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Exploring Potentials for Culinary Tourism through a Food Festival: The Case of Thessaloniki Food Festival

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Abstract

This paper seeks to conceptualize the way Thessaloniki is promoting culinary tourism, whilst supporting and building upon local networks; engaging and co-creating an urban experience with its citizens and visitors. The aim of the paper is to suggest a potential framework that can be used as a strategic planning tool for the promotion of culinary tourism in Thessaloniki. To this end, a food festival is being investigated. This has been conceived by the organizers as the foundation of the idea of culinary tourism in the city. However, the findings indicate that there is a lack of active participation by the locals and not enough communication among various assets that are associated with the culinary identity of the city. In general, Thessaloniki seems to embody the ongoing struggle of an emerging destination, which is dealing with the complex process of branding and marketing without having the proper tools and the necessary collaboration required between its structural networks. Accordingly, the research provides a lens through which the culinary culture of Thessaloniki can be used as a strategic pillar for stimulating a sustainable way of “consuming” whilst also promoting the city’s identity; enhancing Thessaloniki’s appeal as a culinary destination.

Keywords: *Culinary tourism; food festivals; sustainability; localism; local development.*

Introduction

Thessaloniki is considered as a city in transition (Patikas 2013). Far from being an ‘isolated island’ anymore, the city seems to embody an ongoing struggle to redefine its image and attractiveness in order to acquire a stronger position on the global map, either through tourism development or culture-led regeneration. These policies mark a response to the stagnation that the financial crisis created, providing potential economic, cultural and social impacts. Indeed, the city has only recently developed and implemented policies in the

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tourism sector in an effort to put the city on the global map of tourism whilst focusing on its own innate resources.

Currently, the local government is trying to integrate the city's rich historic and cultural heritage into its "contemporary - present and future - spatial and symbolic order" (Hastaoglou & Christodoulou, 2010: 132). Often the city has been described as a crossroad of "cultures and religions", which gave birth to the city's past and present multicultural narrative (Tzanelli, 2012). This narrative has been employed to promote Thessaloniki as a travel destination, promising prospective travellers the chance to experience it through its material form (e.g. architecture, museums) and corporal senses (e.g. tasting the past). However, as Tzanelli (2012) argues, the multicultural narrative of the city was built on many waves of invasions and revolutions, followed by their silenced obliteration. This meant that at times the traumatic traces of the past were "at best allowed to crumble away, at worst written off the record" (Mazower, 2004: 7). Thessaloniki tries to "remember" its past, and present itself to the world in a manner where the "violent endings and new beginnings" are smoothed out into a continuous narrative that "can be marketed as a prestigious commodity" (Mazower 2004: 7; Tzanelli 2012: 3). Actually, in the midst of a 'more-than-financial' crisis the city seems to embody the ongoing struggle of a new destination, which is dealing with the complex process of branding and marketing without having the proper tools and the vital required collaboration between its structural networks.

In this context, the study asks if the rich gastronomic culture of the city could constitute a way of developing itself as a culinary destination, bearing in mind that food has presented itself in a variety of spheres, ranging from nutritional value to symbolic meaning, community and identity construction. In the very heart of this paper lies the assumption that culinary culture can act as an asset, and a strategic pillar for stimulating a sustainable way of "consuming" and promoting a city's identity. My contribution therefore is to suggest a more sustainable framework regarding the promotion and development of culinary tourism. Premised on the above, the research aims to shed light in the way Thessaloniki is promoting culinary tourism, exploring further its culinary landscape; developing a critical understanding of how different actors experience and conceptualise the identity of the city; locating the challenges the city is facing when it comes to the development of its resources.

Accordingly, the starting point of the research was to investigate the role of Thessaloniki Food Festival (TFF). TFF was introduced by the local government in 2011, as a way to promote and upgrade local gastronomy, establishing the city as a destination for culinary tourism. According to the official website of the Festival¹ it aims to

- define the culinary identity of the city,
- promote local products through various activities involving locals,

¹ <http://foodfestival.thessaloniki.gr/en>

- introduce citizens' and professionals' participation developing their operations in the city,
- mobilize the local community,
- make local products known,
- promote Thessaloniki as a top gastronomic destination, adding to tourism development.

