



Culinary Tourism in Ireland - An Assessment of its evolution and current state

Elke Japke

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current state*

Elke Japke

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Abstract

Culinary tourism is an area that has long been included in strategical planning by several countries or regions. Culinary heritage is highly cultural and can contribute to the promotion of tourism destinations. Experiences related to food are a strong component in the formation of a destination's image. However, according promotion needs to be well-coordinated. Food is naturally related to tourism but it requires the supervision of tourism authorities to create and maintain culinary tourism as a successful tourism product. This paper establishes the history of food and tourism in Ireland and shows how these two merged, resulting in the start of culinary tourism in this country. Furthermore, the development since the start of culinary tourism has been examined in the form of an extensive content analysis, leading to a SWOT analysis of the current performance of this area. To support the argumentation, expert interviews have been carried out through the use of questionnaires. The assumption was that Ireland's offer regarding tourism experiences related to food is ideal for culinary tourism to be successful. Based on the knowledge about the history of tourism, however, it was to be expected that weaknesses would be found in the work of tourism authorities, hence the coordination and, especially, promotion. Due to the detailed analysis of promotional webpages as well as publications by Fáilte Ireland, the country's national tourism development authority, the main hypothesis could be confirmed. Ireland's offer regarding culinary tourism shows a great variety of food-related experiences. But these ideal conditions have not fully been recognized by the authorities. Promotion, especially online, lacks pro-activeness regarding this area. A significant weakness is the structure of the main promotional webpage Ireland.com. Information regarding food tourism is difficult to find. The issues uncovered could easily be resolved by simple changes, such as the implementation of hyperlinks on certain sites. Publications like the Food Tourism Implementation Framework 2011-2013 and Food Tourism Activity Plan 2014-2016 showed great potential with regards to a successful development of culinary tourism. Follow-up work was, unfortunately, only published shortly before this dissertation was completed. Therefore, the Food and Drink Strategy 2018-2023 could not be analysed for this paper. Nevertheless, the content analysis, SWOT analysis and expert interviews have confirmed that culinary tourism could be successful in Ireland if its promotion within marketing tools was improved and more pro-active.

List of Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini
DMO	Destination Management Organization
GB	Great Britain
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICTA	International Culinary Tourism Association
IHF	Irish Hotel Federation
ITA	Irish Tourist Association
ITB	Irish Tourist Board
ITIC	Irish Tourism Industry Confederation
IUOTO	International Union of Official Tourist Organisations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SOAR	Situation and Outlook Analysis Report
UK	United Kingdom
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USA	United States of America
WTO	World Tourism Organization
AD	Anno Domini
GB	Great Britain
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USA	United States of America
WTO	World Tourism Organization

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1. Introduction

10, 2 % of world GDP are generated by travel and tourism. 292 million people are employed in this sector which represents the extent of tourism's share. (World Travel and Tourism Council, n.d.) Tourism can practically be found in every country on earth. In many small island states, it has become the leading source in producing foreign exchange. With this kind of importance come great influences. It is unquestionable that tourism has large positive effects. It enables a cultural exchange between visitors and locals. This can support the maintenance of traditional cultures, for example through protecting craft work or typical local architecture as well as monuments and museums. Hence, tourism can help sustaining and even strengthening cultures. However, tourism also tends to commercialize cultures rather than valuing them. It can cause acculturation and social as well as psychological destabilization. Sustainable tourism development is the answer to such negative impacts. (Rein & Strasdas, 2015) A guide towards sustainable tourism development was published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 2005. It states that we must value and sustain the variety of cultures we have in this world. (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005) One must notice that "[...] sustainable tourism should not be taken to imply a finite state of tourism. In fact, it is often argued that tourism may never be totally sustainable—sustainable development of tourism is a continuous process of improvement." (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005, p.11). This paper is related to sustainable development regarding a crucial cultural aspect of every tourism destination: food. As food represents a country's or region's culture, it is one of the characteristics attracting tourists. Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán (2012) state that "the search for natural or cultural attractions forms the basis for tourism. Cultural attractions refer to aspects related to human culture in any of its numerous manifestations, including [...] gastronomy." (p.231) They refer to the International Culinary Tourism Association, which found out there is an interrelation between culturally and culinary interested tourists. Hence, food is a form of culture. (Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2012) Culinary tourism has become a popular form of travelling, especially during the past decade. Food can be " [...] experienced using all the human senses, [it deepens] the tourism experience even more". (Rand & Heath, 2006, p.210) To enable culinary interactions between tourists and local communities, marketing must be designed and carried out accordingly. Du Rand & Heath (2006) state that "[t]he roots of food tourism lie in agriculture, culture and tourism. All three components offer opportunities

and activities to market and position food tourism as an attraction and experience in a destination." (p.209)

