

■ Neophobia (risk), novelty-seeking and neophilia

Are food lovers psychologically pre-disposed to seeking out new tastes and new food-tourism experiences? Quan and Wang (2004) argued that food consumption in tourism can be either the peak touristic experience or the supporting consumer experience, dependent upon specific circumstances. To these theorists, peak food experiences are derived from both motivation (novelty seeking) and memorability. Often food is a medium for peak social experiences.

Presumably sensation-seeking is similar to neophilia, and the only research available concerns wine tourists. In their study of wine tourists, Galloway et al. (2008) determined that “sensation seeking was observed to be significantly related to spending on wine, and wine drinking, as well as to the frequency of visits to wineries and the number of activities engaged in at wineries, the use of the internet as a source of information about wineries, venturing off the beaten track during a visit to a wine region, and the strength of opportunity for learning, stimulation, or indulgence as incentives to visit a wine region.” Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2009) found that food in a tourism context had a “challenging culinary trophy” element with an association of novelty (Mykletun and Gyimóthy, 2010).

Research note: scary food and traditions

Mykletun, R., & Gyimóthy, S. (2010). Beyond the renaissance of the traditional Voss sheep's-head meal: Tradition, culinary art, scariness and entrepreneurship. *Tourism Management*, **31**(3), 434-446.

Attempts have been made to make traditional local foods a part of the tourists' experiences, but few have caught great interest among the tourist and leisure consumers. An exception is the Norwegian traditional Sheep's-head meal. This article focuses on driving factors behind this success. Sheep's heads have been continuously available and used at private meals, albeit the status of the meals has changed from everyday food to party food, and a festival and commercial meals with unique ceremonies have developed. Participation in these may give a sense of symbolic proximity to traditions and historical 'roots'. The culinary qualities of the product are important especially for the experienced sheep's-head meal participants. The scariness of the product itself and the measures taken to make the meal an enjoyable adventure trigger the feelings of courage, mastery and inclusion in the 'in-group' of sheep's-head eaters. Most important for the success were the individual entrepreneurships and entrepreneurial networks which were the number one drivers behind the rejuvenation of these unique meal experiences. This case illustrates the significance of the individual and network entrepreneurial processes in the branding and development of tourism destinations.

Food is certainly a risk factor for tourists (Lepp and Gibson, 2003), sometimes leading to sickness or to disappointment owing to a large gap between perceived value and cost. Kim, Suh and Eves (2010) found that neophobia, or the fear of new foods, had a negative relationship with visitor satisfaction, but despite discussing the food involvement literature at length they used only two established measures from Bell and Marshall (2003). Logically, an actual fear of strange foods, or perhaps purchased meals, will tend to keep people at home, or will encourage them to visit only those establishments perceived to be familiar and/or safe. But a person who feels food neophobia could conceivably be a foodie – only with a narrow range of likes or tolerances. This constraint on food tourism, from a supplier's point of view, will also apply to those with special dietary requirements and preferences, including those related to religion and health. Increasingly, food tourism, and travel suppliers in general, have to accommodate greater diversity in demands, and greater respect for allergies and other dietary restrictions.

3

Summary

This chapter went into detail on the nature of being a foodie, starting with the voices of self-described foodies and then questioning whether being a foodie has a positive or negative connotation. Psychological theory was brought to bear on personal and social identity, which is essential to understanding any leisure or lifestyle pursuit. Only the individual can decide if they are a foodie, because they identify with what it means; it cannot be determined solely by appearances or behaviour. And what it means to them is always in part a reflection of social considerations including the possibility that foodies are part of a loose or tight social world devoted to like-minded people. In that social context the concept of *communitas* is important, wherein people get together at events and through social networking to celebrate their interests in an atmosphere of sharing and belonging.

The social-psychological construct called involvement (or ego-involvement) was then examined, drawing from leisure studies where many pursuits have been examined through this theoretical lens. Involvement is reflected only in part by behaviour (such as spending, time commitments, travel) and is otherwise a matter of self-identification and attitudes. Highly involved foodies make food a central part of their lifestyle and take all food-related activities very seriously. This is where the connection to serious leisure theory is important.

Based on a lengthy food involvement scale for Australian research, which constituted a test, we then utilized a much shorter and more efficient scale for the multi-country online survey. The Australian findings made it clear, through factor analysis, that foodie involvement embodies four important dimensions: