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TASTING GAZIANTEP: HOW LOCAL FOOD SHAPES SENSE OF PLACE

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ABSTRACT

Local food is an integral part of the cultural heritage and tourist attraction of a destination. Local food may create peak experiences for a tourist. Taste and smell create lasting impressions and memories, shaping tourist experience and leading to an association between food and place. This paper aims to analyse the conditions of such an association. After a review of relevant literature, focus group interviews were conducted with participants who had visited Gaziantep. We have found out that while local food creates lasting impressions, unfamiliarity usually results in more memorable experiences, and participants who spent longer time in the city, with higher motivation and means to experience the local food expressed more vivid memories. Likely, complementary cultural heritage and accompanying visual elements create a more complete and memorable sensory experience as well as a stronger association. Lastly, time passed after the trip turned out to be insignificant on memorability.

Keywords: Local Food, Sense of Place, Peak Experiences, Sensory Stimulation, Cultural Heritage

JEL Codes: L83, Z32, L66

GAZIANTEP'İ TATMAK: YEREL GIDA MEKÂN ALGISINI NASIL ŞEKİLLENDİRİR?

ÖZ

Yerel yemek, hedef bölgenin kültürel mirasının ve turistik çekim unsurunun içsel bir ögesidir. Yerel yemekler, turist için zirve deneyimler yaratabilir. Tat ve koku, kalıcı izlenim ve anılar yaratarak turistin deneyimini şekillendirerek yemek ve mekân arasında bir çağrışım oluşturur. Bu çalışma böyle bir çağrışımın oluşumundaki koşulları araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. İlgili yazının incelenmesinin ardından, Gaziantep'i ziyaret etmiş gönüllülerle bir odak grup çalışması gerçekleştirildi. Yerel mutfağın kalıcı izlenim oluşturduğu bulunmakla birlikte, yabancıliğin genel olarak daha hatırlanabilir ve olumlu turistik deneyimler yarattığı, dahası, şehirde daha uzun süre konaklayan, yerel mutfağı deneyimlemek için daha güdülenmiş ve geniş olanaklara sahip olan katılımcıların daha canlı anılara sahip olduğu bulundu. Aynı biçimde, tamamlayıcı somut ve somut olmayan kültürel miras ve bunlara eşlik eden görsel unsurların, daha bütünsel ve hatırlanabilir duyuşsal deneyimler ve hedef bölge ile daha güçlü bir bağ oluşturduğu saptandı. Son olarak, ziyaretin üzerinden geçen zamanın hatırlanabilirlik üzerindeki etkisinin önemsiz olduğu bulundu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerel Yemek, Mekân Algısı, Zirve Deneyimler, Duyuşsal Uyarım, Kültürel Miras

JEL Kodları: L83, Z32, L66

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1. INTRODUCTION

Can food remind us of a certain place? Can it shape future purchasing behaviour? In search of answers, this paper focuses on links between the tourists' consumption of local food and their sense of place. Throughout the wealth of literature on humans' interaction with place is an evident tendency towards the sense of vision and physical manifestations of culture. Consumption of local, unique and authentic food however, has the potential to create lasting experiences, and associations with place, through senses of taste and smell.

We perceive, experience and give meaning to our environment through senses. Notwithstanding a basic degree of universality about *how* we perceive our socio-physical surroundings through elementary senses, the processing of one's environment, and consequently the relevant experience, remain highly subjective. The variation therein has been shown to stem from the momentary interaction of the individual (and their acuity, culture etc.) with the character of the stimuli (Tuan Y. , 1974). Our presence in relationships or affiliation to certain locations differ according to numerous factors.

As we respond to environmental sensory stimuli, they subsequently transform into experiences. They collect data and provide knowledge concerning the individual's surroundings; geographical structures, historical sites, society and all other environmental elements (Kuban, 2000). They then trigger emotive responses that shape attitude, behaviour and memory. Through our interaction with spaces, the environment obtains identification, recognition and meaning; it becomes a *place*. Sensory experiences mediate the relationship between place and meaning (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015). In turn, sensory responses to environmental stimuli transform into stories, memories and experiences in a cognitive process (Binder, 2008).