Ireland is a small country in the north of Europe, being known for its stunning nature and rather unpleasant weather. Food is not one of the first things that come to mind thinking about this country, although whiskey and Guinness are famous Irish beverages and reason enough for many to visit Ireland. Nevertheless, the country has a strong culinary heritage, distinguishing itself from other destinations, especially through its deeply-rooted agriculture. Farming has been important to the Irish for centuries, even though it had to face enormous challenges in the past. Having been living in Ireland for two years, the author started to wonder if culinary tourism as a designated segment existed in Ireland. Staying with Irish families, it became clear that there were typical Irish dishes. Through the studies of Sustainable Tourism Management, the author was aware of culinary tourism being a form of sustainable tourism development. During previous assignments, the author had also learned more about Ireland's tourism development and came across the struggle in the history caused by food. As a result, questions regarding the history of food and the relation between food and tourism arose, guiding the development of this paper. During the first steps of this paper's establishment, it became clear that Ireland has a strong food culture, agriculture being an important part of it. In line with that, many organizations could be identified, making effort to maintain agriculture and high quality of food in this country, which reflects a significant contribution to the sustainable development in Ireland. Food-related tourism experiences are available in various forms. The variety of the offer in this matter represents ideal circumstances for culinary tourism to be included in tourism development. Indeed, the author found a Food Tourism Implementation Framework and a Food Tourism Activity Plan. Clearly, culinary tourism had been recognized as a contributor to tourism development in Ireland. However, it is important to be aware of the competition existing on a global level. Culinary tourism or rather a strong culinary heritage can be a competitive advantage as tourists can truly engage in local culture. It can also be an economic booster for local producers. To efficiently use its advantages, tourism authorities must coordinate all stakeholders involved in culinary tourism and establish both development and marketing strategies towards a common goal. As stated before, Ireland does not evoke the thought of food in one's mind. This can be changed by according marketing strategies. Potential visitors must be educated in this matter. The variety of food-related experiences needs to be promoted effectively. The author suspected

significant weaknesses regarding the strategical planning of culinary tourism as well as concerning its promotion. To either support or refute this suspicion, a full assessment of

- the history of Irish food
- the development of tourism in Ireland
- the merge of food and tourism
- the current effort of tourism authorities in relation to promoting culinary tourism

was performed to allow a full understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. To identify these, a content analysis was carried out. The material used was retrieved from Ireland's Destination Management Organization (DMO) webpages and the webpages of the tourism board. Aside from the content (in relation to food tourism in Ireland), structure and usability of the according webpages were reviewed as well. The results of the content analysis were then summarized in a SWOT analysis, reflecting the current state of culinary tourism in Ireland. In addition, expert interviews were conducted through the use of questionnaires regarding key aspects in the development of culinary tourism as well as its marketing, both generally and concerning the Republic of Ireland. The expert's answers would support this dissertation's assumptions and argumentation but also offer solutions. The overall purpose of this paper is the evaluation of the performance of culinary tourism in Ireland, especially with regards to its promotion, in order to identify potential as well as flaws, for which solutions are being offered.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural heritage and tourism