Nevertheless, it has been observed that the initial enthusiasm and success of the festival has gradually faded, and today this ongoing event acts as a constant reminder of the past and present “ghosts” the city is still facing (see Mazower, 2004). In the research, however, TFF was considered a basis for understanding how various stakeholders engage or dis-engage in different ways with this event, and fashion their understanding of the city's culinary identity, relating it to the wider urban landscape and local imagery. The importance of this lies in the fact that a case study such as TFF can identify relevant issues and various driving forces that are important for the development of culinary tourism in a particular area (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Various studies have proved successful in this endeavour (Jones & Jenkins, 2002; Kneafsey & Ilbery, 2001; Sharples, 2003). Arguably, the success of a food festival depends on the uniqueness, status, quality or seasonal significance *i.e. elements that potentially will create interest and attract attention* (Hall & Mitchell, 2008: 13). In such a way, they play a crucial role in promoting a destination; creating loyalty to local food products (Mason & Paggiaro, 2009; Simeon & Buonincontri, 2011). In addition, food festivals allow the food to be treated as both a commodity and symbol, which can provide a meaningful experience for tourists as a way to experience new cultures and flavours (Long, 2004; Mitchell & Hall, 2003; Rusher, 2003). In order to frame the discussion, the theoretical framework that follows critically assesses the role of culinary tourism in creating new destinations and its relationship to food festivals.

Gastronomy as a way of developing tourist destinations

In a world characterised by structural changes, social mobility and globalization processes, tourism has undergone major changes. Over the past decade, the ever-increasing competition between tourist destinations has led to the development of unconventional and extraordinary attractions to catch the attention of prospective visitors (WTTC, 2015). In turn, it is claimed that modern tourists are interested in those destinations with which they can connect through highly personalized and authentic experiences; destinations where travellers can feel themselves to be in touch with the “real” world and the “real selves” (Handler & Saxton, 1988). To this effect, amongst the various trends that are located in post-modern tourism, gastronomy and culinary tradition can be seen as key factors in its development and promotion (Guzmán & Cañizares, 2012). Another important factor which played a significant part in such developments is the overall increase of interest in food, as promoted by the emergence of ‘foodies’, numerous publications, TV shows, and alternative

movements such as the Slow Food Movement. These factors, arguably, allow individuals to become more educated and be aware of different symbolisms and interpretations of food and food consumption in different parts of the world.

Accordingly, gastronomy has become an important constituent of the wider socio-cultural, historic, economic and environmental makeup of a destination as well as a significant source of identity formation in post-modern societies (Richards, 2002). Therefore, the distinctiveness of local food in relation to a place also plays an important role in a destination's identity (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Arguably, gastronomy reflects the specific way of life in different geographical areas, underpinning tradition in rural areas and modernity in urban ones, since it is something rooted in local culture and tradition (Mitchell & Hall, 2006). In short, the very settings in which we live define also the food we eat. Linking discourses of food and identity as early as 1825, the French gastronome Brillat-Savarin claimed *'Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you who you are'* (Brillat-Savarin, 1970: 13). In light of this, food can become an important opportunity for interpreting an urban culture or a community. Hence, by using food as an interpretive tool, we can understand a place's heritage, customs, celebrations, daily way of life, and more (Basman, 2011).

Nowadays, whole countries, regions and cities are promoted using their unique culinary attractions, as well as using local food as a source of attraction in strengthening their tourism marketing (Lin, et al., 2010; Dann, 1996). Arguably, this actions took place mainly because it was noticed that tourists' spending on food can constitute up to one-third of the total tourist expenditure (Mak et al., 2012; Telfer & Wall, 2000). Thus, it has been observed that 40% of tourists' expenditure is constituted by food consumption while 50% of restaurants' revenues in global destinations are generated by travellers (Hall & Sharples, 2003). In response to that information, the culinary identity of a region has been used as a form of destination brand identity (Boyne & Hall, 2004; du Rand & Heath, 2006; Fox, 2007; Frochot, 2003; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Lin et al., 2010). The cases worldwide are numerous. Take for example Singapore's Tourism Board which integrated historical and geographical characteristics in its cultural policy, setting food as one of its selling points (Henderson, 2004). The Niagara region in Canada has developed the *'Niagara's cuisine'* as a new product in its tourism policy (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003). The *'Taste of Scotland'* project created a marketing scheme in which the participating establishments agreed to provide dishes which "are either traditional or are using recognizably Scottish products, to provide the visitor with a meal of Scottish food" (Hughes & Leslie, 1995: 114). Similarly, the *'Taste of Wales'* initiative has successfully promoted local food and food products, giving a boost to the tourism industry throughout the region (Jones & Jenkins, 2002).

