

Local products in hospitality under investigation – *Examination of Hungarian restaurants and producers in the light of short supply chains*

Abstract

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Introduction – Recent pandemic has shaken consumer's confidence in multinational value chains, which may further increase the interest in local products in the short to medium term. As Covid-19 has led consumers to buy local ingredients, the supply of local food to restaurants has also become an important factor in sustainability practices. Due to the crisis, restaurants have had to face several challenges, operational flexibility of the establishments has become an essential aspect – one of the most important means of the sector's survival. The period of post-crisis recovery often results in opening of new directions in management practices, including hospitality management, too. Observing previous patterns, we can say that such a new direction could be the promotion of sustainable operating models and, as part of this, the spread of local products in gastronomy. Green practices and sustainable food (including food from local sources) are essential elements for consumers, according to the literature, and providing green cuisine to health-conscious people boosts restaurants' sustainable image. Local products can operate as an attraction in the context of tourism, and their impact can be interpreted both directly and indirectly, on the one hand bolstering the local economy and, on the other hand, motivating local tourism service providers to innovate.

Purpose – Hence, with the practical and theoretical aim, several interviews with Hungarian restaurant managers, producers and representatives of professional bodies have been carried out in terms of local, seasonal and sustainable ingredients' criteria. The purpose of this paper is to answer the following research questions: what are the strengths and weaknesses of short supply chains from the restaurants' perspective? In the course of our present research, we are about to explore the greatest opportunities and challenges of short supply chains and green restaurant concepts. Our aim is to detect problems, thus helping hospitality professionals and producers in order to reach a more sustainable hospitality ecosystem.

Methodology and approach – After having reviewed Hungarian and international literature, two interview guides have been designed addressing the principal actors involved in the process: producers and restaurateurs. A total of 23 restaurateurs located in Hungary (Budapest and countryside towns/villages as well) and 6 owners of micro and small-sized farms have been interviewed. The preliminary version of the guides have been pre-tested. The purpose of it is to evaluate the interview difficulty, its time consumption suitability, the correct interpretation of the item and the presence of sensitive questions. After this, the data collection (interviewing) phase has been conducted for a two-month period. The interview questions have been grouped into three main sections: (1) general information on the interviewee and their business; (2) local products and logistics, and (3) vision and Covid-19. The collected data have been analysed through qualitative analysis.

Findings – Based on our preliminary results, while some restaurant's chefs find local ingredients a great opportunity to increase their business, customers also show an increasing interest in the consumption of local food and expect restaurants to have these on their menus. Nevertheless, some interviewees (both restaurateurs, chefs and producers) reported communication as a weakness in the coordination of short food supply chains, while logistics barriers have been pointed out as complicating factors in the local food purchasing process from the restaurants' side.

Research limitations/implications – This study is based on a moderate-sized sample of restaurateurs, chefs and farmers located in Hungary. While some regions are overrepresented, therefore, results are not be generalisable to a national or international context and the finding should be used with caution. To compare and generalise the findings, further research will be carried out.

Practical implications – One of the objectives of this study was to help restaurants and local producers in the post-Covid recovery period and make their cooperation smoother. Three main groups should be interested in the results of this paper and its future development: restaurateurs and chefs; small-scale producers and professional bodies in the culinary field.

Keywords: short supply chains, local products, small producers, sustainable restaurants, sustainability, hospitality