Culture is an important, if not the most important part of the touristic product. Cultural tourism is a constantly growing area on a global level. More and more tourism destinations try to build a cultural image based on physical features as such, as well as experiences related to them. 'Experiences' become a crucial term in this segment. Travellers nowadays ask for more than the traditional tourism product (goods and services), namely creating memorable experiences by engaging in the culture. (Richards & Wilson, 2005) The intense spreading of and demand for cultural tourism stems from three major circumstances: "the changing nature of post-industrial, consumer capitalism; economic development policies and the growth of regionalism as a global phenomenon." (Richards & Wilson, 2005, p.1210). In addition to a shift towards cultural tourism, Richards and Wilson (2005) refer to a noticeable shift *in* cultural tourism, "[...] from specific cultural attractions (such as

monuments and museums) towards intangible factors such as ‘atmosphere’, gastronomy and linguistic diversity in the attractiveness of places" (p.8). The authors mention that tourists are no longer just the recipients of completed products. They are more and more involved in the production of their own tourism experience. (Richards & Wilson, 2007)

"The rise of skilled consumption, the importance of identity formation and the acquisition of cultural capital in (post)modern society point towards the use of creativity as an alternative to conventional cultural tourism" (Richards & Wilson, 2005, p.1209).

Creativity has become an important term in cultural tourism development strategies, for distinctiveness is of high priority among tourism destinations. Such creative measures often involve innovation to achieve something "new". It is not so much separated from traditional ways as it is an extension of them. During creative tourism product development, "experience" is becoming crucial. Intangible culture is more likely to be creatively extended, which on the one hand brings the advantage of being a mobile attraction. On the other hand, this very characteristic makes intangible heritage difficult to protect. Knowledge is easily spread. For that reason, destination management units need to permanently link the offered intangible culture to their location in the visitor's mind. (Richards & Wilson, 2007) Heritage is the core of an area's culture.

"Heritage, whether it be an object, monument, inherited skill or symbolic representation, must be considered as an identity marker and distinguishing feature of a social group" (Hjalager & Richards, 2002, p.26).

Hence, it represents a social memory reflecting regions or areas in the sense of cultural values, may it be tangible or intangible. (Bessière, 1998) One can speak of the culture's core. Richards speaks of heritage as a symbol of identity, which is especially being used in tourism. (Hjalager & Richards, 2002) Rituals and customs are part of an area's heritage. Culturally interested tourists seek to participate in those to truly integrate in the social group they are visiting. Since gastronomy is a form of such rites, it plays an important role in cultural tourism. But not only tourists themselves show a stronger interest in heritage. In this modern world, where globalization threatens to eliminate uniqueness, social groups feel the urge to discover their heritage and an identity in it. (Bessière, 1989) As Bessière (1998) points out correctly: "Heritage provides historical depth and a permanent pattern in a perpetually changing world. As a temporal link, it is indistinguishable from tradition"

(p.26). Even though it provides some sort of stability, heritage is dynamic and changes over time. While passing it on, generations build heritage up and change it "by combining conservation and innovation, stability and dynamism, reproduction and creation" (Bessière, 1998, p.27)

2.2 Culinary Heritage and Tourism

To build on cultural heritage, respond to the demand for quality food and dining experiences and promote economic development, destinations can integrate tourism and local food systems, which is what culinary tourism enables communities to do. (Green & Dougherty, 2008) Culinary tourism is a component of the "local food movement", whose perspective it is to increase the economic benefits for farmers, to contribute to environmental sustainability and to promote healthy eating habits to among consumers. (Green & Dougherty, 2008)

"Culinary tourism emphasizes unique foods and dishes from the culture of the host region." (Green & Dougherty, 2008, p.149)

A regions culinary heritage is explained by Hjalager & Richards (2002) as follow: "[...] what we eat and the way we eat are such basic aspects of our culture. [...] eating habits are parochial behaviours that are learned and culturally bound" (p.5). In the promotion of a destination, local food can be presented as a cultural attraction because it can contribute to developing an image specifically related to a designated area. Hence, food heritage can distinguish tourism destination from each other. Apart from the tourist's point of view, food culture or food heritage supports local communities to maintain their identity, which is especially important in a globalized world as ours. (Hjalager & Richards, 2002) Seen from the economic point of view, a strong culinary heritage is an advantage in the globally competitive tourism market, as it can portray the uniqueness of an area, or destination. To achieve that, the local communities of a region need to be coordinated appropriately during development planning, which can be quite the challenge. Along with that, enough suppliers need to exist, such as farms, processors, retailers and restaurants. Those again need to collaborate and interact frequently. For some regions that might require the implementation of completely new organizational strategies. Local food nevertheless is evolving positively. Buyers are ready to spend more to receive qualitatively better food. The will to support one's community's farmers, who sometimes might even be acquaintances, as well as the trust in them is another supporting component in the local food movement. The link

between local food movements and travellers is culinary tourism. It both maintains and uses cultural heritage by offering tourists to "taste" the destination, to get involved in the production and consumption. This experience will create a memory that can only be linked to the prevailing designated area. (Green & Dougherty, 2008)

