

# **Benchmarking food tourism experiences, strategies and partnerships**

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<p>This thesis looks at the food tourism industry from the development areas of experiences, strategies and partnerships. The objective is to find out what destinations have been doing to develop these and what kind of examples they have from these. This is done to assess where Finland's food tourism development stands on an international level and what could be learned and adapted. The research is done for the Finnish FOOD &amp; TOURISM project, whose work is presented in the theoretical framework along with an overall description of the food tourism industry in Finland.</p> <p>The theoretical framework starts with an overview of the food tourism industry. The main concepts and issues are explained, and the main stakeholders are presented. There are more in-depth sections describing the consumers of food tourism, as well as the marketing side of the industry. After these, the theory of the main research areas, namely experiences, strategies and partnerships are discussed.</p> <p>The research method used in this thesis is benchmarking. The method and how it works are introduced in the empirical part. Besides the main focus areas, the research was narrowed to material provided in English and to examples from destinations that indicated development and supply in food tourism and thus provide competition and future learning perspectives for Finland. The research data was collected mostly from online sources that were destinations' websites, publications and articles.</p> <p>The findings of the research present various types of food tourism products and experiences from different categories. These include restaurants, food festivals and markets, food tours and trails, food attractions and cooking classes. The strategy findings show that the Finnish food tourism strategy has a lot of similarities with the mentioned international counterparts. The research also indicates that there are currently not too many strategies dedicated solely for food tourism, at least not publicly available. However, it was found out that some destinations have initiatives for these. The examples from the partnerships indicate various types of networks in different food tourism development areas, such as consulting and advice, funding, marketing, media and quality assurance. These showcase the possibilities for different industry partnerships and prospects for development.</p> <p>As a conclusion, the objective for the research was met by presenting various international examples and findings from the research areas. These were benchmarked to the Finnish examples, with a discussion on how these could contribute to Finland's food tourism development. There are also suggestions for other benchmarking research areas in the future.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Food tourism, benchmarking, experiences, strategies, partnerships	

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# 1 Introduction

Food is a major element in traveling. It can be enjoyed and consumed as a pastime, activity, experience or simply as a product. For some people, it can be the main motivator or reason to leave home. This thesis will look deeper into this industry sector called food tourism.

The objective of this research is to find out what has been done in the field of food tourism around the world and benchmark it to the Finnish food tourism development. The main focus areas are the food tourism products and some of the strategies and partnerships. The purpose of the benchmarking is to find out how Finland's food tourism is doing compared to its competitors and where does its development stand on an international level. With the benchmarking method some new ideas or improvement suggestions can be found for future development.

The research is done for the commissioning party of FOOD & TOURISM project, which has been developing Finland's food tourism during the current decade. The project includes various stakeholders such as Visit Finland, public sector and the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Hungry for Finland). The project was initiated to develop food tourism across Finland and to gain visibility for its cuisine. The various outcomes of the project include a national food tourism strategy, a national competition for the best products in food tourism and other publications, to name a few.

Food tourism can be simply defined as "food and drink motivated travel" (Everett 2016, 11). This thesis will cover the industry more in-depth with its different research areas. The literature discusses this industry sector also with several other terms, that are presented in the theory. In this research, the term food tourism will be mostly used to best describe the whole scope of it. However, in some parts such as the theoretical framework and findings, other terms may also be used to convey the original content of the sources. The focus in this research will be on the food tourism development from the destinations' perspective.

The research will proceed by first covering the industry of food tourism in general. This includes definitions, key industry stakeholders, impact, sustainability and future development. The consumers of food tourism and some of the marketing literature are further covered, even though these are not the research areas of this thesis, they are relevant parts of the industry and very linked to the main research areas. The products, strategies and strategic partnerships of food tourism are discussed separately with relevant industry sources. Then there will be more in-depth information about the commissioning party and

the overall food tourism development in Finland, which will provide base for the benchmarking process. This will similarly cover the main research areas.

The empirical part starts by defining the object and research questions. Benchmarking is a research method, where organizations or processes are compared within a company or with others (Wöber 2002). Therefore, this method suits best to achieve the objective. In this study the comparison point is the food tourism development in Finland and the three focus areas. The narrowing factors were the research areas, but also language, as only English material was included. The examples were narrowed by evaluating their relevance for the research and how well they represented food tourism and its development in the destinations.

## **2 Food tourism**

Food tourism can be described as traveling focused fully or partially on tasting and experiencing the local cuisine, whether in your home country or somewhere far away (World Food Travel Association a; World Tourism Organization 2012, 7). It particularly highlights food as an enjoyable and pleasurable aspect, rather than as a basic part of traveling (Gajić 2015, 156). It has been a fast-growing niche segment in the tourism industry for years now (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 183; World Tourism Organization 2012, 10). It is many times also referred to as culinary tourism, gastronomy tourism, gourmet tourism or cuisine tourism, even though they might not always mean the exact same thing and may be understood differently (Boyd 2015, 15; World Food Travel Association a).

### **2.1 Overview of the industry and previous research**

The academic research on food tourism dates back to the 2000's, making it a relatively new study area in the field of tourism (Boyd 2015, 12; Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Fields, Albrecht & Meethan 2015, 5). However, it has been gaining more and more interests and the research on this subject is only increasing (Everett 2016, 392). Destinations have started to support and promote food tourism projects and initiatives (Sotiriadis 2015, 1218). Even though every country is more focused on their own food tourism development, the industry of food tourism has been acknowledged and researched by organizations such as the World Food Travel Association, who are developing food tourism internationally (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 3). World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has also published two reports on food tourism in 2012 and 2017. Despite being a niche segment, it comprises a lot of different research areas such as marketing and destination branding, motivational factors of travellers, experiences and trends, networks and communities as well as sustainability (Boyd 2015, 14). In addition to the research areas, food tourism itself has some smaller niche segments based on specific foods (Everett 2016, 69). It is possible for destinations to focus only on one of their signature dishes, produce or cooking style in attracting visitors (Getz & al. 2014, 11). The industry can also be considered from supply and demand perspectives (Getz & al. 2014, 196), which in this case will be more on the supply side of research.

Food tourism is often closely linked to other tourism industry sectors and concepts. One of these is agritourism, which means travellers visiting rural farms (Skift 2015, 9). Drink or beverage tourism and its subcategories, such as wine and beer tourism, are very much related to food tourism and they are quite big industry sectors and research areas on their

own. Slow food and sustainable agriculture are concepts that are often mentioned in relation to food tourism because these relate to eco-tourism, which in turn can be seen to have many similarities with food tourism (Frost & al. 2016, 90; Gajić 2015, 157).

There is a variety of food tourism destinations from countries to cities and from restaurants to events (Getz & al. 2014, 202). This promotes the definition that it is not dependant on the distance of traveling. Food tourism activities include everything from visits to restaurants, cooking lessons, food and drink-based events and markets and nowadays even visits to supermarkets can be considered as a form of food tourism (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 4; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie 2015, 24). In the literature, these kind of places, where the consumers and food meet are described as “foodscapes” (Getz & al. 2014, 38). A complementary term presented by Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2014, 298) describes these places as “experiencescapes”, highlighting the possibility for influential experiences. According to a list published in 2017, some of the best food cities include capitals such as Tokyo, London, New York, Bangkok and Paris, but also places like Bologna in Italy, Lyon in France, New Orleans in the USA and a few other cities (The Telegraph 2017). Except for the few all-time favourites such as France and Italy (Frost & al. 2016, 40), the most trendy and popular destinations change often, and there are undoubtedly various individual preferences. In addition to the big food cities and well-known areas, rural food tourism has been in the phase of development (Frost & al. 2016, 43). From the demand side, there is not much available data about the outbound markets of food tourism, though some countries and regions have done researches about their own target markets' food tourism preferences.

The benefits and impacts of food tourism are multiple. Economically it can bring revenue, even to the rural areas, increase income levels and improve employment (Gajić 2015, 158). World Food Travel Association lists further some measurable impacts such as increased visitor arrivals and sales, media visibility and tax revenues. All of these contribute to one of the most substantial impacts of food tourism, which is gaining competitive advantage or unique selling proposition as a destination (World Food Travel Association a; Yeoman & al. 2015, 5). In the competitive market of food tourism, this matters for any country or business. Some of the more abstract impacts can be increased pride of the culture and cuisine within communities and localization (Gajić 2015, 157; Yeoman & al. 2015, 5).

The food tourism industry can also be examined from the perspective of what is influencing in it. Stanley and Stanley (2015, 3) note that the drive for food tourism comes from the consumers' curiosity for the origin of the food they consume and for finding new food. One

of the most substantial external factors influencing the increase of food tourism is Internet and social media (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 7). Another driver is the increased income levels (Laing & Warwick 2015, 180). Many literature sources on food tourism highlight the impact of celebrity chefs in promoting destinations and their food (Everett 2016, 151; Fields 2002, 45). This is much due to the numerous cooking shows and competitions on television as well as cookbooks (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 5).

Gastronomy, cuisine or food is one of the key elements in cultural tourism and heritage (Gajić 2015, 158). Food can reflect the culture and heritage through attractions, local cuisine and production places (Everett 2016, 11). Many destinations are preserving old traditions that come from agricultural produce and practices, which attract visitors who appreciate culturally authentic food experiences (Getz & al. 2014, 27).

Sustainability is an element that is important to take into consideration in all levels of food tourism development. According to Boyd (2015, 18), there has been a lack of attention in regard to food contributing to the sustainability of tourism. Food tourists are conscious about sustainability issues as they value local, organic and slow food and support businesses with the same values (Laing & Warwick 2015, 180). Since the demand of sustainability in food tourism is much valued, it becomes an important issue for the supply of food tourism products and development. Sims (2009) states that destinations who use food to portray authenticity for consumers, enhance their sustainable development at the same time (Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013, 5). In practise, this could mean that the authentic experiences are preserving cultures and use local resources from ingredients to employees, which in turn attracts foodies, who value authenticity and bring income and economic stability.

Looking more closely at the three dimensions of sustainability that are environmental, economic and social, each of these has different impacts in food tourism. Environmental impacts are highly influenced by the traveling distances of the consumers. Other areas impacting on the environment are food growing and preparation, seasonality, transportations, packaging and waste management. (Everett 2016, 314.) Economic sustainability is enhanced by the direct income earned by many food producers, increased employment and entrepreneurship (Everett 2016, 316). Different food tourism products and experiences contribute varyingly to sustainability as for example farmers' market support local produce, bring rather stable income and can portray authenticity and traditions (Everett 2016, 226).



As food tourism is a fast-growing industry sector, it is worthwhile to look at its future and upcoming trends. Concerning the trends, Erik Wolf from the World Food Travel Association (2015) listed trends such as food jams, where people gather up to spend time by cooking meals together. Another trend is the upcoming underdog food tourism destinations, such as Scotland and Ireland. (Simpson 2015.) There is a need for exploring and finding new food tourism destinations among the foodies (Frost & al. 2016, 47). Erik Wolf also suggests that printed media will gain back some of its popularity as a communication tool for food tourism, but locals will also be influential in spreading the word of food tourism destinations. In addition to a few other trends that were outlined, there was a mention about how chefs will continue to feature in films and television. (Simpson 2015).

### **2.1.1 Food tourists or traveling foodies**

The target market of food tourism are culinary tourists, who can more generally be referred to as foodies (Gajić 2015, 158). However, not all foodies are food tourists, which is why it is important to gain market intelligence and target the potential consumers of food tourism (Getz & al. 2014, 202). Being a foodie comes from self-identification and it is not enough to observe behaviours and habits, though these can give some insight. Within the food tourists, there can be a lot of diversity in terms of interests and lifestyles. (Getz & al. 2014, 54-68.) This allows some room for specialisations in the food tourism experiences. However, this kind of subjectivity also means that for some travellers a particular food experience may be dull and ordinary, while for others it may be influential (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen 2014, 298).