In understanding how we perceive, give meaning to and interact with our surroundings, F. Löwitsch proposed that (in 1928), our memories regarding a certain "spatial sensation" (a term proposed by R. Semon in 1921) may evoke pleasant or unpleasant emotions. A certain people's sensation of space in a certain time and place is reflected in their choice of architecture, or "spatial concept", evoking satisfying inherent spatial sensation (Poppelreuter, 2012). Tuan (1974) offered the term "topophilia", the affective bond with a certain place. He suggested that environmental perception is based on sensory experience, where taste, sound, smell etc. help us recall past experiences, ultimately shaping behaviour.

Our general relationship with a certain place, through environmental stimuli, our responses to those and the subsequent experience, any resulting emotional aspect (including bonding, attachment or affiliation), given meaning and identity, and an overall sensation of “being there” have been studied under the general term “*sense of place*” (Tuan Y. , 1974), (Altman & Low, 1992), (Kianicka et al., 2006), (Najafi & Shariff, 2011), (Mohammad et al., 2013). Sense of place is the meaning, feeling and emotion attributed to geographical areas (Stedman, 2003). It includes awareness of a place and the features that distinguish it from other places (Tuan Y. , 1980). Historical, cultural, social, ecological, and physical characteristics can contribute to creating a sense of place (Sullivan et al., 2009). There are many different ways and perspectives to explain the concept of sense of place, developed during recent decades based on many theoretical; (Gesler, 1992), (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009), (Qazimi & Albania, 2014) and empirical work (Shamai, 1991), (Hay, 1998), (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), (Derr, 2002).

The term sense of place is broadly utilised to embrace the nature of how we feel in or about a certain place (or how it makes us feel) (Tuan Y. , 1974), (Steele, 1981). Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) defined the sense of place as “*a multidimensional construct comprising: (1) beliefs about the relationship between self and place; (2) feelings toward the place; and (3) the behavioural exclusivity of the place in relation to alternatives*”. “*The sense of place can have a powerful, even magical, impact on us - even at the unconscious level*” (Phillips, 1996).

1.1. Tourists’ Sense of Place

Sense of place comprises emotional bonds with places, with values, meanings, and symbols of places that are actively and continuously constructed and reconstructed within individual minds, with an awareness of the cultural, historical and spatial context, within which meanings, values, and social interactions are formed (Williams & Stewart, 1998). Social interaction with a place brings about a degree of “social appropriateness”, resulting in a modification of individual behaviour (Mohammad et al., 2013).

As one lives in a particular place, experience, familiarity, and relevant knowledge increase and it becomes exclusive for the individual. Feelings of attachment and affiliation arise as the place “grows on” the individual. It becomes a part of the self and shapes identity (Qazimi & Albania, 2014). Evidently, this is the case for permanent residents, and not the tourist, whose lack of

affiliation, temporariness and “foreignness” predominantly shape the tourist experience. Furthermore, tourists are exempt from social appropriateness, to some degree.

Unlike resident areas, which reflect a certain level of singularity or cohesion in the interpretation of culture, destinations are spaces ‘*within which multiple interpretations of a single ostensible culture can be negotiated, contested and consumed*’ (Lacy & Douglass, 2002). The tourist experience is multi-sensual and includes the “consumption of place” (Urry, 1990) with visual, cultural and historical aspects proving particularly important to visitors (Bessière, 1998). The degree of contrast between tourists’ experiences during travel with their daily routine activities will determine the degree of stimulation and memorability of the experience. Experiences in stark contrast to daily activities are classified as “peak experiences” (Quan & Wang, 2004), and are therefore more memorable. The term was first offered by Maslow (1964) to define *“rare, exciting, oceanic, deeply moving, exhilarating, elevating experiences that generate an advanced form of perceiving reality, and are even mystic and magical in their effect upon the experimenter”*.

The environmental perception and behaviour will also vary depending on familiarity. The sensory experience of different, novel or exotic surroundings will be proportionately more stimulant and therefore more memorable than that of a permanent residence. The sense of a new place will be affected by the individual preconceptions about that place (Cross, 2001), as well as its identity and differentiation (Hashempour, 2013).