Maintaining heritage means protecting values, knowledge, skills and techniques. It often happens that heritage is being valued just when it is about to disappear. It is rooted deeply enough for social groups to take it for granted until it is threatened. Culinary heritage would be one of those kinds. Cooking traditions, eating habits and food production characterize designated areas. (Bessière, 1998) Hjalager & Richards (2002) clearly express that "[...] local culture is becoming an increasingly valuable source[...]" (p.3). in the highly competitive tourism industry. In correlation with that, "[...] gastronomy has become a significant source of identity formation in postmodern societies." (Hjalager & Richards, 2002, p.3). Gastronomy as a cultural field is economically extending and thus, has increasingly become related to tourism. Furthermore, since the consumption of food and beverage is already a significant component in the tourist experience, it is ideal to promote and turn into the main attraction. But to do so, the experience needs to be well designed. Hosting destinations must create memories for and with their visitors. What is being consumed is not as much as the question as how it is being consumed. (Hjalager & Richards, 2002) Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán (2012) describe gastronomy as an "[...] indispensable part of the travel experience." (p.229) The reason for that not only lies in eating being a basic human need but also in food consumption being a way of integrating, learning and identifying. They state the local cuisine of a tourism destination can become its symbol if the players can create an overall ideal gastronomic product for tourists. The quality of this product or rather the traveller's perception of it strongly influence the reputation of a tourism destination and hence, the overall image. Culinary tourism has the significant advantage of not depending on seasons. Food is available all-year-round, which makes culinary tourism a great alternative for destinations that cannot offer ideal natural resources. Moreover, it is more reliable from an economic perspective. (Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012)

2.3 Culinary Tourism and destination promotion

Local cuisine can be used in destination marketing and thereby for the development of culinary tourism. It can be an effective tool to differentiate a destination from others and create a brand. In order to create and maintain a 'culinary' image, both public and private

stakeholders must cooperate. Local and regional foods should be positioned as a key aspect of the destination's image. Du Rand & Heath (2006) established a framework for the development of culinary tourism, consisting of four main tasks:

- prioritizing culinary products and markets
- positioning and branding the destination
- theming, packaging and routing
- promoting the culinary destination

Culinary tourism can be promoted through published materials and websites. The more contemporary tool for the promotion of culinary tourism is the destination's webpage, which is generally run by the destination's tourism authority. On these webpages, travellers can find or gather relevant information, which is greatly supported by visuals. The combination of both requested and inspirational knowledge allows destination promoters to influence the visitor's behaviour and decision. (Okumus & Cetin, 2018) Hence, destination webpages enable stakeholders to target and develop markets, such as food tourism. This, of course, must be based on knowledge regarding the consumers, which can be retrieved through statistics and surveys. (duRand & Heath, 2006) This again reflects the necessity of insights when integrating culinary tourism on the destination's webpage, which can be achieved by involving all stakeholders. It ensures an understanding of the local cuisine and core features with regards to culinary tourism, which can be divided into four categories: facilities, activities, events and organizations. DMOs can structure promotional information following these categories on the destination's webpage and thereby increase the ease with which the consumer can use it. A further aspect to be considered with regards to the promotion of culinary tourism on the webpage are the different types of tourists that can be attracted. The first type are tourists for which food plays a crucial role in the decision-making process and information is actively being sought. Tourists of the second type appreciate food and are open to experiencing it. Yet, food does not influence their choice of destination or tourism experience as a whole. The third type are tourists who do not pay much attention to food. Having experienced delighting local cuisine, however, they are likely to attach more importance to food when planning of their next holiday. Type four tourists do not show interest in local cuisine and are not influenced by visual promotion or presentation of food. (Yousaf, 2018)