Within the tourism literature the terms push and pull factors are often used to describe travellers' motivations (Getz & al. 2014, 75). Within the context of food tourism Fields (2002, 37) describes the push factors as the familiar foods and the pull factors as exploring new foods. With the example of food events, Kim (2010) stated that there are three push factors that are "knowledge and learning, fun and new experiences and relaxation with family", and she also listed as the pull factors "area quality and value, quality of events and food variety" (Getz & al. 2014, 76). For foodies, authenticity can act as one of the major motivators in destination selection (Fields, 2002, 39). From the food travellers' perspective, there are several aspects that contribute to the authenticity, such as locality of the ingredients and tasting the regions' own specialities (Getz & al. 2014, 116; Laing & Warwick 2015, 179). In addition to authenticity, they are keen to explore new foods and experience the local culture (Laing & Warwick 2015, 179). Social aspects, meaning meeting new people or bonding with friends or family can equally have an effect on the motivations as they often contribute to pleasurable food experiences (Fields 2002, 39).

In the literature, there is a lot of discussion about the foodies' level of engagement to food tourism. Everett's (2016, 11) definition of food tourism as "food and drink motivated travel" suits quite well to describe all levels of engagement. However, the consumers can be divided based on primary and secondary motivations. Consumers with primary motivations purposely travel to food tourism destinations, whereas consumers with secondary motivations decide to undertake food tourism related experiences while in the destination. (Everett 2016, 11.) Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) indicate three traveller types, first of which are experiencers, who actively look for food related experiences and for whom food plays an essential role in selecting the destination. The second type, enjoyers, see food as a pleasurable and positive factor, but they value relaxation over food in destination selection. Lastly, survivors are not specifically interested in food experiences and these are not affecting on their traveling decisions. Similarly, based on a study by the Travel Industry Association of America (2006), the food tourism consumers can be divided into deliberate, opportunistic and accidental travellers. These are quite transparent as deliberate travellers travel specifically with food tourism purposes, opportunistic travellers engage in food tourism experiences, but these may not be the primary reason for travels and destination selection and lastly accidental travellers engage in food tourism experiences that they come across in their travels. Economically, the most engaged travellers bring the most income. (Getz & al. 2014, 80-81). Lastly, a more straightforward division presented by Quan & Wang (2004), divides food into central and peripheral factor in consumers' holiday experiences, which may however, change in between trips as well as within a trip (Therkelsen 2015, 320). From these different divisions based on food tourism engagement, a lot of similarities can be detected.

### **2.1.2 Marketing food tourism**

Marketing plays a crucial role in building and spreading image of a food tourism destination. Developing effective marketing of food tourism requires relying on the one-of-a-kind tangible and intangible resources of the destination, in order to differentiate from others. This can be strengthened by using food as the Unique Selling Point. (Everett 2016, 136.) There are already many destinations that have incorporated food into their marketing in various ways. However, according to a survey made by UNWTO (2017) in 2016 for their affiliate members, 65,5% of the respondents thought that food tourism was not promoted enough in their destinations. This indicates some room for improvement in elevating food tourism in marketing context.

In terms of the target market of foodies, it is important for marketers to gather market intelligence and segment the potential consumers for their own destination (Getz & al. 2014, 68). For a long time, the food tourism marketing has relied on portraying authenticity for the consumers especially in the rural areas (Richards 2002, 12). This is reasonable, since it is much valued and motivated by the traveling foodies. UNWTO (2012, 11) underlines the fact that maintaining an authentic destination image through marketing should last from the early stages of consumers travel planning and last until their evaluation of the trip afterwards. The previously mentioned, much engaged, experienter type of traveller provides an opportunity for destination marketers to target and engage this potential market segment most effectively, because the experiencers actively look information about the destination well before the trip (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016, 189).

The level of engagement can influence the channels that the consumers use to look for information. The experienter and enjoyer type of travellers use multiple rather reliable sources from the Internet, destination guidebooks and friends, whilst the survivor type relies also on friends and Internet but focuses more on safety and healthy food rather than food experiences. (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen 2016, 189.) This is supported by the previously mentioned study of the Travel Industry Association of America (2006), which also indicated that the deliberate and most engaged travellers look actively information from printed material to Internet as well as word-of mouth sources (Getz & al. 2014, 81). In addition to these more concrete marketing channels, the before mentioned impact of celebrity chefs and their programmes can also be used for marketing efforts (Everett 2016, 152). In a more traditional manner, food tourism may still be promoted through radio shows and printed media (Everett 2016 154). Internet, social media and apps offer effective ways to engage with foodies more directly. However, with these channels and word-of-mouth marketing, it is important to pay attention to managing reputation. (Getz & al. 2014, 188.) With the combination of the information provided by industry professionals, such as Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and suppliers, and the user-generated content on social media, the marketing can be more successful (Skift 2015, 8). This in turn could possibly lead to portraying a more genuine image to the potential future consumers, and hopefully leads to meeting their expectations better.

For the DMOs, promoting positive images of their culinary tourism could act as an effective brand building strategy (Sotiriadis 2015, 1218). Both in their 2012 and 2016 surveys on food tourism over 80% of the affiliate members of UNWTO (2012, 2017) regarded food as an essential element in “defining the image and brand of their destination”. In order for the brand to be credible and authentic, the different food tourism products and experiences need consistency among each other (Skift 2015).

## 2.2 Food tourism products and experiences

In the literature, food tourism is often not just about traveling to consume food related products and services, but it is much linked to the concept of experience economy (Fields 2002, 41; Frost & al. 2016, 45). Based on the work by Pine and Gilmore about the experience economy, Getz & al. (2014, 44-45) link the four dimensions of experiences to food tourism. They argue that the education, aesthetics, escapism and entertainment dimensions are also relevant within the food tourism experiences. The other experience defining factors are the degree of involvement, passive or active, and absorption or immersion of the experience. The relation between experience economy and food tourism is supported also by Everett (2016, 283), who states that the food attractions should incorporate at least one of the experience dimensions. Providing memorable experiences to consumers requires adding value to the eating experiences (Richards 2002, 11). However, there has also been discussion how these scripted experiences, which are dedicated to increase profits, are not serving to the authenticity seeking foodies (Frost & al. 2016, 47). Getz & al. (2014, 103) state that in demand-led or experience marketing, the experiences that the destinations are offering must be co-created with the target market of food tourists. This is supported by the argument of Laing & Warwick (2015, 191) about the shift from experiences scripted by the tourism industry to personalized experiences influenced by the consumers. Additionally, Richards (2002) provided an interesting point about how in the context of experience economy, the different terms of food tourism can reflect different things. He suggests that by describing the production to consumption line, the term food tourism reflects more of the production side of things moving on to culinary tourism and lastly to gastronomic tourism, which in turn reflects experiences and consumption. (Boyd 2015, 16.)

Destinations have realized the value of using stories in developing food tourism (Everett 2016, 144). Building stories and narratives around food is seen as a success contributing factor for destinations (World Tourism Organization 2017, 187). There are lot of stories based on individual dishes or cooking traditions, which can give an insight of the destinations' culture and history. These stories can be shared for example in cookbooks by other travellers (Frost & al. 2016, 171). Storytelling can add value to the experiences of the foodies and make them more memorable. Many of the businesses in the food as well as tourism sector have a section in their website that states either "our story" or "about us". This section usually introduces the story of how the business was developed or its values and operations. This is one of the best ways to tell stories about the cuisine and dishes to

potential customers. If the story is well done, it could be picked to feature in printed marketing material such as destination brochures or newspapers as well as in digital channels.

There is a vast supply of different kinds of food tourism products and experiences. One of the most common of these “foodscapes” (Getz & al. 2014, 38) must be restaurants. These are likely to engage the most travellers, with all levels of food tourism interests. This is why it is important that they are providing memorable and positive experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen 2014, 298). What makes restaurants considerable in food tourism are the locality and regionality of flavours and ingredients as well as the unique features regarding food, service, design, setting or the combination of these. These could also be for example cafés, delis or pubs. (Erik Wolf 2014, 14.)

Another popular food tourism experience type is food festivals and events of different sizes, which aim to promote products and places. They can be based on specific or local ingredients or cuisines (Everett 2016, 219). There has also been a growing number of other cultural festivals, where food is very much incorporated to the programme and thus also enhances the food tourism. A popular example of this are food trucks. (Skift 2015, 17.) Events and festivals can be effective in attracting domestic and international visitors. Similar to these, there are farmers’ markets that are usually more repetitive in nature, set in specific locations and enable producers to meet consumers directly. Farmers’ markets are fruitful for start-ups and small businesses in accessing the markets and earning more direct profit. (Everett 2016, 223, 226).

Another type of food tourism product is tours and trails. They are often itinerary based guided or self-guided experiences, combining existing sites and attractions together to form longer routes. These usually require cooperation between multiple food tourism operators. With the many stakeholders, there are many possibilities to specialisations in terms of themes and offerings. (Everett 2016, 249, 250.)

Attractions based on food include museums, theme parks, dairies, breweries, distilleries, farms and factories, to name a few. These are usually in fixed places and represent the regions’ unique products and resources through innovative implementations to engage the consumers. Recently, especially attractions related to food history of regions have gained popularity. (Everett 2016, 268, 271, 272, 284.)

Linked to the experience realm of education and immersive engagement, there are products and experiences, where the consumers become the producers in a way. In the literature Toffler (1980) describes this as 'prosumption' combining production and consumption, while Meuter & al. (2000) call it 'co-creation'. (Everett 2016, 331-337.) These include activities such as cooking classes and 'pick your own' experiences, where consumers can pick up vegetables and fruits at farms by themselves. The latter especially contributes to the consumers' motive of finding out the origin of the food they consume. (Everett 2016, 335-341.)

The risks in managing food tourism products, such as attractions, are based on health and safety matters (Everett 2016, 270). MacLaurin (2014) states that the information about local food safety affects the consumers destination selection process (Getz & al. 2014, 69). Especially for marketers this is a relevant indication of what to highlight in the marketing materials. Another challenge is the scale of food tourism experiences, because sometimes they are able to host only small amount of people (Getz & al. 2014, 40). Considering food, it is also important to keep in mind the different dietary requirements and allergies. In the food supply, the contents should be stated clearly. The more variety of options in these, it could result to more customers.

### **2.3 Food tourism development strategies**

Strategies and strategic planning can essentially be described as "an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities and focus energy and resources". According to Bryson (2011), it is a set of concepts, procedures and tools. Some of the key points for strategic planning are starting with a notion to the end and adopting a systems approach, focusing on results and their drivers and improving performance, and lastly concentrating on the needs of the various stakeholders and customers. (Sotiriadis 2015, 1215.) In the field of food tourism, strategic processes and strategy planning have not been in the centre of research as much as some of the other fields of studies (Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013, 4; Sotiriadis 2015, 1219). According to an affiliate member survey by UNWTO (2012, 12), a majority of the respondents see food and gastronomy as an aspect in strategic brand building of a destination, but some of the respondents thought that there is room for improvement in the food tourism strategies.

According to a case study by Ottenbacher and Harrington (2013, 11), elements of successful making of culinary tourism strategies include "a clear strategy, strong cooperation among stakeholders, leadership, enhancing the regional culinary profile, communicating

quality standards and promoting regions as perceived by tourists". When it comes to engaging stakeholders, Getz & al. (2014, 105) note that creating a food tourism development strategy should take into consideration more than the economic aspects, to gain a wider support from the different stakeholders. This support and participation is needed for developing the strategy, which is why stating the overall objectives is important (Skift 2015, 12). Strategies should also take into consideration all the various activities of food tourism and their possibilities (Skift 2015, 8).

