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A (SUSTAINABLE?) PINCH OF THE DESTINATION - DEMAND FOR LOCAL PRODUCTS AT LAKE BALATON, HUNGARY

Judit Sulyok¹; Péter Tupcsia²; Katalin Formádi³

Abstract

Local products play an important role in the present-day world. Tourism stakeholders encourage destinations to support production, and travelers to buy local products. Local products can be ambassadors of visited areas, furthermore contributing to a more sustainable tourism sector. Concerns are also raised by stakeholders such as changing landscape in order to serve local product demand, or challenges of serving a great volume of visitors with small scale produced local products. Besides the overview of the theoretical background, the study presents the results of the primary research done at Lake Balaton (Hungary). Demand for local products among leisure travelers was mapped, differentiating food and non-food items. Respondents to the survey could furthermore indicate whether local products were bought for own use or as souvenirs for others. In line with previous studies, food items are dominating, two thirds of leisure travelers bought any food type local product. Implications of the study can support stakeholders in identifying influencing factors when buying local products, and give guidance on how to reach successfully potential consumers.

Key Words: *sustainability, local product, tourism, lakeside, demand*
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Introduction & theoretical background

Studying local products, including food type products, is a popular topic among tourism scholars. Plenty of surveys seek to identify the main

¹ Judit Sulyok, PhD, senior research fellow, University of Pannonia Balaton Tourism Research Centre, +36 88 624000, sulyok.judit@gtk.uni-pannon.hu

² Péter Tupcsia, PhD student, University of Pannonia Department of Tourism, +36 88 624000, tupcsia.peter@gtk.uni-pannon.hu

³ Katalin Formádi, PhD, associate professor, University of Pannonia Department of Marketing, +36 88 624000, formadi.katalin@gtk.uni-pannon.hu

factors of local food development and tourist consumption of local food. Tourism researchers often consider local products as an attraction; however, link between local products and tourism can be mapped both by supply and by demand side (Tóth-Kaszás et al., 2017).

Authenticity has a great role in tourists' experience (Antón et al., 2019; Kastenholz et al., 2016). Slow food preparation and atmospherics contribute to local food experiences that may lure travelers to revisit certain locations (Björk et al., 2016). Demand for local products is influenced by socio-demographic features, and trip patterns, as well (Dey & Sarma, 2012). According to Hiamey et al. (2021), the socio-cultural background of tourists affects their evaluation of a destination's food and consumption.

Producing and selling local products in rural areas is often a source of income (Lin & Mao, 2015; Szöllösi et al. 2014). Gastronomical values, and traditions are to be found everywhere (Barrionuevo et al., 2019). Local products might be part of the tourism experience in the form of restaurants offering local products, visits to local producers, farmers' market, or consuming local food at events, festivals. Integration of local products into tourism supports widening tourism supply, and making it unique (Szöllösi et al., 2014). However, integration of local products into tourism might also have some negative impacts. Barrionuevo et al. (2019) refer to increased prices, and this way limitations on accessing local products for a wide range of segments. Non-food type local products are 'ambassadors' of cultural heritage (Ona & Solis, 2017).

Local food is an important element of destination image (Peštek & Činjurević, 2014). Local products have a story related to the area, they have a special meaning, and value (Barrionuevo et al., 2019). Buying local products can enhance visitor satisfaction (Peštek & Činjurevic, 2014), and also support destination loyalty (return visit or recommendation) (Kastenholz et al., 2016; Lin & Mao, 2015).

From the demand point of view, searching for new experiences might be realized by tasting local food (Hinek, 2017). Increased interest in a healthy lifestyle also motivates local product oriented travel (Barrionuevo et al., 2019; Dunn & Wickham, 2016). Sites promoting local products, such as farmers' markets, might be an attraction (Garner & Ayala, 2019), and so main motivation for a leisure visit.

Local products can be identified as souvenirs, as well (Swanson & Timothy, 2012); however, souvenirs play a more significant role in international tourism compared with domestic tourism (Chen & Huang, 2011). Motivation for buying local products can be to remember or simply to ‘prove’ the trip or to provide gift for others (Boley et al., 2013).