Consequently, tourists will perceive, experience and give meaning to the destination much different than the residents. Kianicka et al. (2006) propose that, while the meaning the destination carries for both tourists and residents may be equally profound, the meaning for the residents is, understandably, more existential; while it is more individual and recreational for the tourist. Due to differences in social, historical, cultural and economic backgrounds, tourists and locals will give different meanings to landscapes, social relationships and economic processes (Kianicka et al., 2006). Tourism development may, in time, alter the residents’ sense of place, as well (Sullivan et al., 2009).

Understanding the formation of tourist experience through sensory perception can create a significant tourist experience design (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2015). Once the sensory components of the destination are conveyed as a message, this may be detected and transmitted as a promotional message (Pan & Ryan, 2009). Considering the role of positive and memorable experiences in future

decision-making process, sensory perception of the destination emerges as a crucial field of attention in marketing (Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2000). Since senses remind a specific moment, memory, or a brand, communicating the “sensory image” of the destination (Davies et al., 2003), or sensory advertisement (Yun & Yazdanifard, 2013) may be employed to effectively alter tourists’ decision-making process: “Tourism organisations (...) need to pay attention to the sensual content of promotional messages conveyed to potential tourists to provide incentives for seeking enriched experiences of place” (Pan & Ryan, 2009).

Multi-sensory experience of a destination in stark contrast to the habitual environment of the tourist will, as expected, be more memorable. The relevant term “sensory branding” stems from the idea that “consumers are most likely to form, retain and revisit memory when their all five senses are engaged during the process of buying products or services” (Hussain, 2014). A pleasant scent, in particular, has been proved to improve the evaluation of especially unfamiliar brands (Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2000). One such example would be Bangkok, “a vividly colourful, noisy, scent and taste-filled city” (Manfrotto, 2015). Other such examples include Bruges (visitbruges, 2015), Vilnius (JCDecaux, 2008), and few Slow Cities (Pink, 2007).

1.2. Local Food as a Sensory Component

Tourists experience places, and consequently, foods different than usual. Food & beverage during travel is not only a necessity, but also the main component of local culture (Jones & Jenkins, 2002), and the main tool in experiencing the destination (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Local food also acts as a component of the multi-sensual experience and a means to give meaning; as tourists seek to “taste and experience the destination” (Bessière, 1998).

The gravity of local food within the tourist experience depends on a number of factors. Foods in stark contrast to usual are obviously expected to create peak experiences and be more memorable. The tourist’s search of novelty determines whether the experience is a positive one or not. A tourist may be in search of the novel and strange (neophilia) or express fear and resistance (neophobia) towards local food (Fischler, 1988), depending on the cultural distance between the origin and the destination (McKercher & Chow, 2001). The components of a memorable food experience may include local specialties and food attributes, the authenticity of the product and serving style/equipment, novelty, togetherness and social interaction and hospitality (Sthapit, 2017).

The implications of “locality” of the food and beverage offered in the destination are diverse. Local food is mostly considered an “iconic” product that reflects the “typical” nature of a place (Bessière, 1998). In a more physical sense, locality implies the (indicated) region of production (Morris & Buller, 2003) or being a specialty product for export (Sims, 2009). Here, certification of localness may be in place. All kinds of reliable geographic indicators (such as the French AOC) will officially guarantee the product’s quality, reputation, and connections of a particular location (WIPO). Cohen & Cohen (2012) offer the concept of “cool authentication”, as a singular, objective and formal certification of a product, which will turn to be the basis of a “brand image”.

Local food is also perceived as a symbol of the destination, its cultural heritage and traditions, enhancing the total experience by linking the consumer with the place (Fieldhouse, 1986), (Sims, 2009). The links to the production region, its tradition and culture confer certain qualitative characteristics, as they are likely to be perceived as healthy and ethical (Dedeire, 2001), (Skuras & Dimara, 2004), (Armesto & Martin, 2006). The mental association between places and foods, as well as related heritage, story and supportive elements also contribute to the formation of tourist experiences (Tregear et al., 1998).

Local and traditional food further implies a certain degree of authenticity and fulfills the tourist’s relevant need and search for it (Sims, 2009). Tourists may seek to eat what and how the locals do (Fields, 2002). Local agricultural processes, recipes, cooking and dining traditions and habits, rites, stories, and all other physical and cultural components form integral cultural codes of the destination (Bessière, 1998).

However, absolute authenticity may not always be a priority; or the tourist may lack the cultural and mental background (or time) to appreciate local cuisine in its intended form. In extreme cases, local food may even present an “impediment” (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). In this case, the staging of tourist experiences (Cohen E. , 1979), (i.e. the modification of the local food to the general palate) will be in order. If the tourist *perceives* the food to be authentic, the experience will in most cases be positive, a phenomenon named “experiential authenticity” (Trilling, 1974) or “existential authenticity” (Wang, 1999). Furthermore, the tourist’s own process of authentication, or “hot authentication”, coupled with the formal cool one will lead to *total* authenticity (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

1.3. Local Food as a Component of Sense of Place

Sense of place is an important dimension of a tourist experience, along with activities in the destination, influences and personal significance (emotions, knowledge, memories etc.), (Quinlan-Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). The formation of tourist experience, sense of place and place identity require input from areas as diverse as neuroscience/neurobiology, electrophysiology, human genetic analysis, and molecular biology, neuroimaging and other computational neuroscience and sophisticated experimental techniques from cognitive psychology; all in order to better understand how our brain conducts and stores relevant neural activity (Lengen & Kistemann, 2012).

The feeling of taste has great importance in our lives in a physical, social and emotional sense. The taste senses vary between cultures, and even people in the same culture, and are actually related to other senses (Bourezak & Nouri, 2017). The smell and taste receptors complement each other and respond to the same stimuli (Marieb, 2015). They can lead to “featureful” memories and a sense of place (Ramsay, 2015). “Human memory is story-based” (Schank, 1999). As tourists create memories of their experiences, they speak of combinations of feelings through the senses (Bosangit et al., 2015).

In this context, local food forms not only a part of tourist activity, but also a major sensory stimulant, shaping emotions, memories and ultimately the sense of place. Local food may be a “pleasurable sensory experience” that “pulls” tourists to a destination (Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

Experiencing external stimuli creates an internal experience, resulting in a memory trace, which could easily be revived when a stimulant resembling a component of the original experience is encountered (Poppelreuter, 2012). In this way, local dishes provide an absolute advantage in creating unforgettable tourist experiences (Pine II & Gilmore, 1999). The senses of taste and smell, supported by the cultural landscapes, sensation of open space and other relevant factors (Sims, 2010), directly stimulate the nervous system and immediately affect how the tourist feels in the destination. These points of perception, in turn, can create true memories and subconscious relationships to the destination (Okumus et al., 2007). Perceived tastes and scents result in (measurable) neural responses, and this effect, supported by their cultural aspects, play an important role in local foods’ effect on sense of place. As food is identified with a certain place, it gains a new, mystical, exotic or unique meaning. As a result, the experience of consuming local

food may give new meaning to a place, lending it exclusiveness and may, in time, shape future decision-making process.

However, tourists visit numerous destinations and have many food & beverage experiences every year. For any experience to “stand out” from the others, it should be (perceived as) unique and authentic to the destination, therefore incorporating a sense of place (Soper, 2007), so that the tourists may effectively associate those senses and memories of satisfaction to the relevant destination (Stedman, 2003).

That association will (likely) occur under certain circumstances; but it is useful to remember that satisfaction as well as experience formation is a highly subjective and unpredictable process. Local food may act as a symbol of tourism, contributing meaning to travel and forming a part of the overall tourism environment (Doğan, 2004). In the best case, the tourist will remember an image, smell, taste or a pleasant and inclusive social gathering around an unusual food experience and subconsciously associate the positive emotions with a certain destination, ultimately encouraging repeat visits.

1.4. The Case of Gaziantep

Gaziantep, “the city where the gastronomy is blended with history”, is located in the central southern Anatolia, and is the most important tourism centre of the region (Hazıoğlu & Çözeli, 2016). It is one of the “gastronomy cities” selected by UNESCO. The local cuisine include a rich tradition of spices, fatty/spicy meat dishes and heavy desserts.