As exemplified above, food bears strong socio-cultural connections with a specific destination, encouraging tourists to experience it through the tastes and the culinary customs of that place. Actually, many studies show that tourists'

interests and preferences in food can play a significant role in effecting their choice of destination (Bessière, 1998; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004). In this light, in order to describe the relationship between gastronomy and tourism, various terms have been used to identify this field such as “*food tourism*” (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hall et al., 2003), “*gastronomic tourism*” (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Zelinsky, 1985), “*culinary tourism*” (Long, 1998) etc. These different terminologies mean almost the same notion, i.e. tourists’ participation in food related activities, with food being the focus of travel behaviour rather than a by-product (Shenoy, 2005). The aim of this paper isn’t to discuss further the differences between those terminologies. Still, as a matter of strategy “*culinary tourism*” was considered as the most appropriate for use, since this includes also the social and cultural context in which food is produced and consumed (Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Guzmán & Cañizares, 2012).

Culinary tourism has become one of the fastest-growing research topics (Kim et al., 2011). Long (1998: 181) who first introduced the term, uses an anthropological perspective and defines culinary tourism as:

“an intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an ‘Other’, participation including the consumption or preparation and presentation for consumption of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered as belonging to a culinary system not one’s own”

Ignatov & Smith (2006: 238) defined culinary tourism as “trips during which the purchase or consumption of regional foods, or the observation and study of food production represent a significant motivation or activity”. In this direction, it becomes a kind of touristic experience resulting from the appreciation and consumption of local food (Smith & Xiao, 2008). Another way to conceptualize culinary tourism is to view it as an experiential journey, where food is viewed as the medium of experimentation and experience towards the local socio-cultural makeup of a region through its cuisine. In short, culinary tourism can be seen as a series of activities which feature local food and “unique” culinary culture to attract tourists to enjoy local food and culture (Su, 2015). In this sense, culinary tourism is promoted as the form of tourism which embodies “all the traditional values associated with the new trends in tourism i.e. respect for culture and tradition, a healthy lifestyle, authenticity, sustainability, and experience” (Gaztelumendi, 2012: 10). Thus, it is aligned with the current global trends regarding cultural consumption in relation to localism values, which take into consideration the territorial characteristics of a destination, the local culture and products and the so-called “authenticity” of a destination, as represented through its people, products, and the overall experience. According to Silkes *et al.* (2008: 73), it is this emotional identification intertwined with the symbolic interaction between a local and a tourist that makes culinary tourism a powerful factor in a destinations’ image development. “The success of this unique form of tourism ... depends on its ability to create

an enriching tourist experience and to optimize the economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism”.

Nevertheless, if we view tourism as part of the ongoing globalisation processes, we could argue that it has influenced many aspects of human activity such as profound transformations in food production and consumption (Oosterveer, 2006; Wilhelmina, et al., 2010). In this light, a number of studies argue that food consumption in tourism is also subject to the macro influences of globalisation (Hall & Mitchell, 2002; Richards, 2002; Symons, 1999; Torres, 2002). Within cities’ competitive environments, this also means that there is a constant need to create new products and services in order to provide greater added value to the destination; succeeding in making the destination more competitive and unique in relation to others (Richards, 2002). This fact can significantly affect the local culinary identity (Fox, 2007; Harrington, 2005), and arguably can result in a deprivation of “sense of place” for both locals and tourists (Richards, 2002). This stands especially for destinations that utilise their local cuisine and culinary products as a source of tourist attraction or as a major image differentiator from their competitors (Mak et al., 2012).

Furthermore, as competitiveness amongst destinations is rising, food festivals have been seen as a value-added strategy in relation to a vast array of other culinary attractions (Ralston et al., 2005; Silkes et al., 2008). Food festivals can be defined as one-time or recurring events of limited duration. They are developed primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of culinary products in the short and/or long term (Ritchie, 1984; Hall, 1992). Indeed, the number of food-related events being held around our “world of cities” is growing rapidly. However, definitive figures about their long term impact are hard to determine (Griffin & Frongillo, 2003). To this end, Silkes *et al.* (2008) developed a conceptual framework for the study of festival-based culinary tourism as a means of rural destination branding. Along the same lines, a recent study (Silkes, et al., 2013) examines food experiences at festivals as a unique form of culinary tourism. In urban context, Hollows *et al.* (2014) examined food festivals, contending that such festivals need to be understood in relation to local contexts and a city's wider regeneration. In this light, even if tourism organizations and policy makers are recognizing the potential of culinary tourism, the scientific knowledge about how to successfully develop and implement a relevant sustainable strategy seems limited. Specifically, whilst several studies have portrayed the importance of culinary activities as a key contributor to the tourist experience, there is a lack of research focusing on culinary tourism strategy-making (Sotiriadis, 2015). Thus, little is known about the importance of the culinary tourism market sector and the importance of culinary tourism as a key promotional strategy (Kivela & Crotts, 2005, 2006 as cited in Ottenbacher & Harrington 2013). Accordingly, by viewing Thessaloniki Food Festival as a potential developmental strategy which aims to promote and upgrade local gastronomy, whilst establishing the city as a destination of culinary tourism, this paper critically assesses a way in which the culinary culture