Local products are mainly produced within small scale, often hand-crafted, processes. On one side, this supports sustainability, and ensures uniqueness. On the other hand, critics are formulated because of unsustainable packing practices (Chen & Huang, 2019).

As regards differentiating between food and non-food local products, previous studies identified the dominance of food items (Lin – Mao, 2015). Further benefits of local food products include that food souvenirs have taste, smell, texture, so sensual experience is an integral part of experience (Lin – Mao, 2015).

Lake Balaton as a tourism destination

Lake Balaton is a leading tourism destination in Hungary, the most popular for domestic travelers. According to Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) data, the Lake Balaton tourist region has a territory of 3,886 km² (4.2% of the country’s territory) and a permanent population of more than 270,000 people (5.7% of the Hungarian population). The area can be regarded as a rural area, with approximately 180 settlements in the region, and there are 18 cities. Tourism has a prominent role in the area’s economy and society, the core attraction of the destination is the natural environment. The lake warms up during the summer period, which means that summer holidays, including periods of swimming and water sports, are a dominant tourism product. The beautiful scenery of the Balaton uplands, the visitor centres of the Balaton Upland National Park, active tourism (hiking and cycling routes), and wine and gastronomy tourism, as well as the wide range of cultural heritage, offer a complex, memorable experience for visitors. According to the HCSO data, commercial accommodation units around Lake Balaton registered approximately 3 million guests, and 8.8 million guest nights in 2023. This is supplemented by a high volume of second home owners and daily visitors. Tourism at Lake Balaton is characterized by strong temporal (summer period) and spatial (shore area attraction) imbalances; however, tourism development places great emphasis on establishing tourism offerings throughout the whole year. The Veszprém-Balaton area was the

European Capital of Culture in 2023, which gave a further boost to its tourism development. Demand for local products – such as buying local products, and place of selling points visited – was mapped already in previous years and published by Madarász et al. (2021). The current study is the next step in tracking local product demand at Lake Balaton.

Methodology

Empirical data presented in the current study is based on a quantitative survey among the Hungarian population. Data collection was realized in January 2021, online panel of a market research company was contacted in order to do the field work. The sample size was 1,000 persons, and was representative for the Hungarian population regarding age, gender, and place of residence. Respondents to the survey reported about a freely selected leisure overnight trip to Lake Balaton, so the final sample size for the current study is 532. Besides socio-demographic features, and trip features, demand for local products was tracked. Survey participants reported about buying local products (food and/or non-food) for their own use, or for others. Table 1.

Table 1: *Main characteristics of the sample*

Gender	Male – 48.7% Female – 51.3%
Age	18-29 years old – 22.5% 30-49 years old – 44.1% 50+ years old – 33.4%
Place of residence	Budapest – 17.8% County centre – 22.7% Other city – 29.5% Village – 30.0%
Education	Primary – 11.5% Secondary – 69.4% College/University – 19.1%

Source: *own research*

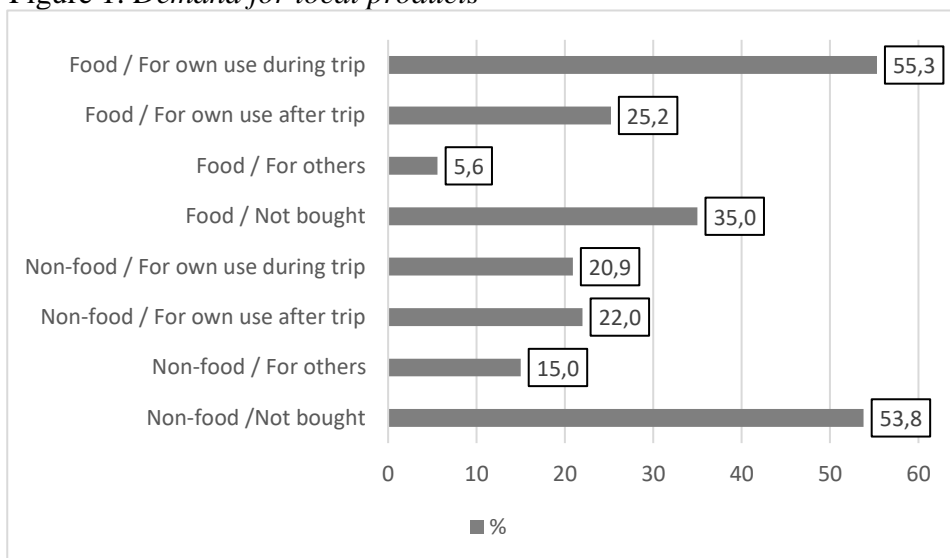
Results

The study identified great potential for local products: 7 out of 10 overnight leisure visitors to Lake Balaton bought some kind of local products. Food products are much more popular than non-food products. Meanwhile, food items are rather consumed during trip, non-food items