Considering the process of strategy management, Whellen and Hunger (2008) propose starting from scanning the environment and composing the strategy to implementation and evaluation (Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013, 12). Related to environmental scanning, it is beneficial to address the competition. In regard to this statement, it is notable that some destinations are already more established in the field of food tourism, so the level of reputation and previous work will have an impact on creating strategies (Getz & al. 2014, 202). The key to differentiating from the competition is to rely on the unique resources of that specific destination (Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013, 22).

Harrington and Ottenbacher (2010) argue that the key to a successful food tourism strategy is to combine food in packages with other experiences surrounding for example wellness or landscape (Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013, 22). Overall, food tourism strategies should be incorporated into destinations management and marketing actions for these to be more successful (Sotiriadis 2015, 1229). Ultimately, as UNWTO (2012, 9) states: "Here is where success lies: having tourists revisit the destination due to its gastronomy". However, having consumers revisit destination requires constant improvement in offering, because the traveling foodies are explorers and many of them are looking for something new.

Sotiriadis (2015) suggests a conceptual framework for strategic planning of destinations' culinary tourism from three perspectives; consumer behaviour, destination development and destination marketing. The aim of the first perspective is to "provide valuable experiences", the second is about enriching and differentiating the supply, whilst the last one is about aiming to have "integrated communications with the market and promoting the tourism destination offering". The different levels of this strategic planning are the perspectives, managerial functions, stakeholders, strategies, strategic plans and evaluation of results. Each of these six levels is developed according to the three perspectives regarding consumer experiences, managing and marketing of the destinations. The implications of this framework are that it presents the main focus areas for culinary tourism planning, how much these are linked with each other and how to approach these comprehensively.

Based on the empirical study on the effectiveness of this tool, the limitations found were that it is only a conceptual framework and it needs operational actions and it cannot be used in evaluating already implemented culinary tourism projects. (Sotiriadis 2015.) However, since there is not much academic research about strategic planning in food tourism, this framework provides some initial approaches and it is quite comprehensive about the topic.

From a more concrete operational perspective, Stanley and Stanley (2015, 20-21) suggest a four-step action plan, which starts with a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, then listing the needed strategies and prioritizing them, creating a concrete document that includes objectives, strategic and action plans, timeframes and responsible persons and finally creating a business plan. The last one is more compatible for actual businesses, who are trying to develop their food tourism. However, the plan has also some relevant elements that could be incorporated more generally into food tourism projects, strategies or development.

#### **2.4 Strategic partnerships and networking**

The stakeholders of food tourism industry can be divided and discussed from different perspectives. In their survey about food tourism, UNWTO (2012) addressed the cooperation with the division of tourism sector stakeholders and gastronomy sector stakeholders. This kind of division brings together the two main industries of food tourism's supply side. However, there are of course other industries that can impact and take part in food tourism. Swarbrooke (2012) presented an ownership perspective in relation to food attractions, with the division into public sector such as governments, private sector such as entrepreneurs and voluntaries such as trusts. These actors can also be regarded in terms of financing. (Everett 2016, 280.)

From another perspective, the food tourism industry can be divided into primary and secondary providers. The primary providers are regarded as the main food destinations and motivators for the consumers' traveling. The secondary providers, consumers may encounter during their trips to the primary providers, but they may not think of themselves as part of the food tourism industry. For the consumers the division between these two is not as transparent, because both of these will constitute their overall experience of the destination. (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 157.) This kind of division of the stakeholders is more straightforward and based on the consumers' overall experiences of the food tourism destinations.



According to the industry professionals of World Food Travel Association, the food tourism industry can be divided into four subcategories in terms of operators (see Table 1). These are food and beverage meaning for example restaurants and food producers, travel and hospitality meaning DMO's and travel agents, related groups such as media and researchers, and lastly consumers. (Chase, Kumar Mishra & Wolf 2014, 25; World Food Travel Association b.) This approach is quite concrete and takes into consideration the various stakeholders of different industries and can be efficient for the development of food tourism destinations. The collaboration between these multiple different operators could lead to innovations and new ideas.

Table 1. Food tourism industry stakeholders (Chase & al. 2014, 25; World Food Travel Association b)

<b>Food &amp; Beverage Businesses</b>	<b>Travel &amp; Hospitality Businesses</b>	<b>Related Businesses</b>	<b>Consumers</b>
Food & beverage distributors Food & beverage producers and manufacturers Cooking schools & classes Farmer's markets & farms Food & beverage events Restaurants, bars, tasting rooms, catering and other food and beverage service Retail & grocery	Lodging Culinary attractions Destination marketing organizations Meetings & conventions Tour operators, packages, guides & travel agents	Government Professional services Academia Suppliers Media Technology platforms Trade Groups	

As established with these different divisions of the food tourism stakeholders, there is a lot of room and necessity for cooperation. There are several ways to pursue this cooperation. In terms of acquiring financing, there can be stakeholders from the private sector as well as public and government-funded actors (Everett 2016. 189). With the example of food trails, Everett (2016, 261) states that there can be funding from regional development programmes and charities as well as from membership scheme fees of the producers, who in turn get support and advice. There are organizations dedicated to providing their members advice and consultancy as well as the possibility for networking. The food assurance schemes are established to ensure the quality and standards of food and its production (Everett 2016, 191, 194). These are addressing the previously mentioned key element of "communicating quality standards" (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013, 11) in successful strategies.

In the context of products and experiences, there is varying need for cooperation. Especially for tour and trail experiences, cooperation is necessary and can benefit some of the smaller businesses with the support of the whole network and visibility. However, this can also create problems if one or more of the stakeholder is performing poorly in contrast to the others. (Everett 2016, 250, 259.) In this case the need for efficient cooperation is necessary to ensure coherent and memorable experience for the consumers, who may look this kind of experiences as a whole. From the consumers' perspectives, the networks and cooperation behind individual foodscapes such as restaurants, may not be so transparent or relevant. Nonetheless, for businesses and other possible stakeholders, different kinds of partnerships and networking may be beneficial to gain support, advice, visibility, financing and opportunities.

In terms of networking and cooperation, it is worthwhile to discuss about supply chains in food tourism. The term is commonly used to describe all the mediators from production to consumption of products and services. These mediators can be people as well as activities and resources. (Everett, 2016, 350.) In 2005 Hall and Page presented the following types of culinary supply chains: direct sales; industrial chains with retailers, wholesalers and producers; cooperative chains of producers; restaurants' chains between consumers, restaurants and producers, and lastly a network of producers supplying cooperating markets and restaurants (Everett 2016, 352). However, these indicate only culinary based chains so incorporating tourism into this creates a supply chain from producers to processing and manufacturing to marketing and distribution to transportation and consumption until waste disposal and even including customer feedbacks. It is highlighted that effective management of this chain and its each part and process, is essential for sustainable competitive advantage. Shortening the supply chain into direct sales from producers to consumers for example in the countryside, can have an influence in assuring the quality and locality of the products. (Everett 2016, 355).

While community networks have the advantage of close distances, regional and even bigger networks can have more challenges in communicating. Nowadays this is facilitated by the Internet (Everett 2016, 364). Internet and various digital tools and apps provide efficient and fast ways to communicate, share information and establish new networks. Networking events and workshops offer face-to-face possibilities to form new partnerships and increase communication.

### 3 Food tourism in Finland

In the past Finland has not been particularly known or distinctive with its food culture compared to some of its international competitors. However, there has been more and more signs of interest towards it. Foreigners have an idea of Finnish food being authentic, healthy, nature based, fresh and excellent quality among other things. (Havas & Adamsson 2015, 16-17.) These attributes are very much true and correct but have not previously been able to distinguish or highlight Finland as a food tourism destination.

During the current decade some great work has been done in the development of food tourism in Finland. A project called FOOD & TOURISM was first started in 2012 after a few years of acquiring financing (Havas & Adamsson 2015, 11). The first Finnish food tourism strategy for 2015-2020 was completed in 2015 and from there on it has been put into action. The strategy was coordinated by Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, but it was initiated and financed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Visit Finland (Havas, Adamsson & Sievers 2015a, 2). The overall vision for 2020 states "Food is an integral element and powerful experience in Finnish tourism!", while the mission statement of the strategy is "The more the merrier – and better food! Broad involvement of actors in food and tourism sectors!" (Havas & al. 2015a, 11.) As the target group for the Finnish food tourism, the strategy states consumers, who are knowledgeable and looking for new experiences (Havas & al. 2015a, 12). This is very much in line with the overall theory of traveling foodies. The strategy was mentioned in the second global report on food tourism by UNWTO in 2017.

There are three themes that emerged from the research in Finnish food tourism, which were Taste of Place, Pure Pleasure and Cool and Creative. The first one describes the variety of flavours spread out to different parts of Finland. The second one emphasises the cleanliness and healthiness of Finnish food. The last theme is focusing on the innovating and trendy food events, products and experiences of Finland. There are three different strategic actions and measures to develop these thematic areas. These are product development, strategic partnerships and communication. (Havas & al. 2015a, 13-14.) Out of these areas, products and partnerships are benchmarked on an international level in this research.

In regards to the previously mentioned statement of the importance of including food tourism into destination strategies and offering food in packages with other experiences (Ottentbacher & Harrington 2013, 22; Sotiriadis, 2015, 1229), Finland has a great example of

this. The Finnish food tourism strategy was created in relation to the strategies of Visit Finland, the official promotion agency of inbound tourism in Finland. These strategies are centred to develop wellness, culture and nature tourism, where food has an important role. (Havas & al. 2015a, 2, 9.) Visit Finland is mainly in charge of promoting and marketing Finland's food tourism for the international markets. Additionally, the Ministry of Employment and Economy has listed food tourism as one of the development areas in their "Roadmap for Growth and Renewal in Finnish Tourism for 2015-2025" (TEM 2015, 27).

When it comes to Finnish food tourism products and experiences, the project has managed to find the best of the best through a national food tourism competition. The contest was one part of the national food tourism strategy and it was established to promote and spread the image of food tourism destinations and products in Finland and to find and encourage new potential businesses in food tourism. It was first organized in 2015 with 77 participants. From these, the chosen top-products include tours, restaurants and festivals that were chosen by professionals in the field, with a few special criteria. The prize for the winner was 3000€ for future development, visibility in Visit Finland's marketing, marketing videos and a chance to participate into a Paul Bocuse Chef workshop in Helsinki. In addition, the contestants had a chance to network and learn from each other. (Havas, Adamsson & Sievers 2015b.) The contest was reorganized in 2017.

For the competition, a website called Hungry for Finland was established (Havas & al. 2015b). The site holds lot of information about the overall FOOD & TOURISM project and its achievements so far. It includes all the publications of the project such as the strategy, in three languages. It also includes lots of information and advice for the current and future industry operators.

In addition to the experiences and products involved in the competition, there are other great examples from the different experience categories in Finland. Currently, Finland has five restaurants with one Michelin star, which are all situated in Helsinki. There are however, also five Bib Gourmand restaurants, which represent restaurants serving good quality food with reasonable prices. (Leminen 2018.) The food festivals are highlighted in the "cool and creative" theme and these include for example the Restaurant Day and Taste of Helsinki (Havas & al. 2015a, 13). The coastal area of Helsinki has markets and halls serving national foods and ingredients. There are also some food tours in Helsinki. Finland has some food attractions such as the hotel and restaurant museum in Helsinki and the Fazer chocolate factory's visitor centre. Even the Brunberg chocolate shop in the city of Porvoo is frequently visited by international travellers.