of Thessaloniki can be used as a strategy for stimulating a sustainable way of “consuming” and promoting the city’s identity.

Methodology

In order to access and understand how the experiences and the interaction of different actors/stakeholders, fashion Thessaloniki’s urban fabric and culinary identity, an ethnographic examination was considered appropriate. That is because ethnography encompasses an extensive repertoire of tools and techniques, employed and organized in a way that allows the ongoing triangulations of the research results. Initially, I conducted a netnographic content analysis, exploring the way Thessaloniki is promoted as a culinary destination. Subsequently, I analysed 60 travel blogs by following Kozinets’ (2002) methodology. In addition, I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders that are somewhat related to the culinary landscape of Thessaloniki, involving public and private organizations such as the local government, restaurant owners, tour operators, gastronomic consultants, chefs etc. The majority of the sample was recruited as a result of its past and/or present participation in the Festival. This qualitative approach allowed me to explore the views of homogenous as well as diverse groups of people, unpacking different views and perceptions from people who were either identifying with/or not with TFF. Such an approach offered insights into various socio-cultural characteristics, such as dimensions of culinary identity and residents’ perceptions regarding their view on what has to be done to enhance and promote further the culinary identity of the city. To this end, I identified the underpinned reality as expressed through a Festival, whilst understanding some basic cultural elements regarding Thessalonian culinary identity. Also, I discerned different perspectives, challenges and limitations that the city is facing when it comes to the development of resources and proportional initiatives which potentially can be used for the promotion of culinary tourism.

Discussion and Recommendations

The results indicate that Thessaloniki has only recently developed and implemented relevant policies in the tourism sector. These are trying to position the city on the global tourism map. These policies constitute a response to the stagnation that the economic crisis created, providing potential positive economic, cultural and social impacts. To this end, tourism development in the city is viewed positively by the majority of the stakeholders, since they considered it a very good chance to develop their businesses. However, the city lacks successful cooperation among the stakeholders that are involved in the culinary landscape of Thessaloniki. This is a significant factor since the importance of strong cooperation among stakeholders in the maintenance and development of a destination has been shown in earlier studies of destination marketing (Fyall, et al., 2006; Fyall & Leask, 2007).

Arguably, the city has a long way to go, in order to become a culinary destination. TFF which aims to establish the city as such, is moving according to the findings in superficial levels. It seems that there is a lack of active participation by the locals and there is not enough communication. In order to start building on initial efforts, the various participants that are directly and indirectly involved in the culinary tourism sector need to be more repetitive. Indeed, TFF cannot be the only parameter that will enable the city to cultivate its culinary profile, especially if it doesn't take advantage of the existing culinary resources, whilst involving more professionals in an interdisciplinary way and in general be more open to co-formulation by the local communities. In the case of TFF there isn't enough synergy between the organisers and many of the stakeholders.

In this direction, Tikkanen (2007) suggests that in order for a place to become a culinary destination, an appropriate synergy should be cultivated among those involved in the culinary landscape of a city. Only then, can the cuisine of a place become a strong component of the local culture, which can be sustained through food festivals. It seems that TFF is not sustaining local culture, since the culinary resources are not only utilized and not even sufficiently identified. These facts should be considered seriously by the organisers, since a food festival can constitute an important means for the development of a culinary destination, having desirable economic impacts as well. Look, for instance, at some figures derived from a community based food festival in Northeast Iowa. The total economic impact of its visitors (n : 22,806) was estimated to be almost \$2.6 million in terms of sales; \$1.4 million in terms of personal income and generated 51 jobs (Çela et al., 2007). To this end, the destination marketers should adapt the local food to cater for tourists' tastes and preferences; whilst concentrating on the preservation of local specialties and food culture. Taking into consideration different endeavours, not only should they promote local food culture, but should also enrich food-related activities to enhance the image and the appeal of the city (Su, 2015).