Gaziantep is located where early agriculture was carried out and many trade routes have passed (NW Mesopotamia) (Nahya, 2012). A rich source of different flavours, meals and culture from this region, which was dominated by ancient civilizations, have resulted in the richness of Gaziantep cuisine (Gökirmakli, et al., 2017), (Gastroantep, 2018).

Food is deeply rooted in the culture and daily life in the city. While a rich number of local dishes is included in food & beverage establishments throughout the city, food preparation & consumption rituals are commonly followed at homes and outdoor recreation / picnic areas. The people of Gaziantep take pride in their love of eating, which is also exhibited in their professional approach to service and (hand-made) production of authentic tableware. The city houses several passages, open-air markets, alleyways, inns etc. dedicated to the display and sale of tableware, hand-produced, mainly of copper.

2. METHODOLOGY

Due to the intricate mental associations that are subject to the research, focus group method was selected. Focus groups are used to generate information about collective opinions and the implications behind them. They are also useful in a rich sense of the participants' experiences and beliefs (Gill et al., 2008). The focus group discussion is often used as a qualitative approach for an in-depth understanding of social issues and it usually provides qualitative and observational data that can be required by analyses (Nyumbai et al., 2017). The focus group emerged in behavioural science research as a distinguishing member of qualitative research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015) and it is a method involving the use of in-depth group interviews. The primary purpose of this method is to use interaction data derived from the discussion of participants (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007).

The study was engaged with the purpose of understanding the relationship between sense of place and local food, and relevant associations. For this purpose, the diners, who ate local meals in local restaurants in Gaziantep, have been included in the focus group interview. Focus group participants found the opportunity to brainstorm together. The questions were designed to examine the relationship between local foods and spatial influences. There were, however, limitations to the study, including time restraints. The participants were chosen by following the rule of “purposive sampling”. All participants were academic staff and the interview was conducted at a meeting hall on their campus. To differentiate between the perceptions of locals and visitors, a local was also included in the group. There were 7 participants (see Table 1), a moderator (the first author) and a co-moderator (the second author) directed the focus-group and two independent scholars (specialists) were selected to measure validity and reliability of this study. The research has been carried out on 19th June 2018. All participants were informed and they signed a consent form. The interview lasted for about three hours and was recorded by voice recording and in writing with permission from the participants. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for use for focus groups from previous literature, scanning of the study to find out the relationship between local foods and sense of place. The primary data was obtained with the help of face-to-face focus group interview.

Table 1. Focus Group Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Time of visit
P1	42	Female	Frequent

P2	37	Male	2010
P3	33	Female	2018
P4	31	Female	2012, 2018
P5	32	Female	2014, 2018
P6	29	Male	2018
P7	38	Male	2012

P1 is a local and although she lives in Izmir now, she frequently visits Gaziantep for visiting friends and relatives (VFR). P2 has visited the city once, about eight years ago as an excursionist, leading a group of students. P3, together with P4, P5, and P6 visited about three months ago for the short term, but P5 had a separate gastronomic visit 4 years ago, and P4 6 years ago. P7 spent a week in Gaziantep 6 years ago.

2.1. Data Analysis and Findings

The interview was opened with an inquiry on the participants' overall memories of the local foods consumed through their time in the city. All participants responded positively to local food experiences, without an incident of neophilia. There was an evident reoccurrence of the best-known food items of Gaziantep, as almost all participants savoured several grills and baklava (see Table 2).