Finland provides great examples of taking advantage of diverse partnerships. The FOOD & TOURISM project includes stakeholders from the public sector (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry), tourism industry professionals (Visit Finland), and a university (Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences). Multiple other actors were involved in the strategy's implementation phase. There has also been national engagement of entrepreneurs and food tourism industry operators through workshops around the country. These have provided some tools and framework for future development. (Hungry for Finland.)

## **4 Benchmarking food tourism**

### **4.1 Objective and research questions**

The objective of the research is to find out examples of what has been done in the field of food tourism around the world in terms of products, strategies and partnerships. This is done to assess the competition for Finland, where food tourism has been in the development phase during the recent years. The chosen method is therefore benchmarking as this suits best to achieve the objective. By benchmarking the competition, it can be easier to find out where Finland's food tourism stands on the international level and some of the examples may give ideas for future development and improvements. As the research is based on the three specific areas of food tourism, the research questions are:

- What kind of food tourism products and experiences are there?
- What kind of food tourism strategies are there?
- What kind of partnerships and networking models there are behind the food tourism development?

### **4.2 Benchmarking as a research method**

Benchmarking as a research method is about organised comparison of processes or products. The object of it is to advance organizational improvement according to the standards, which can help in gaining competitive advantage. (Wöber 2002, 2.) The process of benchmarking is less about copying the best practices, but more so about sharing knowledge and ideas or as Karlof and Ostblom (1993) called it, "benchlearning" (Kozak 2004, 8). In terms of benchmarking categories, the literature discusses about organization benchmarking and destination benchmarking. The organization benchmarking is done as performance evaluation of one organization, while destination benchmarking is focused on all of the destination elements. (Kozak 2004, 41.) With these categories, this research can be considered as destination benchmarking, with a further emphasis on food tourism development.

Benchmarking can be divided into internal and external benchmarking. Internal benchmarking happens when an organization is comparing their own processes or units with each other. External benchmarking consists of best practise, competitive and sector benchmarking. Competitive benchmarking is focusing more on the comparison against real competition in the industry and sector benchmarking is about the overall performance of the sector and its organizations. With the best practise benchmarking the aim is to find the best examples in a specific management area across different industries. (Wöber

2002.) In this research the type of benchmarking that is used is competitive, because the other examples that are looked at are other destinations and their products, processes and practices. However, there is also elements from the best practise type, since the goal is to find some of the best examples in the industry.

The process of benchmarking can be done in four steps, namely, “planning, data collection, analysis, action and review (Kozak 2004, 13). A more broad and in-depth process of external benchmarking incorporates the stages of “define mission statement, choose a partner, collect the data, identify performance gaps, decide what to benchmark, present the benchmarking findings and take actions” (Kozak 2004, 97). Figure 1 presents the process of this research according to these stages, but in a slightly different order. The mission statement, which refers to the overall objectives (Kozak 2004, 98), was stated in the first chapter of this empirical part. At the same time, it was also decided what was going to be benchmarked. The next chapter will further discuss choosing the partners or the destinations’ examples, which will be presented. These three stages could be described as the planning phase of the process. The data collection is explained also in this chapter after which the performance gaps and findings are presented and discussed. The last stage is not however, part of this process as this is only a research and that is more for the destinations’ food tourism management.

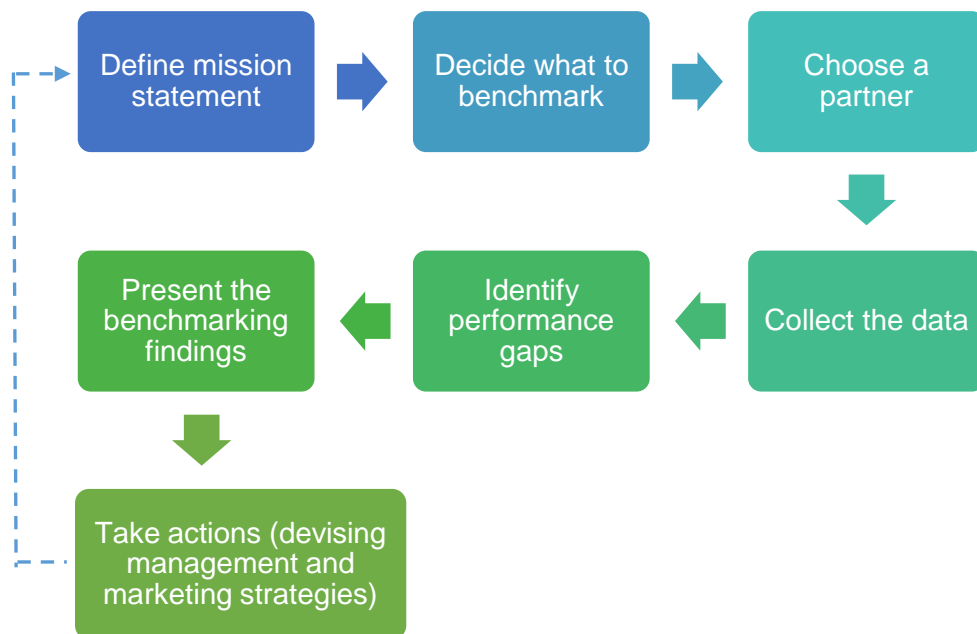


Figure 1. External benchmarking process (adapted from Kozak 2004, 97)

### **4.3 Narrowing the research**

The process of destination benchmarking can be done with either qualitative or quantitative performance measures or the combination of these. Qualitative measures are more textual such as customer satisfaction, whereas quantitative measures are more about numerical data as for example financial indicators. (Kozak 2004, 17, 55). This benchmarking is based on qualitative measures, but instead of the customer and demand based approach, the research is based on the qualitative data about the types of products, strategies and partnerships of food tourism destinations.

There is some geographical narrowing as well. This means that the examples are mostly drawn from countries and destinations that have considerably invested in developing food tourism and thus provide competition and potential learning perspectives for Finland. The previously mentioned examples of the well-known as well as the current trendy food tourism destinations are notable competitors, but also the proximity and similarity of the Nordic Countries makes them competitors. It is worth to mention here that there already exists more in-depth benchmarking research about food tourism in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. However, any relevant or updated information and examples may still be included here as well.

Language is another substantial narrowing factor. The research is based on English material, which results in excluding some country specific information and examples that are only provided in other languages. In the case of products and experiences, one could argue about the contribution of these to food tourism as international travellers could have difficulties in finding them, thus decreasing the international competition that is considered in this research.

### **4.4 Data collection method**

The data was planned to be collected by using various sources including publicly shared information about food tourism. These included destinations' websites and their publications, books, articles and case studies, using search words such as food tourism products and experiences, food tourism strategies and food tourism partnerships and networks. There was a high importance in finding information that was current and not outdated. In the Internet search, all the related terms of food tourism, such as culinary tourism and gastronomic tourism, were used to find various sources, since these are used quite interchangeably. In the beginning, it was assumable that the products and experiences would most likely be the easiest to find as these are marketed for the consumers and are a part of the destinations' overall tourism offering. The food tourism strategies and partnerships



could be more difficult to find as these can also be confidential information that is not shared publicly.

Searching data on Google with these previously mentioned search words and methods proved to have some challenges. Researching with words such as food tourism products, strategies or partnerships did not in general result in interesting examples at least not within the first search results. Especially with the experiences, this was a too general method to find specific examples. Instead, what proved to be more beneficial was to look information directly from the destinations' own websites. This resulted in finding more interesting examples of unique experiences and articles from the destinations' food tourism. The strategies were easier to find from Google, but even more results were found with individual destination researching. Most of the partnerships were found through various food tourism stakeholders and articles. Additionally, some of the books used in the theoretical framework included some interesting examples of products and experiences, which were then further researched online.

## **5 Research results**

### **5.1 Product and experience benchmarking**

It goes without saying that there is a vast number of examples of food tourism products and experiences around the world. On the one hand any food related activity may transform into an experience for the consumers, but not all food related activities or places necessarily enhance food tourism. The examples drawn in this research are individual and unique and reflect the region or country and can thus enhance its food tourism. The theory of the products and experiences and the different types of these gives a framework for the presented examples. These will cover the different experience types and what they provide for the destinations' food tourism and possible foodies. What is notable in food tourism products and experiences is that different countries, cities or areas can have great and successful examples of these, but without a proper plan to develop the food tourism in general. This is why some of these benchmarking cases can be from destinations that are not typically considered as well-known food tourism destinations.

#### **5.1.1 Restaurants and dining**

When it comes to restaurants the supply is enormous. There is a huge number of restaurants offering memorable eating and drinking experiences that attract domestic and international visitors. Especially fine dining restaurants with a world-renowned reputations and famous head chefs are enough in themselves to attract the highly food engaged tourists. The world-known Michelin guide and its star ratings offer a great way to find these. The stars range from one to three with one awarded for "a very good restaurant in its category", two for "excellent cooking, worth a detour" and three for "exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey" (Boucher). Considering these, the two and three-star restaurants could be considered beneficial for food tourism. The five criteria are "quality of the ingredients used, mastery of flavour and cooking techniques, the personality of the chef in his or her cuisine, value for money and consistency between visits" (Tan 2017).

Based on the Michelin guide to the Nordic Countries 2018, currently Norway, Sweden and Denmark all have one restaurant in their capital city with three Michelin stars. Three restaurants in Denmark have two stars, one of which is situated outside Copenhagen. Sweden has four restaurants with two stars with only one being in Stockholm. In the case of one-star restaurants, which Finland has five, Denmark has 22, Norway has five and Sweden has 21 (see Table 2). Additionally, Iceland has one restaurant in Reykjavik with one star. Many of these one-star restaurants in Norway, Denmark and Sweden are located outside the capital city area. (Jenkins 2018.)

Table 2. Michelin stars in the Nordic countries (adapted from Jenkins 2018)

Country	One star	Two stars	Three stars
Finland	5	-	-
Sweden	21	4	1
Norway	5	-	1
Denmark	22	3	1

To give an idea of the three-star restaurants, the Norwegian establishment is a restaurant called Maaemo, situated in Oslo. The head chef and co-owner, Esben Holmboe Bang, was included in Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential Chefs in the World in 2013. The food is focused on local produce, seasonality and Norway's raw nature. There are only eight tables and a private Test Kitchen table, where visitors can see the chefs. The numerous awards include two Michelin stars only 15 months after opening and a third star later on, as well as being one of the top 100 restaurants in the world in 2015. (Maaemo.) With this reputation, it is very likely that this restaurant contributes to the food tourism industry in Norway.

Even if the food is not worth a Michelin star does not mean that it would not be delicious for the regular travellers. The Bib Gourmand recognition is given to restaurants that offer quality food in reasonable prices (Leminen 2018). One of the Bib Gourmand restaurants in Iceland, Matur og Drykkur, offers traditional Icelandic dishes, searched also through old cookbooks, prepared with modern and inventive ways. They emphasise homemade cooking and fresh ingredients. The restaurant is located in an old salt fish factory in Reykjavik. (Matur og Drykkur.) These kinds of places can be equally important for food tourism as they promote the local cuisine but can be less expensive than the Michelin star restaurants.

As discussed, food trucks have become enormously popular. Singapore has seized this opportunity by establishing Picnic, an indoor food truck park with the ambience and feel of outdoor dining. This is affected by the lighting that changes according to different times and seasons and the decorations, which consists of plants and flowers. In addition to the food street area, the three seating options include a picnic stage, flower garden and a beer garden. (Picnic Singapore 2018.) This example is included because of the idea how the popularity of street food can be well transformed into a nice concept other than festival or event.

As an alternative for restaurants, more authentic food experiences can be found at locals' homes. The 2001-established company Meet the Danes has a quite straightforward concept that has been well recognized overseas. Local Danes arrange 3-course homemade dinners at their homes, for international travellers. During the dinner that usually lasts 3-4 hours, guests can have insightful talks with the local host. (Meet the Danes.) Nonetheless, as said this kind of concept is nowadays very common and established in many destinations and there are even worldwide apps dedicated for these experiences.