are bought for take away. Furthermore, mainly non-food local products are the ones dedicated to others instead of for their own use (Figure 1).

Trip motivation impacts demand for local products. Leisure travelers visiting Lake Balaton with motivation of wine and gastronomy, and those attending cultural festivals show a greater interest towards local products. At the same time, travelers visiting friends and relatives (VFR travelers), and active tourists are less interested in buying local products. In the case of active travelers, practical issues might be a limitation (e.g. there is no option to buy local product during hiking, or it is difficult to carry on heavier items) (Table 2).

Figure 1: *Demand for local products*



Source: *own research*

Table 2: *Demand for local products by trip motivation*

	Relaxation	VFR	Active tourism	Wine and gastronomy	Cultural event, festival	Health	Other
Food / For one's own use during trip	75.9%	6.1%	7.1%	2.0%	4.1%	0.7%	4.1%
Food / For one's own use after trip	75.0%	3.8%	5.3%	4.5%	6.1%	1.5%	3.8%
Food / For others	73.3%	3.3%	6.7%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%
Food / Not bought	68.3%	11.3%	8.1%	1.6%	3.8%	0.0%	7.0%

Non-food / For one's own use during trip	76.8%	5.4%	6.3%	2.7%	2.7%	1.8%	4.5%
Non-food / For one's own use after trip	75.9%	3.4%	5.2%	4.3%	5.2%	1.7%	4.3%
Non-food / For others	77.5%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	0.0%	7.5%
Non-food / Not bought	69.6%	11.2%	8.4%	0.7%	4.5%	0.0%	5.6%

Source: *own research*

Note: *Correlations highlighted in the table.*

Socio-demographic features of travellers also influence the demand for buying local products. Regarding age, 30-49 years old respondents buy above average non-food items for their own use during the trip, and at the same time, they are less interested in taking non-food products, either for own use, or for others. The situation is reverse in the case of 50+ years old visitors: they tend to buy fewer non-food products for using during trip, and they show a greater potential for non-food local products taking with for their own use, or for others. So, 50+ years old can be regarded as souvenir buyer segment. Regarding place of residence, the study identified the following correlations:

- Visitors coming from Budapest, the capital city, are less interested in buying non-food local products for others;
- Visitors living in county centres are more interested in buying non-food local products for their own use after trip;
- Visitors living in cities are more interested in buying food products for others, non-food products for their own use during trip, and non-food products for others; and
- Visitors living in cities are less interested in buying non-food local products for their own use after trip.

Furthermore, the research showed a correlation between demand for local products and educational level. Travelers with secondary education are buying above average food and non-food products for others. Travelers with higher education showed greater potential in all cases, with the exception of non-food items bought for others.

Conclusion

The current study has valuable theoretical and practical implications. In line with previous studies, the research identified the dominance of food

type local products in the addressed rural lakeside destination. Local products bought for own use support remembering the trip, that way can raise nice memories and a induce return to the destination. Parallel with this, local products bought for others play a role in recommending the destination. From the sustainability point of view, the great demand identified regarding local products raises the challenge of how to serve an increased demand with small scale, often hand-crafted products.

Recommendations for certain stakeholder groups are the following:

- Policy-makers, public stakeholders:
 - Integration of local products into local economy
 - Regulation of local products
 - Ensuring selling points
 - Integration of local products into the image
- Destination management organizations:
 - Certification, quality schemes of local products
 - Integration of local products into marketing communication
 - Ensuring selling points
- Service providers, producers:
 - Cooperation with destination management
 - Highlighting the local dimension, a local story behind the product.

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