The most efficient way of increasing this developmental potential is by establishing of linkages (economic and socio-cultural): cooperation and coordination at all levels, since culinary tourism creates opportunities for small producers and synergies with tourism-related businesses, whilst contributing to the reinforcement and differentiation a destination is offering (Sotiriadis, 2015). In this light, the city should develop a more specialized strategy. Arguably, a potential strategy could be a portfolio of culinary assets and attractions. Martin and Williams (2003) argue that appropriate policies must be adopted and implemented at local level to highlight culinary tourism projects that are suited to the sustainable use of a destination's natural resources. Accordingly, the local tourism leadership has to consider and deliberately deal with several issues that appear essential for culinary tourism initiatives. These include (a) efforts to achieve cooperation with stakeholders, (b) political support and leadership, (c) infrastructure, (d) interregional and intraregional differentiation, (e) tying the

tourism plan with other quality activities, and (f) effective communication of the core culinary profile to achieve cooperation with the diverse body of stakeholders in the city (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013).

In addition to this, the local food culture could be effectively integrated into food-related activities such as TFF, to make a strong and favourable impression on tourists by providing valuable information that can produce a meaningful link between tourists, food and place. Especially, this would be useful for a destination with an unclear food identity, as Thessaloniki seems to be, bearing in mind the fact that culinary tourism has more potentials in areas where the local cuisine is better connected to local culture (and the opposite when there is a weaker connection) (Riley, 2005). In particular, the city could pay attention to what scholars define as “geogastronomia” (Caldwell, 2006). Caldwell, analysing culinary tourism and food nostalgia in post-Soviet Russia, redefined this term to ‘capture the broader idea that topographies themselves can be arranged and become meaningful through food’ (p.102). She argues that geogastronomia or ‘food as place-making’ (p.100) demonstrates the symbolic and actual power of local cuisines to constitute meaningful geographies. In this respect, geogastronomia is not [solely] an act of “consuming” geography (Turgeon & Pastinelli, 2002), but rather an active process of place-making that is viscerally created and experienced. In short, food contributes to peoples’ affective relation to place (Caldwell 2006: 103).

Accordingly, a key issue presented in this research for the successfully implementation of culinary tourism is “the creation of a culinary profile”. Therefore, more specialized “action research” is required in a variety of locations and spaces (local markets, neighbourhoods, communities etc.), focusing on a more strategic process regarding those attributes. A potential strategy to strengthen or contribute to a brand of a destination would be to incorporate local cuisine as an element of the brand. That’s because there are food items that can be unique to a place, or region holding social significance that allows differentiation from other destinations (Silkes et al., 2008). In particular, in the research, the identified dimensions of food and products in relation to a destination can also be used to determine which representative food items can be well recognized and memorized and can also adequately reflect the culinary identity of Thessaloniki. For instance, TFF can develop a more specialized theme based on the local stories and legends which in Thessalonian context are numerous; developing a contemporary myth-making approach. The last can be either incorporated to the new brand name of the city “*Many stories, one heart*” or to another new brand name closer to the culinary culture of the city (e.g. Gastronomic Capital of Greece/ Balkan Capital).

The strategy of using such stories to localize and authenticate cuisine is not a new practice or one specific to regional cuisines. It has been used by restaurateurs to attract tourists since 19th century France (see Spang, 2000). But why are stories and particular food stories so important? How can the story of Thessaloniki be narrated through food and why? Gottschall (2012) in his book

"The Story Telling Animal", argues that we are "wired" for stories. This is an important part of our everyday life. Telling our stories helps us remember who we are, and where we are. Stories, dramatic or not, help us ground our narrative in a social landscape. If we accept these premises, if we consider the vast literature about food and how it can contribute to our identity, if we consider the numerous definitions of culinary tourism and experiences, we might be able to explain further how the stories of Thessaloniki can be told through its food and eating customs and why this is so important. This is an important concept, since the cultural dimension of tourism has been widely acknowledged in recent discourses, highlighting tourism as more a cultural process than just a product (Wilson & Harris, 2006). This means, not only culinary assets, but also, that locals can engage more actively in creating a *"unique"* Thessalonian story: *the one created and shared by the people of this city*. Indeed, the co-formulation of experience is a very important aspect in creating this narrative since apart from food, there is also the story behind this food as well as the stories of the people. In a similar way, Hall & Mitchell (2000) and Giddens (2002) highlight localization as an essential and perhaps unexpected ingredient of the contemporary modern and global world. Accordingly, in tourism, "localism" is also played out through food consumption and, in this sense, local identities are not threatened, but benefit from the globalizing processes. Still, we should bear in mind that this market should not be overestimated, since it has been pointed out that food consumption may be representative of a niche market, whilst the emotional nature of culinary experiences provides significant opportunities for niche marketing (Kivela & Crofts, 2009). In relation to this, discovering or re-inventing local food culture is essential for the development of culinary tourism.