### **5.1.2 Food festivals, events and markets**

Starting from the smaller scale events, in the city of Florø in Norway, travellers can find the world's biggest herring table. It is a summer event, where visitors can have a seat at a table that is 350 metres long and enjoy various herring dishes. Everything is free of charge as the whole event is organized by voluntaries and sponsored by local businesses. (FjordKysten 2018.) This sounds like a simple event, but it is still representing Norwegian and Nordic food in a fun way.

Last year, the Tourism Authority of Thailand held a food festival called "Thailand live gastronomy" in Bangkok. In the event they had different sections such as "Original" section in which they showcased some local dishes from all over the country, special menus from Bangkok's street food areas, seafood from Southern Region's fisherman villages and tuk-tuks turned into food trucks. The "Gastronomy Innovation" section had domestic and foreign chefs cooking Thai food in innovative ways. Visitors could also taste and buy tropical fruits and organic food. The festival included some other cultural performances such as Thai kick-boxing and music shows. The overall aim of the event was to put more emphasis on Thailand's gastronomy tourism. (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2017a.)

Australia holds lots of interesting food events and festivals around the year. One of these is the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival. It is one of the biggest food events in the country and it is also well recognized overseas. It is organized every March with over 200 events happening around the city and over 250 000 annual visitors. Since its beginning in 1993, it has attracted some of the best-known chefs from around the world increasing its reputation. The festival is an integral part in highlighting the food and the brand of the state of Victoria. (Melbourne Food and Wine 2018.) These kinds of events are great in attracting large numbers of domestic and international visitors, but it can take a rather long time to establish them on an international scale.

Closer to Finland, in Aarhus Denmark, the biggest food event in Northern Europe is organized every autumn. It is simply called The Food Festival and it has been running for six years with over 30 000 visitors. The festival is dedicated to promoting the Nordic food culture and kitchen. The festival features lots of events and activities from Danish hotdog championships, gourmet picnics, sausage-making, seaweed safaris to cabbage workshops. The festival has also innovative areas dedicated for plants, fishing and Nordic produced drinks. (Food Festival 2018.) In a way this could benefit also Finland, as it is part of the Nordic countries, but in terms of differentiating in these, it is not as beneficial.

One of the most famous food markets around the world is the wholesale Tsujiki Fish Market in Tokyo. In addition to selling flowers, vegetables and fruits the market is especially known for its fish produce and their famous tuna auction. For the visitors the outer market area includes restaurants and retail shops where visitors can taste the fresh seafood, whereas the inner market is dedicated for doing business. Lately, they have experienced one of the before mentioned challenges in food tourism experiences, managing visitor numbers in the limited area of the market. They have had to limit the visitor numbers to their tuna auction. Because of these reasons, the market is due to switch its location in the future. (Japan-guide 2018.) This example proves the potential of locals' regular everyday food activities to become successful food tourism experiences for outsiders and how important visitor management is.

### **5.1.3 Food tours and trails**

In many of the food tour examples, various types of transportations methods were used. From walking to cycling, there are lots of options for consumers to explore food destinations in the way they prefer. In Portugal, a company called Taste Porto offers a walking tour called Photo Food Experience. The tour includes four tasting spots around the city of Porto, where the visitors get to see "behind the scenes". The native tour guide is also a photographer and prepared to give tips on styling and composition of food in pictures. They do not provide cameras, but instead the focus is on smart phone photos. The company supports a local charity by donating them a percentage of each ticket. (Taste Porto.) This is a small addition to a very common type of food tour, but it is very relevant considering the fact that culinary tourists actively share food photos on social media platforms, which increases awareness of these cuisines and the urge to experience them (Skift 2015, 6). Finnish cuisine and dishes could also be photographed highlighting the fresh, clean and simplicity aspects of it and this could be encouraged by the businesses in the industry. Hong Kong Foodie is another company offering walking food tours. One of their food tours features six tasting locations, which include a bakery, a wonton noodle shop, a

roast meat restaurant, a juice shop, a preserved fruits speciality house and a dim sum corner. All of these are family-run places that represent the local cuisine and have interesting stories to tell. Along the tour, visitors get to hear interesting facts about Hong Kong and to see the city. (Hong Kong Food Tours Limited 2018.)

Another mode of exploring food in different regions is by cycling, which Gourmet Cycling Travel (2017) is offering in France. The company is founded and owned by a professional cyclist and a chef, who are participating on the tours alongside other pro cyclist guides. The group sizes are smaller to ensure a more personal attention and non-cyclists are also welcomed with other activities. (Gourmet Cycling Travel 2017a.) One of their tours is organized in Provence. With a 6-day tour around the villages and beautiful sceneries, the food experiences include tastings of organic olive oil and goat cheese, picnic at a local winery, Provençal BBQ dinner with wine tastings, selecting ingredients for the dinner at a local food market and a cooking class to prepare the dinner. (Gourmet Cycling Travel 2017b.) In a country that holds the famous Tour de France cycling competition, this is a very fitting mode of transport to also explore the cuisine. This tour example is more on the culinary holiday category.

More on the product side, Switzerland offers a nice addition for the Grand Tour of the country, a refillable snack-box. The idea behind it is that along the route, the travellers can stop in the 51 sales outlets selling regional specialities and top up their snack-boxes right at their original source. This allows them to visit the suppliers and get a peek at their operations and enjoy the country's delicacies while traveling in the beautiful landscape. (Switzerland Tourism 2018.)

Trails are another way of combining several food experiencers and producers together. In Scotland, The Seafood Trail offers a way to get to know the coastal area of Argyll and its eight waterside restaurants. They serve various fresh and local seafood and shellfish dishes. They also highlight the collaborative side between the restaurants and the local fishermen. Visit Scotland has even produced a brochure to introduce this and their several other food and drink trails. The brochure includes information of these trails, some fun facts and other activities from these areas. Some of the trails include a Malt Whisky Trail and a Scottish Cheese Trail and many others. (The Seafood Trail; Visit Scotland a).

#### **5.1.4 Food attractions**

One of the most interesting attraction type has got to be food-based museums. In Berlin, foodies have the opportunity to visit an interactive museum based solely on Currywurst.

The exhibition tells the story of this snack through interactive ways from virtual Currywurst making to listening songs about the dish. (Deutsches Currywurst Museum Berlin.) This example shows how to build a tourism attraction around a simple dish or potentially a cuisine with a slightly humorous twist and interactive features.

Nowadays farm visits can be a part of holidays and they can provide memorable experiences. One such farm is located in Byron Bay, New South-Wales, Australia. The farm is a multifunctional establishment for the local community, but also for outside visitors interested in farm experiences. The farm has a few micro-businesses such as a restaurant, a café and a produce store, where visitors can purchase and taste the sustainably grown and local produce of the farm and nearby area. Their motto is “grow, feed, educate” and they use sustainable methods and offer various workshops for visitors. (The Farm Byron Bay 2017a.) On the farm it is possible to participate on a farmer-led or self-guided tours, see some of the farm’s animals, take part in activities or simply enjoy a picnic and the views (The Farm Byron Bay 2017b). These kinds of farm experiences are increasing, but they are still a great example of food tourism experiences, where the locality and authenticity and sometimes exclusivity are very much available. Even though this experience falls mostly into the category of food attractions, it still incorporates other types of food experiences such as the restaurant, shop visits and tours.

Dairy farms such as the Dunlop dairy in Scotland, can be an interesting experience for cheese enthusiasts. Visitors can learn how the cheese is produced with an educational video and enjoy lunch at their tearoom. They can also taste the cheeses and buy these from the shop to take home. They also sell locally prepared ice cream, jams and fresh eggs. The dairy is located on the beautiful countryside, where visitors can have walks and see the cows. (Dunlop dairy 2012.)

### **5.1.5 Cooking class experiences**

The immersive experiences such as cooking classes, are usually centred on either one particular and local dish, the regional cuisine or in some cases the whole cuisine of the country. Starting from the grass-root level, as there are experiences where you get to enjoy a meal at locals’ homes, there are also experiences where you get to participate in the cooking with locals at their homes. Wilde Kitchen in Normandy is run by a local family at their 18th century farmhouse. During the one, three or six-day English courses, visitors get to learn French cooking, taste traditional Norman food and visit local markets. If not interested in the cooking, the area of Normandy provides lots to explore for other visitors. (Wilde Kitchen 2017.)

In Vienna, the capital city of Austria, it is possible to partake in an apple strudel baking course, in which the national dish is prepared from the scratch by making the dough and filling. To go with the sweet, participants get a glass of prosecco and hear the story of the dish. Alternatively, there are also strudel shows, where it is possible just to sit and watch professionals prepare this dessert. (Café Restaurant Residenz Schoenbrunn a.) The premises for the preparation of the dish and the show are in the café Residenz that is located in the Schönbrunn palace, which is a world heritage site by UNESCO. The Viennese coffee house culture is in fact also listed as immaterial world cultural heritage. (Café Restaurant Residenz Schoenbrunn b.) Preparing this internationally known dessert in its original surroundings surely promotes the authenticity factor for the consumers. Similar food authenticity can be experienced in the private artisan gelato making class in Rome. The class is organized in an authentic laboratory of a Gelateria romana by a company called gourmetaly. The place is owned by a family with long traditions in gelato making. The 1-hour lesson will include information about the right ingredients, recipes and tastings. (gourmetaly 2013.)

In Switzerland, there is a cookery school called The Chasa da Fö, which is situated on Alp Laret at the height of 2,200 metres and is thought of as Europe's highest cooking school. Chefs from the nearby hotel teach the visitor some of the region's own recipes. (Hotel Paradies.) What is interesting in this example is that it utilizes the country's beautiful landscape and nature, which consists of the Alps, as the scenery for the cooking. In Finland, there are no big mountains and the terrain is quite flat especially in the south, but instead Finland has lots of forests and lakes. These landscapes provide beautiful and serene surroundings for cooking as well.

For the most engaged consumers such as the "experienter" foodies (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen 2016), Italy provides a great variety of food tourism experiences. A company called Stirred, placed in Veneto in Northern Italy, organises 6-day cooking course holidays in their premises at the Villa Casagrande. The cooking course holiday includes visit to the Rialto fish market in Venice to pick up produce for the cooking; a boat trip to an island in Venice to sample regional delicacies; tasting regional foods in the local restaurants; visit to an artisan mountain cheese producer; a visit to a winery and searching for truffles in the Dolomites. Fresh variety of local produce is used in the cooking that is instructed by professional chefs using multiple techniques. (Stirred 2018.) This is a type of holiday experience that is all about food and attracts consumers, who are most likely willing to pay a bit extra. Even though Italy has the advantage of being one of the biggest countries for food tourism, it is important to remember that foodies are also explorers and value new places,



where not many others have been before. This benefits Finland and shows the opportunities in providing experiences for the most engaged food tourists.

Considering the pick your own (PYO) experiences, Destination Perth website lists the best tips and places in and around the city for fruit picking. The Perth area has the advantage of all year-round fruit produce, so they cover what is in season in different times of the year. Additionally, they list the places where to get these, their opening-times and what other attractions or activities there are available. These places include the Perth Mango Farm, CORE Cider House and strawberry farms. The variety of produce goes from citrus fruits to berries. (Destination Perth 2018.) These kinds of experiences may not get enough visibility, because the farms and producers may not consider themselves to be part of the tourism industry and instead see them as “secondary providers” as discussed by Stanley and Stanley (2015, 157). For the average tourists these could be less appealing, but for the highly engaged foodies, whether domestic or international, these kinds of articles and information are beneficial. Displaying this information on destination websites makes these stakeholders more visible in the tourism industry and the information can be more accessible for the potential visitors.