Table 2. Local Food Items Mentioned

Name	Type	Description
Alinazik	Meat dish	Seasoned and chargrilled minced meat served on grilled eggplant puree mixed with yoghurt
Katmer	Dessert	Sweet and flat pastry filled with pistachios and clotted cream
Lahmacun	Pastry	Nationwide famous flat dough spread with minced meat
Baklava	Dessert	Nationwide famous sweet pastry filled with pistachios or walnuts
Küşleme	Grilled meat	A rare and lean strip of lamb meat, grilled in cubes
Beyran	Soup	A heavily spiced meal, made from lamb meat and stock
Zahter	Tea	A local form of thyme
Menengiç	Coffee	A form of pistachio
Bellure	Dessert	Sweet pastry made with syrup and pistachios
Firik	Rice	Ripe and fumed wheat
Kadayıf	Dessert	Shredded wheat dessert
Ayran	Beverage	Salty yoghurt drink

Individually, P3 to P6, in their joint excursion, went to an unordinary eatery (in search of a backstage experience) and consumed little portions of liver, however “küşleme” and “beyran” were exceptional and memorable. They also tasted baklava and katmer. In their previous visit, P4 remembered primarily “chickpea wrap”, a local breakfast delicacy. P5 remembered local “zahter tea”, offered by “*hospitable shopkeepers*”. Another noteworthy memory was “menengiç coffee”, enjoyed in an underground coffee house. They also remembered liquorice sherbet, served from

canisters carried on the backs of men in authentic clothes. They remember eating “küşleme” and another form of grilled meat “loaded with lard”, in a famous restaurant. Along with baklava and katmer, they also remember “bellure”. They also tried stuffed dried eggplants and a local meat roast at the modernised hotel but mentioned they were “nothing extraordinary”.

A single meat restaurant stood out, which served “a complementary extravaganza” including “frik rice”, various cold starters and a “ridiculous portion of ‘kadayif’ buried under a thick layer of ground pistachios”. They also served one-litre bottles of “ayran” per person. I hardly remember the grills ordered but have a vivid memory of “being too stuffed to walk properly”. I still remember the details of the restaurant, including “the colours and engravings of the chairs”. I remember the neighbourhood clearly. (P7)

On a different note, the local participant P1 stated that although they mainly ate at home, “what (my) mother cooked”, they also ate outside, primarily “Alinazik” at probably the best known restaurant in Gaziantep. They also remembered eating “katmer” for breakfast, served with warm milk in winter. They also mentioned the renovated inn “Bayazhan”, a first-class and modernised establishment and “Tahmis” coffee house, both important landmarks.

Having a limited time and leading a group of students I only ate “lahmacun” as a “fast-food option”, outside and around the city castle. Although found everywhere in Turkey, I remember specific ones in Gaziantep as extraordinarily large, with considerably more meat and served with extra salads. (P2)

Moving to the main line of conversation, participants were asked about their memories of the establishments, places and neighbourhoods they consumed the mentioned meals. The majority expressed a clear recollection of the places and also the influence of food on the perception of those places:

The shabby eatery shifted drastically for the better once I tried the food. The “not-so-hygienic” looking place became more sympathetic. I had low expectations about the place and food but I liked them both. I also clearly remember the places I ate “baklava”, “katmer”, and especially “chickpea wrap”, “a food cart in a narrow alleyway where 3 workers relentlessly worked and patrons ate on foot”, from 6 years ago. (P4)

I have vivid memories of 4 years ago. I remember “the long tables with red and authentic tablecloths, as well as old chefs in tank tops, all copper tableware and walls covered in photographs of famous people that visited” (a certain eatery). Where taste took a primary role there, the place was more predominant for the more tourist-oriented “Şirahan” where food was not so noteworthy. I also have visual memories of “Tahmis” coffee house, the city castle where they were served “Turkish coffee

prepared in copper coffee pots submerged in hot sand” and underground coffee house where personnel wore “authentic uniforms”. (P5)

The local P1 mentioned the renovated “Bayazhan”, its *“yellow stone bricks and authentic little shops”*. They specifically remember an outdoor eatery located in the woods of the city university’s campus for *“unbelievable food”*. However, aside from that example, they expressed little to no association between specific foods and places. They expressed that there is a strong emphasis on service quality and professional and attentive approach of the service personnel (also approved by the other participants).

P2 mentioned, due to the limited time and the crowded travel party, there is a partial memory of the “lahmacun” place, *“a row of small shops with tables in front”*. However, they vividly remember the neighbouring castle and stadium, two *“very large and impressive structures”*.

In the last section, participants were encouraged to express their overall experiences, with an emphasis on the associations between the place and local food. There was a general agreement on the tastes and colours associated with Gaziantep, the meaty and spicy tastes stood out.

P5 and P6 collectively stated the warm tones of yellow and orange along with red, a sensation of a sunny daylight, tones also reflected by the copper. They stated the taste of the city was simply meat. P4 also mentioned warmer tones, with an emphasis on architecture, especially red brick structures. The taste of the city is stated as *“hot chili and spices”*. P3 further stressed hot chili and the orange tones of copper. All four participants associated the foods and the city strongly and stated a similarity between the colours of places and foods. P7 further stressed the meaty and spicy flavours and colours but singularly added the luscious, creamy and nutty notes of desserts. They added green as the city’s colour due to the *“heavy consumption of pistachios, both in desserts and separately”*.

There was a disagreement on the individuality of the city’s cuisine. P2 started by stating Gaziantep and neighbouring cities Hatay and Adana were simply *“indistinguishable”* in their cuisines. P1 disagreed, stating that while the cuisine of Hatay featured predominantly a high variety and quality of cold starters and that of Adana relies heavily on grilled spicy meat, the cuisine of Gaziantep should be commented on its use of vegetables/garnitures and yoghurt as sides and *“an amazing collection of desserts”*. P2 summarised by stating the taste of Gaziantep was *“meat and*

chunky chili flakes” and associated the city with the colours of red and black. P1 added white and green, mentioning dried mint on yoghurt and the taste is “*red meat, hot chili and ground wheat*”.

3. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present paper focused on how local food shapes tourist experience, and the sense of place. Throughout the research, local food has been identified as a possible mitigating factor of authentic, novel and memorable experiences, owing to possibilities of creating peak experiences and long-lasting memories, thanks to stimulating taste and smell (Quan & Wang, 2004). In turn, these features have been heavily linked to long-term associations with the destination, even at a subconscious level, in that they may shape the tourists’ sense of place as a multi-sensory component.

Experiences at a destination directly affect emotions, memorability, overall satisfaction and chance of a repeat visit. In this context, taste and a general satisfaction of local food offer an absolute advantage (Sims, 2009). As the visitor associates those particular sensations with a destination, their brain subconsciously recalls it whenever a similar stimulant is present (Yun & Yazdanifard, 2013), (Kurgun, 2017). Local food here presents as a symbol of the place and culture (Bessière, 1998) and a sensory component of visitors’ sense of place.

The research presented some very crucial factors in the nature of associations between local food and sense place. The first implication is the importance of familiarity. While the majority of participants expressed a concrete interest in food as a different and novel component, in stark contrast to daily experiences and therefore a peak experience, this was obviously not the case for the local participant, for whom local food presented a daily experience.

The second implication is the importance of time and circumstances of consumption. P2, who had very little time and a large group to lead, did not have any possibility, nor the motivation to savour any of the local delicacies, but had to rush to stave off hunger. As a result, they mentioned very little reminder or associations of the place, despite clearly remembering the qualitative factors of the food. This was supported by the expressions of P3 and P6, who only visited Gaziantep for a short term. It must be noted though, although the three participants have little to no memories of the actual places of food consumption, they have strong associations between the food and the city.

A rather valuable result turned out to be the irrelevance of time passed. While participants expressed vivid sensory memories from 4 to 6 years ago, participants with more recent experiences

exhibited much less memories and association. Firstly, it should be evaluated that factors like time spent in the destination and circumstances of visit, as well as motivation are more determinant than time passed. Secondly, this result should be supportive of the claim that local food, in creating novel and authentic sensory experiences, has long-lasting effects, and thus strong associations between food and place emerge.

The last implication is the importance of supportive elements. While taste and smell has been found effective in creating long-lasting effects, complementary components ensure a more complete and memorable sensory experience. This has presented itself in intangible elements such as service quality and hospitality and tangible elements such as the shape and decoration of the tables and the hall, tableware, uniforms, location, lighting and climate, as well as neighbourhoods and grand city hallmarks.

The results exhibit coherence in the expressions of sense of place for participants in similar conditions. The findings explain the impacts of local food on tourist experiences, sense of place, and forming mental/emotional associations with the destination. Further research may be conducted about different cities.

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