Considering that the "foodways" of a place can serve as a powerful vehicle for conveying deep-rooted meanings that express and reflect its uniqueness, "telling the story" of the city through its food, and contextualizing the culinary offering comes as dominant (Chow & Lim, 2014; Lin et al., 2010). However, the online presentation of the city as a culinary destination misses the "story telling" ingredient. Destination marketers and other culinary assets should capitalize on this phenomenon and give emphasis to the unique elements of a destination, as this "uniqueness" and specificity is what the modern tourist demands and seeks to experience. In this direction it would be recommended to identify specific dishes which could tell the old and contemporary cross-cultural story of the city, including archaeological evidences, coupled with the stories of people, culinary traditions and eating customs, as well as a more thorough presentation of eating establishments identified as local or with traditional cuisine. Still, the city seems to lack such resources. In relation to that TFF should research product suppliers such as local markets and producers, since culinary products potentially can become an attraction of their own (Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Stewart et al., 2008). In such a way, these culinary-related elements can be considered as visitor attractions and can be used as a theme for following festivals. According to Silkes *et al.* (2013)m by adding food-related

elements from festivals to a destination brand, the awareness, imagery and emotional connections increase. Therefore, it might be argued that planning, managing and staging such a festival can offer a great opportunity to the city to combine forces with the community to maximize the branding opportunity of a destination (Jago et al., 2003; Silkes et al., 2008) and potentially help to create more awareness and appreciation of local/regional cuisine (Sotiriadis, 2015). Arguably, the benefits are mutual. On the one hand tourists explore food that is new to them and discover a new culinary culture. On the other hand, the organisers may use local food to promote their cultures and histories (Long, 2004).

Nevertheless, in the case of Thessaloniki the impact of politically driven factions, the economic crisis, the deterrent and counter-productive bureaucracy towards a more independent local governance, the lack of educational background among producers and consumers, the non-defined culinary identity and the need for more deliberate efforts both from public and private initiatives which don't seem to achieve a satisfactory degree of cooperation are considered as limitations for the development of culinary tourism in the city. In addition, a recent study underlines the fact that there is a significant and stable deviation between the projected aims/priorities and the implemented interventions made by the municipal authorities. This shows a "particular dynamic of interests established by specific elite categories that are capable of intervening and claiming public funding for their benefit" (Thoidou & Foutakis, 2006: 40). Overall, this results in a non-functional governance for both the city and its broader metropolitan area (Christodoulou, 2015).

Nevertheless, even if there are several limitations that were identified throughout the research, the immaturity of the research arena in the city is providing a truly fertile ground both from an ethnographical as well as a sociological point of view. Thus, various methods can be applied, not only regarding locals' perceptions, but also about the way tourists experience the city, since in order to determine the value of culinary tourism, these should all be examined holistically within the general context of the destination (McKercher et al., 2008). Therefore, further research is required in order to categorize more effectively not only what Thessaloniki is offering in terms of food, but its overall cultural product. Accordingly, there is a need to progress to a more concrete theoretical background, approaching culinary identity from an anthropological, sociological and historical point of view. This will enable those who are interested, to research more deeply and retrieve the stories behind food, the roots and its development through time. In conclusion, Thessaloniki should focus deeper on implementing a general, more comprehensive and strategic culinary policy focusing on its unique elements (geographical, cultural, historical, landscape and culinary resources), aiming to establish strong relationships and linkages between various stakeholders involved in the discourse; avoiding copying other destinations; managing to create a differentiated product. Such recommendations could enhance

Thessaloniki's appeal as a culinary destination and place it on the European map along with other well-known culinary destinations. In this way, culinary tourism could reinforce the relationship between the place in which food is produced and the development of destination image and brand (Sotiriadis, 2012), thus, allowing the city to take advantage of its historical past and heritage; attracting visitors and economic capital whilst supporting a more sustainable urban future in the midst of a 'more-than-financial' crisis.

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