All types of culinary tourists must be reached out to raise awareness of a destination's attractiveness. The World Wide Web is the ideal tool to communicate with consumers, as it

enables Destination Management Organizations to target the right group of consumers and adapt to trends. The homepage is the first contact and must therefore be clear and simple as well as include a list of content. Since the communication with the consumer is highly visual, the appearance of the web page plays a crucial role. Information should be presented as a combination of pictures, graphics, videos and text. It should moreover be general, in form of headlines, which are linked to subpages providing further details. The consumer must be able to quickly find what they are looking for and skip irrelevant information. Interactive tools like trip planners and brochures are recommendable. Site features can also contribute to the webpage's usability. Furthermore, the webpage should be available in different languages. (Anh, 2013) When translating the webpage, it is prudent to focus on the languages spoken by the target markets.

Based on the above, culinary tourism should be implemented on the homepage of a destination's webpage as part of the content list or a headline, leading to further information for the ones actively seeking details (type 1), and it should be included as a side-aspect of other attractions and activities, in the form of pictures and videos for example, in order to reach type 2 and 3 of culinary tourists. One must keep in mind that the internet is the first point of introduction to a destination nowadays. The first impression is important; however, it is crucial to provide easy access to information and to develop as well as maintain a well-structured summary of messages, knowledge and material.

3. Introducing Ireland

Ireland is an island in Europe in the North Atlantic with a population of approximately 4.75 million. (World Population Review, n.d.) It is the second largest island of Great Britain with a size of 84,421 square kilometres. (Ireland Hiking Vacations, n.d.) It is divided into Northern Ireland as part of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland which takes 5/6 of the island. The Republic of Ireland, which has been independent from Great Britain since the early part of the 20th century, is officially named Ireland. (World Population Review, n.d.) In 2017, Ireland could welcome 9 million overseas visitors, reflecting a growth 3.2%. The revenue generated by tourism amounted to 5.3 billion Euro. The country has been showing constant growth in visitor numbers. Almost half of the visitors came for holidays, 25% travelled to Ireland to visit friends or families. (Tourism Ireland, 2018) Tourism in this country is a story of success, at least in the past decade and present. But Ireland went through struggles and faced challenges to get to this point.

3.1 The evolution of Tourism in Ireland

Travelling had always been happening in the world, including Ireland. However, it was in the 19th century that the first structural and organizational steps were taken. The major supporting circumstance was the industrial revolution in Great Britain between 1750 and 1850. As a result, the Irish light railway system was extended and canals were built, providing the first transport network. Moreover, the first hotel chain was established. Travel agents started to emerge. Amongst them, Thomas Cook, bringing thousands of visitors to Ireland by train. The travel industry kept progressing. In 1894, the first conference of the just established Hotel and Restaurant Proprietors' Association took place. In 1895, the year referred to as the *Tourist Year*, the Irish Tourist Association was formed. (Furlong, 2008) In 1923, the Irish Tourism industry had been destroyed by the Great War. The former well-developed transport infrastructure was damaged by blown up roads, bridges and significantly destructed railway network. The industry as well as its players were crushed, lacking confidence and financial capabilities. However, some individuals still envisioned the industry's regeneration and they were partly supported by the government. The Tourist Organisation Society had merged with the West of Ireland Tourism Development Association in 1924. In June of the same year, the Irish Tourist Association was registered, having the Munster Tourism Development Association subsuming into it the following month. One year later, the new Irish Tourist Association was incorporated on 28 July 1926, being responsible for the country's publicity. (Furlong, 2008) The same year, the ITA could successfully require major funds for the improvement of tourist roads. Moreover, offices were opened in New York, Chicago and San Francisco during 1933. An immense change is being described by Furlong (2008) as "[...] the inauguration of a scheduled air service between the Free State and Great Britain on 27 May 1936" (p.57). Naturally, this enabled a significant increase in visitor numbers. In 1937, the Irish Hotel Federation (IHF) was formed. Two years later, the Irish Tourist Board (ITB) was created. In 1945 as well as the following five years, Ireland was flooded by British visitors due to rationing that was still taking place, even though the War had ended. American and Commonwealth troops added up on already high visitor numbers. Ireland scored enough success to open an ITA office in London in 1945. (Furlong, 2008) However, the infrastructure was not adequate for the number of visitors (O'Brien, 2011) and due to high demand, the country became short in accommodation. (Furlong, 2008) The 1922-1950s did not show enough development strategies concerning tourism. (O'Brien,