#### **5.1.6 Storytelling**

Considering the storytelling factor in food tourism experiences, Ireland provides a great example of this. On the website of Fáilte Ireland that is the National Tourism Development Authority, they have launched an Ireland’s food story marketing toolkit. This includes the overall food story of the country, which is provided in a sentence, paragraph and as a page and in four different languages. The story highlights the features of raw ingredients, welcoming people and memorable experiences of the Irish cuisine. (Fáilte Ireland a). This is a great resource for the different industry operators and it can enhance the consistency and coherency between their offerings. Based on the story, they have also produced six themes each with describing imagery and vocabulary to download and used in the marketing. The themes are simple and fresh; strong sense of place; local rules; warm people; new news and experiences that make memories (Fáilte Ireland b). The toolkit features much additional material such as fictional and non-fictional examples of how to use Irish food story in businesses.

## **5.2 Strategy benchmarking**

When it comes to food tourism strategies, the focus can be based on different areas. Some strategies are national, such as the Finnish strategy, but some of them can be for

specific areas such as counties or cities. This came apparent in the search. In addition, it was notable that some of the bigger and cuisine-distinguished destinations did not have specific food tourism strategies, at least not available publicly, while some of the smaller destinations had proper strategies or action plans. However, some destinations may have been developing their food tourism, but they do not have proper strategies dedicated to target this market segment. All in all, there was not too many food tourism strategies published on the Internet. The examples presented in this section were found through an online search engine and destination's official websites. One of the criterion for the chosen examples was the relevancy, meaning the timeframe. Only current and most recent strategies are discussed. This helps in addressing the current situation of food tourism strategies.

Two examples of the specific area or region focused strategies can be found from the UK. Scotland has just recently informed about their initiative to produce their first food tourism strategy. The strategy will be done in cooperation by the Scotland Food & Drink, Scottish Tourism Alliance and Culinary Tourism Alliance. However, last year they launched a general food and drink focused strategy called Ambition 2030. (SBNN 2017.) This strategy's vision states "Farming, fishing, food and drink is Scotland's most valuable industry, recognised at home and abroad as a model of collaboration and a world leader in responsible, profitable growth" and their aim is to increase the industry turnover to £30 billion by 2030. In the strategy they name three growth pillars that are people and skills, supply chain and innovation. (Scotland Food & Drink 2017a.) This strategy already has references to food tourism and its development, but the upcoming actual strategy may reveal even more food tourism dedicated actions.

In the same country, there is another food tourism strategy to be found. In Wales, they launched their first Food Tourism Action Plan almost a decade ago for the years 2009-2013. In 2015 they produced a second one, which is currently in place until 2020. The budget for it comes from Visit Wales and The Food Division. The action plan lists four main themes that are events and activities, information, developing expertise and PR and marketing. Each of these has planned actions, stakeholders, timeframe and outputs listed in the plan. (Welsh Government 2015.) This is done quite similarly as in the Finnish strategy.

Fáilte Ireland recently published their food and drink strategy for 2018-2023. Their previous Food Tourism Activity Plan was for 2014-2016. As the results from it, the Ireland's Food Story Toolkit was launched, new food tourism initiatives were developed, the Food Series concept highlighting regions' food events was taken to use and they helped and

supported industry operators. In this current strategy, their pre-visit visitor survey shows that Ireland has not been distinguished as a food destination. However, the after-visit experiences indicated that the quality of food was perceived as good. They continue by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the country's food and drink industry. The overall aim of the strategy in short, is to improve visitor's experiences with food and drink and to increase tourism revenues. In terms of numbers, they set out to increase the spending on food and drink by 400 million euros in the five years' timeframe. They also mention some other Key Performance Metrics, which need to be applied for the evaluation of the impact of food in the tourism industry. They have set 2020 as the target for the reviewing of the strategy. The strategy has four development areas each of which has both an objective and a desired outcome. The key activities in each of these, are outlined according to the timeframes of immediate, medium and ongoing, all within the five years of the strategy. The first development area is about gaining insights about the impact of food in the tourism industry and encouraging innovation. One of the actions in this, is in fact international benchmarking trips. (Fáilte Irelandc.) This supports the importance of this research method in learning from others and developing food tourism. Considering the overseas reputation of Ireland's food and drink, the second development area is dedicated to close the gap in perceptions and reality and increase awareness. The third area is about increasing the capacity and performance of the industry and its businesses and providing support. The issues addressed in these actions regard sustainability and locality. The last area is about providing great experiences for visitors by supporting and developing different food tourism initiatives. All of the partaking stakeholders are also listed in the strategy. (Fáilte Ireland c.)

One current, also regional, strategy example can be found from Australia, and more specifically from the state of Western Australia. Their food tourism strategy, Taste 2020, is supporting the State Government Strategy for Tourism in Western Australia 2020. In the beginning they introduce the Western Australia's food and wine industries briefly and then discuss the key consumer markets and their food and wine tourism engagement. In line with the Stanley and Stanley's (2015) theoretical framework suggestion for strategies, this strategy includes a SWOT analysis. They have also identified five consumer demands for the experiences; natural beauty, value for money, casual dining, provenance and accessibility. After their research of the current supply and consumer demands, the strategy introduces five strategic themes for development. These are appropriate regulatory settings; improving standards and quality; developing new tourism experiences; festival and events; and lastly promotion and marketing. For each of these, they have outlined few initiatives for development and the responsible stakeholders. The first strategic theme considers "creating the right regulatory environment for industry to prosper while managing

risks” and this includes topics such as liquor licencing and supply chains of local food. The second theme is about improving standards and quality for service and food offering and increasing the value for money. They also present an interesting idea to develop a regional food tourism quality accreditation for the national tourism accreditation program. Third theme aims to broaden the selection and infrastructure of the available food and wine experiences and to help industry stakeholders to develop these, by offering workshops and combining experiences into culinary trails. The festivals and events theme is about supporting and promoting regional and trade events at Western Australia. One of these is the state’s WA signature dish-competition for amateur cooks that showcases the region’s food produce. Lastly the promotion and marketing theme continues to promote the regions food and wine offering linked with their tourism brand “Experience Extraordinary”. The strategy has a broad collaborative approach for the development. The state has five Regional Tourism Organizations and nine Regional Development Commissions, which are integral in developing regional food tourism. Each of these nine are outlined in the strategy with key food tourism experiences, events and products as well as future development possibilities. In the end of the report, the biggest stakeholders are mentioned. (Tourism Western Australia.)

In addition to this regional strategy, Australia has also an international marketing campaign called Restaurant Australia, started in 2013 as a part of a bigger campaign called There’s nothing like Australia. The Restaurant Australia campaign has been a huge success with over \$1 billion increase in food and wine spending since its start. In 2017 the country also hosted the world’s 50 best restaurants awards ceremony, with a programme that included a tour around the best food and wine experiences of Australia, for the visiting chefs and media. During their research of the Australia’s food tourism industry, Tourism Australia found a gap between the visitors’ pre-visit expectations and perceptions after the visit, for which they developed the idea of Restaurant Australia. (Tourism Australia 2018.) This is an interesting and successful example of international food tourism marketing.

In the future, more strategies focusing specifically on food or drink tourism can be expected. In Canada, developing a national culinary tourism strategy is part of the country’s new tourism vision and it will be developed by the government and the food and tourism industries (Government of Canada 2017). There are also regional specialisations, as several regions in Northern Ontario have started to develop their own food tourism strategies, because the interest for these regions have been growing with the support from the Culinary Tourism Alliance (Hopkin 2017). Food and gastronomy can also be incorporated into

regular tourism development strategies or marketing plans, as it is done in Thailand. Gastronomy tourism is one part of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's international marketing plan for 2018. (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2017b.)

### **5.3 Strategic partnerships and networks benchmarking**

Strategic partnerships exist in all levels of food tourism, entrepreneurial, national, regional, organizational and even international. As pointed out in the Western Australia's food tourism strategy, businesses that are not directly in the tourism business, such as fisheries, would like to expand their markets, but need assistance in this (Tourism Western Australia, 30). This is exactly why strategic partnerships are important, because they can widen the tourism offering. In the theoretical framework it was established that the food tourism operators can be divided in various ways. All the industries have also their own associations and connections. In these examples the focus is specifically in the food tourism networks and their structures and how these are operating in the industry. The framework for the researched and chosen examples was the World Food Travel Associations division of food tourism stakeholders (see Table 1), because it had the most in-depth description of these. These examples give a glimpse of the various partnership and networking possibilities between these stakeholders. The examples are presented here, but they will be further categorized in the discussion part.

In Ireland, the previously mentioned Fáilte Ireland is one of the key players in the development of the country's food tourism industry. However, during the recent years, they have also identified the individuals, whose contribution in the food tourism industry, especially locally in their own communities, has increased the country's cuisine potential and reputation and networking. They are called Food Champions and they have a dedicated section on the Fáilte Ireland's website along with their stories in the industry. They also list and present their Food Ambassadors, who are more established names in the Irish food scene and internationally. They are important actors in developing the industry and showcasing it to visitors and other industry actors. (Fáilte Ireland d.) It is a nice recognition for the food tourism stakeholders of all levels and also a great informational point for visitors and for others, who are interested to learn about the people working in the Irish food tourism industry.

Referring to the previously mentioned food tourism development in Scotland, there is a great example of partnerships. A not-for-profit organization called Scotland Food and Drink is aiming to increase the international reputation and industry value of Scotland's food and drink. The organization is helping food and drink businesses to increase their

profits and it is supported by the Scottish Government. (Scotland Food & Drink 2010.) This is the kind of example of organizations providing advice and consultancy (Everett 2016) that was mentioned in the theoretical framework. Scotland has also a marketing advisory service called Connect local. Their free advisory services include for example: “business development and finding new local markets; creating food tourism trails; branding, marketing and digital promotions; maximizing the impact of attending events; sources of private and public funding; food and drink legislation; and forming common interest group and network”. They organize workshops and networking events. (Connect Local 2017a.) Connect Local is actually a partnership between SAC Consulting, which is part of Scotland’s Rural College and whose mission is to “enhance the rural economy and environment”, SAOS, who are professionals in farmer co-operations and food and drink supply chains, Scotland Food and Drink and Seafood Scotland, who operates in the seafood sector and its supply chain management (Connect Local 2017b).

In Denmark, a non-profit organization called FOOD, is responsible for increasing the interest in Nordic and Danish cuisine, nature and agriculture. It is supported by Danish food producers as well as public funds. (Food Organization of Denmark 2018a.) In addition to organizing food events, they assist international media and journalists to write stories about the Danish gastronomy by organizing for example press trips. They also provide advice about the Danish food industry for companies, as well as funding for food project and initiatives. (Food Organization of Denmark 2018b.)

Another type of partnership model from Scotland is the Visit Scotland’s Taste our Best - quality assurance scheme. It was set to address the locality and quality of different food industry operators such as restaurants, bars, cafes, attractions and hotels. These are accredited with a purple badge, if they meet the criteria of local, fresh, in some cases seasonal and quality produce and are promoting the origin of the food. (Visit Scotland b). For the international visitors these are very beneficial, if they are looking for authentic Scottish food. In South Australia, the Regional Food Industry Association, Food South Australia Inc. and Primary Industries and Regions SA have founded an initiative called Eat Local SA. The idea behind it is to ensure consumers the possibility to enjoy or purchase locally sourced food, in the food service and retail venues displaying this sign. In the case of food service venues, they must have at least one main dish with a locally sourced ingredient, while in food retail venues they have to have at least ten regional products on offer. This is a way to connect the authenticity and local food seeking consumers with producers and food service industry operators offering these. They also have an app, which helps in planning itineraries. (Eat Local SA.)

Looking at examples from the well-established food destinations such as Italy, there are interesting partnerships. One form of networking for marketing purposes is represented in Delicious Italy's operation model. It is an independent online guide for Italy's food, culture and history. They work with local tourism authorities and companies with their PR and communications services, which help in reaching more consumers. They produce their content based on their own travel experiences and their extended list of contacts and help travellers to reach the locals by helping to build itineraries (Delicious Italy 2017.) This type of service is available in regular travel agencies, but this company seems to promote more of the bespoke food experiences and adventures, which suit for the highly food engaged travellers who look for something unique.

Not entirely about food tourism, but more about tourism and the impact of social media, last year Visit Scotland introduced the very first Instagram travel agency in London. In there they had a big variety of Instagram pictures from Scotland, taken by regular travellers. From these the customers could pick the most appealing pictures for them and the travel agents created an itinerary based on these pictures. (Scotland Food and Drink 2017b.) The reason for including this case, was to present also the food tourism possibilities in this. As tourists, as well as locals, share images of their dishes, it is not always clear where you can get these, in which cases food-based travel itineraries could be handy. In Finland this could also be beneficial to highlight the different cuisines of regions.

Technology, digital tools and online platforms can be seen as a sort of a networking opportunity. As an example, Food from Sweden and Business Sweden have been in a successful collaboration with an UK based online food shop Ocado ever since 2012. Their aim was "increasing awareness of Sweden as a culinary nation and introduce British consumers to great Swedish foods". They have also started collaborations with other online retailers in other destinations. (Try Swedish.) Another similar case comes from the Cayman Islands, where they started a partnership with an American meal kit delivery company to market their cuisine for the USA market. The destination worked with four local chefs to produce five different kits with ingredients for local recipes. It is hard to evaluate whether this will increase food tourism in the long run. (Peltier 2017.) Even though these examples do not comply entirely with the definition of food tourism and are more on the food export side, they could be considered as marketing methods to boost food tourism. In addition to these online store collaborations, regular supermarkets and shops can also provide possibilities for food tourism partnerships. Even though the global German supermarket chain, Lidl, stocks over 300 Scottish products in their stores in the UK, they are having a Scottish Favourites Week selling even more locally made products across the UK for a limited time. This is very important for the Scottish suppliers as they get access

to wider markets and visibility among the domestic consumers and potentially even with international visitors. (Scotland Food and Drink 2018.)

In the traditional media, an interesting example worth of mentioning is the collaboration between the famous tv format Masterchef's Australian version and the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO). JNTO as well as the flight company Qantas sponsored the show to film in Japan for a week. The episodes featured many of Japan's sights and landscape, but most importantly their cuisine. In fact, Japan's traditional dietary culture is also UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage and their cuisine is very well-known internationally. (ETB Travel News 2017.) As discussed before, tv cooking shows and competitions can have a huge effect on increasing food tourism or at least the interest for it (Stanley & Stanley 2015, 5). They are a great way to reach bigger audiences, and this show is actually broadcasted even in Finland.

Where food events are important experiences for foodies, networking and trade events are important for the industry stakeholders and for the overall development. These events can be for example conferences, trade shows or workshops. The first culinary tourism conference of Australia, called Destination Food 2018, will be held this year. The event is dedicated for networking and learning opportunities for Australia's food tourism industry operators, which would inspire further development and marketing of Australia's food tourism offering. The event was initiated by one marketing expert from Australia's travel, food and agritourism industry. (Destination Food 2018.) On a global level, this year UNWTO and the Government of Thailand in partnership with Basque Culinary Center will organize the fourth UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in Bangkok. The focus will be on "harnessing the power of technology as a driver for sustainable growth". (World Tourism Organization.)

One of the stakeholders in the related businesses category (Chase & al. 2014, 25; World Food Travel Association b) was academia (see Table 1). On the education side, there are not many university courses or education programmes dedicated solely for food tourism at the moment. The very few of these are offered for example in Australia, at the Griffith University's "Food and Wine Tourism" course in Brisbane and at the "Food, Wine and Agritourism" course in the University of Tasmania. Besides the theory, the learning should have contributions from industry professionals and industry visits (Croce & Perri 2017, 202.) Providing education in this field could result in more future professionals of food tourism and give the students a better possibility to form contacts and networks in the industry.



## 6 Discussion and conclusion

This section includes a more in-depth discussion on the benchmarking findings in each of the research areas. All the research results are summarized in Tables 3, 4 and 5. From these, it is easy and quick to see what destinations and examples were included. The findings from all the examples and what was learned, in general and for Finland, are summarized as well. However, they are not indicating what Finland is lacking or the performance gaps, because Finland has similar great examples to these. They are merely describing what others are doing, hence meeting the overall objective, and providing the “benchmarking” perspective discussed by Karlof and Ostholm (1993) (Kozak 2004, 8.)

The restaurants were a difficult category to cover, mainly because of the biggest supply in these. Looking at the variety of restaurants, it seems to be all the more important to highlight locality and seasonality of the ingredients and flavours. It is an essential factor nowadays, but not a particularly distinguishable feature. Finland has a competitive supply of great restaurants offering locally sourced fresh food. Based on the Michelin guide for the Nordic countries 2018 (Jenkins 2018), it is clear that Denmark and Sweden lead the charts, both with their 26 starred restaurants. Regarding these, Finland has some catching up, but it is still quite competitive with Norway and ahead of Iceland. Another notable factor is that Finland does not have Michelin starred restaurants outside the capital area, unlike the other Nordic countries. These restaurants could be beneficial in elevating other cities and areas to become food tourism destinations.

Food festivals and events seem to be popular even in remote destinations, without any emphasis on food tourism development. Finland has several interesting food events throughout the year, which are recognized in the food tourism strategy’s “cool and creative” theme (Havas & al. 2015a, 13). In the future, more events and festivals could be developed to highlight the different parts of Finnish cuisine and gastronomic culture, with individual dishes and ingredients to regional cuisines. The presented examples gave ideas of what to include in the festivals. The Thai and Aarhus festival had interesting examples of how to have different sections dedicated to different parts of the cuisines. The farmer’s markets are a quite fixed type of experience, even though they can be very interesting for tourists. The Tsujiki Fish Market is one of the most famous examples, but the tuna auction brings something unique and fun to it. The food and farmer’s markets were included in many of the tours and cooking lessons. It is a great idea to pick up produce from these and prepare a dish or a meal with the ingredients. Finland and the central Helsinki area have nice markets especially during the summer season.

In general, there are quite a few food tours on offer. Most of these are rather ordinary tours, where local specialities are tasted, and the local suppliers are visited. Many capital cities and well-known regions have at least some kind of food tours on offer. They vary from small entrepreneurial companies to national or international companies operating globally. Trails such as the Seafood trail in Scotland could also work in Finland, as seafood is a big part of the cuisine. Finland has lots of coastal area as well as islands and lakes, which could offer great opportunities for various trails. Additionally, the inland countryside provides stunning backdrops for authenticity boosting rural trails.

Food attractions are an interesting category, because of the variety of options with these. As mentioned Finland has a hotel and restaurant museum, but in the future similar museums or exhibitions as the interactive Currywurst museum in Berlin, could offer informative and entertaining ways to introduce the Finnish cuisine for foreigners. The Byron Bay Farm and the Dunlop dairy farm were examples of farm-based attractions that have been developed into full experiences. As mentioned rural food tourism has been growing (Frost & al. 2016, 43) and these could be considered also as agritourism experiences (Skift 2015, 9). Besides the more productional farms focused on food production and the animal farms, Finland has lots of farm space to develop these more commercial farms with tourism operations from restaurants to shops and other educational activities.

There is a wide selection in terms of sizes of cooking classes, some of which are organized in locals' homes, while others in professional culinary schools by chefs. The emphasis is on local ingredients, local dishes or both, as expected. As discussed, the original region of the ingredients and recipes can be a major factor in boosting the authenticity (Getz & al. 2014, 116; Laing & Warwick 2015, 179), which is very important for the traveling foodies (Fields, 2002, 39). Finnish cuisine includes many dishes and simple foods that could be prepared in professional or nonprofessional cooking classes. The ingredients could be gathered from nearby producers, markets or even from the nature. The pick your own (PYO) experiences are harder to find, because they are not always directly part of the tourism offering but have the potential of providing immersive and fun experiences. In the Finnish forests' there is a "freedom to roam", which means that people can feely pick for example berries and mushrooms from everywhere. This could offer some possibilities for PYO experiences, in addition to the already existing availability for strawberry and pea picking at local producers.

The Ireland's food story toolkit is an interesting example of using storytelling to enhance the food tourism experiences. It acts as an insightful reference point for the industry stake-

holders and it can boost consistency. In turn the consistency among the food tourism offering affects the destination brand, as discussed (Skift 2015). Besides the overall descriptions about the destinations' cuisine and food on the destinations' official websites, there were no similar examples about storytelling to be found. Finland has noted the importance of storytelling and has been developing a coherent story around the cuisine (Visit Finland).

In the food experiences, a relevant point in many of the examples was that there was usually a combination of activities in one experience. Cooking classes and tours featured tastings and visits to suppliers, and festivals and events featured farmer's markets and workshops. This shows the need for thinking outside the box and the importance of including several experiences together. Nonetheless, simple experiences such as home cooking lessons can be equally important for foodies, who are not interested in the most popular experiences. Quite many of the companies were also offering bespoke experiences, which gives out the impression of personalized service and interest in the consumers expectations.

Other relevant points were that many destinations have their own competitions and awards for food tourism products and experiences, such as the signature dish competition in Western Australia. Similarly, Finland has the national food tourism competition. If the best practice benchmarking is used, these could offer valuable ideas as they usually present the best ideas and operators currently in the industry. From the marketing perspective, not all the food activities and experiences are promoted as food tourism experiences, so their potential in this niche segment could be smaller. However, it is much dependable on the consumers and in what they see potential for memorable experiences. Many of the smaller scale experiences were only provided in the national languages, without any English pages or translations. This meant that these had to be excluded from this research, but it could also mean that tourists can have difficulties in finding them. However, some of them could be intended only for locals or domestic visitors and not as food tourism promoters.

Overall, the examples and cases were different scales. Others were rather well-known food tourism experiences of large scale such as the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and the Tsujiki Fish market, while others were smaller and lesser known experiences. This was done to get a bigger picture of the variety and potential in these. As Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) indicated, the level of visitors' food engagement affects the experiences they choose, so it is important to provide something for everyone. Many of the experiences are also entrepreneur based. They were usually founded or initiated by a couple, family or a group of friends and some of them had grown into bigger network of

partnerships. Compared to these examples and what other destinations are offering, it could be said that Finland has some similar, internationally appealing and competitive experiences on offer. However, as one of the development areas in the Finnish strategy was product development (Havas & al. 2015a, 13-14), these examples and their findings could give some inspiration and perspectives for this.