2011) Moreover, the insufficient training of staff in Irish hotels had stayed a problem ever since firstly noticed in the 1890s. The first systematic approach to solving this was a scheme coming from Shannon airport. The idea was for the Clare County Council to pay a fee of £10 per month for sixteen trainees. No financial help from the outside would be involved and 1951, the project was carried out. Hotel and catering management as well as languages, replenished with exchanges with Swiss hotels were provided by the *Shannon Airport Catering Service Staff Training and Advancement Scheme*, which ended up in the founding of the *Shannon Hotel Management School*, the first hotel school in Ireland. Fógra Fáilte was established in 1952, taking over the publicity functions of the ITA and ITB. (Furlong, 2008) (O'Brien, 2011) The same year, the idea for a national festival arose, called An Tóstal (“a pageant”, but translated into “Ireland at Home”), inviting Irish-Americans to visit the country of their heritage. It was officially launched in April 1953 but could never attract as many visitors as hoped. Nevertheless, the festival started the co-operation between communities and laid the foundation of the *Tidy Towns* competition, organised and financed by the tourist board. It had also evoked the urge to preserve and protect their culture among the Irish. (Furlong, 2008)

Bord Fáilte Eireann was established in 1955. It was responsible for the development and promotion of tourism. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) The Irish Hotel Federation built branches in Cork, Limerick, Galway and Killarney. It progressed well and became part of the International Hotel Association in 1958. Six years later, the Department of Transport and Power undertook tourism and initiated the re-structuring of the ITB. The industry started to focus on the country's look, but also on the organization of the tourism product amongst all stakeholders. In line with that, Bord Fáilte Éirenn funded the establishment of the Council for Education, Recruitment and Training in 1963. One year later, eight Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) were formed, to improve local marketing and organization as well as distribute Irish tourism. 1967 was the ‘International Tourist Year’, as declared by the International Union of Official Tourist Organisations (IUOTO).

Together with political unrest in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s came a difficult phase for the Republic of Ireland. In addition, the country had to face inflation, causing deterrent prices for tourists. Visitor numbers significantly declined between 1968 – 1972. By 1976, Irish tourism had been able to recover from the effects of the troubles in Northern Ireland. However, the industry deteriorated under the world recession between 1978 and 1980. Visitors would shorten their stays and spent generally less, due to intensified cost-consciousness. In addition to that, Northern Ireland's continuously worsened and affected

the promotion of the Republic. Nevertheless, the past 40 years had been successful in raising the awareness of the industry's economic importance and national contribution. Two Operational Programmes for Tourism were carried out in 1989-93 and 1994-99, applying European Union regional funding. (Furlong, 2008)

With the globalization intensifying in the 1990s, the economic development improved, strategies would show a greater variety and a national system of innovation was established. (O'Brien, 2011) The country showed significantly increasing visitor numbers, specifically coming from North America and Britain. Figure 1 shows the visitor numbers between 1976 and 1998, illustrating the point of turn in 1987, with the implementation of the Programme for National Recovery. (O'Donoghue, 2003) In 1998, the identification of Tourism as an area of cooperation led to the establishment of Tourism Ireland Ltd, overtaking the promotional management for tourism in 2002. One year later, Fáilte Ireland was formed. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) Being launched in 2007, the campaign 'Discover Ireland' has been promoting activities in the country, especially in rural areas. The National Development Plan 2007-2013 involved the most extensive expansion programme for tourism so far, planning an investment of €800 million. Ireland has shown great development in the past 100 years and promises further growth. (Furlong, 2008)