Table 3. Experience examples and summary of findings

<b>Experiences</b>	<b>What and where</b>	<b>Summary of findings and what to learn (for Finland)</b>
<b>Restaurants, dining</b>	Nordic Michelin star restaurants, Maaemo (Norway), Matur og Drykkur (Iceland), Picnic (Singapore), Meet the Danes (Denmark)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Local, fresh, seasonal food</li> <li>✓ Sustainability</li> <li>✓ Focusing or highlighting individual ingredients, dishes or regions (themes)</li> </ul>
<b>Festivals</b>	World's longest herring table (Norway), Thailand live gastronomy event, Melbourne food and wine festival (Australia), Food Festival (Denmark), Tsujiki Fish Market (Japan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Combining several experiences and activities together</li> <li>✓ Combining unique suppliers and unknown food destinations</li> <li>✓ Providing experiences outside the capital city area</li> </ul>
<b>Tours, trails</b>	Photo food tour (Portugal), Foodie walking tour (Hong Kong), Gourmet cycling trip (France), Snack box (Switzerland), Seafood trail (Scotland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Experiences in the authentic settings or with unique views</li> <li>✓ Interactive and fun features</li> <li>✓ Incorporating and encouraging social media usage in the experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Attractions</b>	Currywurst museum (Germany), The Farm (Australia), The Dunlop dairy farm (Scotland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Marketing with a coherent story and providing information in English</li> <li>✓ Visibility for small scale experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Cooking</b>	Wilde Kitchen (France), Apple Strudel baking course (Austria), Gelato lesson (Italy), Europe's highest cooking school (Switzerland), Cooking holiday (Italy), PYO farms (Australia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Entrepreneur based</li> <li>✓ Offering bespoke experiences</li> <li>✓ Experiences for consumers with all levels of engagement into food tourism</li> <li>✓ Incorporating professionals and locals (non-professionals) to experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Storytelling</b>	Ireland food story toolkit	

In the cases of the Fáilte Ireland and Western Australia's strategies, there was mentioned the perception gap between the consumers' expectations and their actual experience of the destination. They aim at closing this gap and elevating their regions as food tourism destinations. This is quite similar approach as in Finland, which has not been previously

considered as a food destination. The examples from the UK showed the possibility of regional differentiation. The timelines were in many cases maximum of five years and at the moment many of them are aimed to 2020.

With the strategies there were a lot of similarities. The main focus areas or the themes in these are more or less about the experiences or the supply, partnerships and marketing of food tourism. This in turn, is very much in line with the three perspectives of strategic planning in food tourism as presented in the Sotiriadis' (2015) conceptual framework. Additionally, there are similarities in the content of the strategies to the Stanley and Stanley's (2015) operational perspective of strategic planning, which included a SWOT analysis and concrete action plans with stakeholders and timeframes. From these strategy examples and findings, it can be detected that Finnish food tourism strategy stands well with these international counterparts. They show that many of the destinations mentioned here, have a similar approach to the strategic planning of food tourism. However, each of them has managed to focus on their own distinctive features and resources and individuality of cuisines, which is important (Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013, 22). One thing is apparent, as discussed the industry is fast-developing (World Tourism Organization 2012, 10), and many destinations have strategies and development initiatives for the future. This indicates continuous emphasis on strategic planning for the future development of food tourism. It is also important to watch these upcoming strategies and how these will develop.

Many of the strategies had invested in the visuality of the documents. They had highlighted some of their unique dishes and main ingredients in the imagery. In a way, this could be regarded as promoting the importance of focusing on the destinations unique tangible and intangible resources (Everett 2016) especially for the industry stakeholders, who may review it. It makes these documents also more pleasant to read and approach, when the content has been well organized and presented in various ways. Even with this, the Finnish strategy is equally competitive.

Table 4. Strategy examples and summary of findings

	<b>Where</b>	<b>Summary of findings and what to learn (for Finland)</b>
<b>Strategies</b>	Wales, Ireland, Western Australia, Australia (marketing), Scotland (upcoming), Northern Ontario (upcoming), Canada (upcoming), Thailand (upcoming, marketing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Many similarities in approaches and content (with each other and with Finland)</li> <li>✓ Not many strategies currently</li> <li>✓ Regional differentiation</li> <li>✓ Five-year timelines</li> <li>✓ Emphasis on visuality</li> <li>✓ Many upcoming strategies</li> </ul>

The networks and partnerships were researched with the division of industry stakeholders by Chase & al. (2014, 25) and World Food Travel Association (b) (see Table 1). As said, the partnerships are hard to categorize as they include several stakeholders from different industries and operational fields. Nonetheless, in the Table 5 they are roughly divided into the different categories to get a clearer idea about their findings and learning indications.

There were examples of organizations with different roles in the industry, such as advisory and marketing. In fact, many of the presented examples had multiple operational actions to enhance the destinations' food tourism. There was also a discussion about how individuals affect the industry and how important their efforts are. On the contrary, some cases with media were included to showcase how the television cooking shows and different ways of marketing can be effective ways to increase the appeal and awareness for food tourism. As mentioned, Visit Finland is mainly in charge of promoting Finland's food tourism overseas, and they have well incorporated it to their other marketing strategies (Havas & al. 2015a, 2, 9). Not all the presented examples were direct cases of partnerships, but some of them enfold the possibility for forming partnerships in food tourism.

It is interesting that for example in Australia, where the food tourism industry and its potential seems to be widely noticed, they already provide education for this. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the industry is both a niche segment and a wide industry sector with multiple research areas at the same time (Boyd 2015, 14). Because of this, it is possible to build courses around it and educate students to become professionals in this field. In Finland, both university students and lecturers have contributed to the development of food tourism. The concrete networking in conferences, trade shows and workshops are important for the industry and they are organized nationally and globally. Finland has also used the advantages of workshops in networking.

In these examples, the sizes of the partnerships also varied a lot. Some of them are small scale local partnerships, while others a bigger scale networks and associations. Then again, these were included to give ideas for possible networks in all levels as well as to gain insight to what other destinations have been doing. Compared to these, it can be concluded that Finland has great examples of diverse partnerships considering how new the industry is. Without out a doubt, some of these examples could not fit for Finland or would be hard to establish, but they can act as inspiration or as ideas for adaptation. Some more examples of partnerships, especially from the food and beverage business and travel and hospitality business categories, were presented also in the experiences and strategies.

Table 5. Partnership examples and summary of findings

Partnerships	What and where	Summary of findings and what to learn (for Finland)
<b>Food and beverage businesses</b>	Ireland's food champions and ambassadors, Visit Scotland's Taste our best and Eat Local SA (Australia) schemes, Lidl and Scottish suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Promoting individuals who are integral in the industry</li> <li>✓ Quality assurance and reputation management for the food tourism experiences</li> <li>✓ Food tourism trade events offer possibilities for networking</li> <li>✓ International partnerships</li> <li>✓ Increasing small scale producers and suppliers' visibility</li> <li>✓ Media and marketing partnerships to increase awareness and appeal for food tourism</li> <li>✓ Food exports can initiate the appeal and increase awareness for food tourism</li> <li>✓ Using social media to incorporate consumers' preferences to travel itineraries, for example with food</li> <li>✓ Effective support systems and multiple services (funding, consultancy, networking) for entrepreneurs</li> </ul>
<b>Travel and hospitality businesses</b>	Japan National Tourism Organization, Qantas and MasterChef Australia, Delicious Italy	
<b>Related businesses</b>	Scotland food and drink, Connect local, Food organization of Denmark, Food tourism course in Australian Universities, Food from Sweden, Business Sweden and Ocado, Cayman Islands meal kit, Destination 2018 (Australia), UNWTO and government of Thailand's world forum on gastronomy tourism	
<b>Consumers</b>	Visit Scotland's Instagram travel agency	

Even though there was no specific geographical narrowing with the examples, the focus still ended up being on a handful of destinations. This was because, these destinations had relevant examples and some notable development in the mentioned research areas of food tourism. Additionally, having more examples from each destination gave a better overview of their food tourism offering and development. The findings of this research showed a lot of evidence for the “underdog” destinations of Ireland and Scotland's development in food tourism, as mentioned by Simpson (2015). They have both invested into a concrete strategy for the industry and there were some interesting stakeholder partnership examples. Both have also started to put more and more resources and emphasis on developing food tourism experiences, products and initiatives. Australia's food tourism industry included several beneficial examples for this research. There were also some examples from the well-established food tourism destinations, such as Italy, Spain and France. A further research on some other destinations could provide other interesting examples, especially for the experiences.

## **6.1 Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to assess the international competition for Finnish food tourism experiences, strategies and partnerships by benchmarking. The objective was to find out what other destinations have been doing regarding these. Therefore, it can be concluded that the objective was met, and the research questions were answered. Several examples from the industry were introduced and discussed.

In addition to discussing some ideas and what was learned for future food tourism development in Finland, there were also suggestions for where to look for inspiration and innovative ideas. Overall the research areas and findings indicate that Finland's food tourism development stands well in the international food tourism scene amongst the long established and currently developing destinations. In some areas, such as the storytelling and strategy, the development is even much further than in some other destinations. The strategy and partnerships have many similarities with the international counterparts and the presented cases gave some examples of what has been done and what could possibly work. This could hopefully give some inspiration and ideas for adaptation and direction in the future.

After studying some of the theory and examples of the food tourism products, strategies and strategic partnerships, it can be concluded that these are all very much interconnected. Food tourism operators and marketers create strategies for implementing food tourism products and experiences and to enhance networking of the industry operators. Then again, the private industry operators are mostly the ones affecting on the supply of food tourism experiences, of which performance and functionality effects on the future strategies. This made it worthwhile and beneficial to benchmark these simultaneously to get a better picture of the whole food tourism development in the few destinations' cases.

## **6.2 Future research**

For the future development, a further benchmarking research based on marketing of food tourism could be beneficial. There are already hints and initiatives for future campaigns and marketing efforts from Ireland, Catalonia and Germany (Hanlon & Alford 2017) as well as the before mentioned campaign of Restaurant Australia (Tourism Western Australia, 40). Since marketing offers the way to reach culinary tourists and foodies, it is beneficial to research what kind of approaches other destinations have. As the development of food tourism in various destinations is only increasing, it is more and more important to make destinations visible, accessible and intriguing.



Additionally, some areas for further future research could be the different experience types. Because of the vast variety in these, it could be beneficial for the Finnish companies, entrepreneurs or other stakeholders operating in the food tourism industry, to benchmark similar experiences more in-depth and perhaps even focusing on one rival destination. As for the strategies and partnerships, these are important to keep an eye on, because as discussed food tourism has been much noted and developed by many destinations during the recent years.

### **6.3 Limitations, validity and reliability**

The research had a few limitations. The publicly displayed information of destinations' food tourism may not convey all the development that happens behind the scenes. Whereas the information about products and experiences is much marketed and easy to access, the information about strategies and networks can be left unexpressed. This could be because the information on these may be considered confidential or irrelevant to publish. Another relevant limitation for the benchmarking, is the fact that in many cases, there is no information about the performance, results or outcomes of these different examples. Many of the strategies are still ongoing, which is why it cannot be evaluated how successful they have been. Lastly, narrowing the language search provided some limitations as well. Some examples of the experiences had to be left out, because they were not available in English.

In terms of reliability, the information has been mostly drawn from sources that can be considered reliable. These were destination websites and publications as well as articles published in newspapers and journals and from books by industry professionals. The research results of this thesis can also be considered as valid, because they provide indication and research about the current competition and development in food tourism in the fields of products, strategies and networking.

### **6.4 Evaluation of the thesis process**

For the author the research topic was very interesting, but not particularly familiar in the beginning. Because of this, the research and writing process provided much professional development and increased knowledge of the topic. It was rewarding to gain more and more information and to see the linkages between the different sources. The research provides current value for the commissioning party of FOOD & TOURISM project in Finland, as the industry sector is rapidly developing. The topic of food is also very current and relevant in the tourism industry, providing more and more competition and making benchmarking research worthwhile.

The theoretical part was interesting to write as there were quite good sources available and these were much up to date as the industry is rather new. This part gave the author a great overview of the topic and what it includes, which became the ground and framework for the empirical part. The benchmarking process required a lot of researching and evaluation of sources, which took the most amount of time. This resulted in lengthening the timeframe for the research process. In the case of the experiences, it was especially very time-consuming, since the supply in these was enormous and not all of them were suitable. The other two benchmarking topics, the strategies and networking models, had less examples, but they were harder to find. All in all, it took time and effective evaluation to include only relevant examples, which would provide some interesting and relevant information for the research.

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