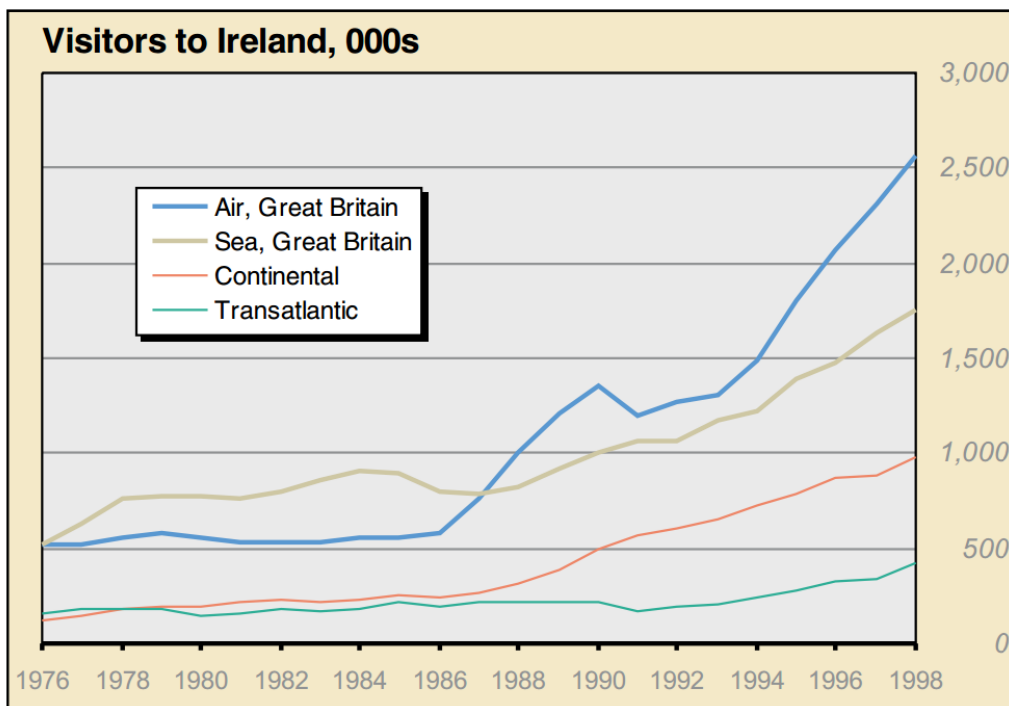


Figure 1. *Visitors to Ireland, 000s* (Delamere, 2000, p. 159)

3.2 The evolution of sustainable tourism development in Ireland

Given the literature regarding the history of Irish tourism, the start of sustainable development seems to lie in the late 1950s, with the implementation of the Tidy Towns competition, organised and financed by tourist board. (Furlong, 2008) As part of the newly implemented festival An Tóstal, the National Roadside Gardens Competition, run by the Irish Countrywoman's Association, was created to improve Ireland's appearance, especially in villages and towns. The overall objective of raising the nations pride by brightening up the country also led to a National Spring Cleaning Campaign in 1953, being carried out annually. Developing from this campaign, a 'Tidy Towns and Villages Competition' was organised and carried out successfully with 52 entries. (Bord Fáilte, 1982) In the following year, the entries went up to 179. No town was forced to participate, but the Board would highly promote the competition and would consult and advise interested communities. The number of entries would grow in the following years. Supporting factors were media, such as television and radio. This also contributed to Ireland becoming more known in the world in the 1960s. In 1968, a total of 510 towns and villages entered the competition. The Tidy Town Prize Day became an Annual Festival, bringing together communities and attracting visitors. The Board kept intensifying the promotion by producing films, the first one in 1975. A five-year tourism development plan, implemented in 1976, focussed on the maintenance of natural resources, which had been degraded by pollution and litter. The emphasis on the environment went further in the Planning and Development Act in 1977, considering water pollution as well as the preservation and protection of wildlife. (Furlong, 2008) As an extension of the Tidy Towns competition, the National Tidy Districts Award Scheme was introduced in 1977. Furthermore, Bord Fáilte funded a National Anti-Litter campaign, raising the awareness of this matter's importance among towns and village. (Bord Fáilte, 1982) In 1982, the Tidy Towns competition recorded 800 entries. Many categories have been added during the years to provide a high variety of incentives. With the evolution of the competition the participants paid growing attention to conservation and preservation as well as renewing urban areas. It has also helped increasing visitor numbers by creating an attractive image. Another positive effect is the involvement of different generations from all over the country. The competition has been helping different communities to come together by promoting friendly rivalry. (Furlong, 2008) The Tidy Town Scheme celebrated its 50th birthday in 2008. (Tidy Towns, n.d.)

Independently from the scheme, or maybe inspired by it, tourism authorities as well as the government became aware of the importance of conservation and maintenance. Thus, in 2002, Tourism Policy Review Group was appointed by the government, which was requested to focus on sustainable tourism development in Ireland and, therefore, determine components requiring the cooperation of industry and government. (Furlong, 2008) A great number of organizations concentrating on environmental sustainability have been established in the last decade. The Irish Environmental Network is a platform connecting 35.000 members. It was created by 30 Irish Environmental NGOs. One member is the Sustainable Ireland Cooperative, a non-profit organisation, educating and providing organisational support to promote sustainable development. (Irish Environmental Network, n.d.) With regards to the tourism industry, Ecotourism Ireland is an important tool in sustainable development. Recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council in 2012, it provides quality certification and support in promoting ecotourism experiences in the country. (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, n.d.) The roots of this label lie in the Former Greenbox Ecotourism Label, operating from 2006 to 2009. Nature-based travel and tourism products can achieve the Bronze, Silver or Gold level. (Ecotourism Ireland, n.d.) In 2014, sustainable.ie was created by the Ireland Cooperative Society, which was established in 1999. Sustainable.ie is a website guiding to organisations, products, other websites and events in Ireland, that are sustainability-minded. (Sustainable Ireland, n.d.) Many small tour operators offering nature-friendly walk or bike tours have been established. This reflects a great interest in sustainable tourism development as well as the contribution of it. Ireland values its natural resources and shows the will to share it with visitors, enabling them to not only experience it but to develop environmental consciousness themselves.

3.3 The history of Irish food

As established above, food is part of a country's heritage. It is for that reason that it has been integrated in the tourism product development in many regions, known as culinary tourism. The basis is a deeply rooted culinary heritage. Ireland's culinary heritage has only recently been promoted for touristic purposes, especially compared to other destinations. That is because the country's food culture was challenged in its development.

“When it comes to food there are three major periods in Irish history, before the potato arrived, after the potato arrived and after the potato failed.” (DoChara, 2017)

The first record with regards to diet and cooking belongs to the Late Stone Age around 2000 BC. Stone and bronze were used to cook. Hunting and gathering were the main activities related to food, but archaeologists also found proof of farmed sections in the country. (Linnane, 2000) At the end of the Late Stone Age and the beginning of the Bronze Age, the records of the Beaker People distinguished themselves with their type of pottery, indicating an “[...] advanced social order, a pottery industry and the collection of food items for storage.” (Linnane, 2000) But the rest of the Irish civilisation also began to become more modern, by going through social and agricultural changes, such as organisation, representing the beginnings of governments. The production of food changed and grass seeds as well as leaf plants were cultivated. Food supply became more versatile and dependable, enabling the country’s population to grow and develop. Forest clearing and planting took turns for centuries. In the 3rd century AD, agriculture dramatically expanded. The most common cooking tradition was the preparation of soups and stews in a cauldron, ingredients varying between coastal and inland locations. Bread was baked on hot flagstones and meat was cooked on hot stones or in troughs. The serving of food was most likely simple, probably in a shared bowl, possibly wicker baskets as well. Drinks came in wooden vessels or bowls. Meat was served with salt and honey, so was fish. Cattle, pork, mutton and wild deer were the most common kinds of meat consumed up until the 8th century. Then, due to overhunting, venison became predominant. Black pudding was made from animals’ blood. Sea pig was a popular meat in coastal regions. Amongst the poorer part of the population, salted meat was widespread, since it lasted longer and was worth much more than fresh meat, due to salt being quite expensive. Cereal was widely used, although not particularly for bread. Oats were boiled and either served for breakfast, thick and sweetened, or for dinner, more liquid, with salt and herbs. Delicate white flour was used to prepare cakes. Scones combined wheat flour, burned seaweed, sour milk and fruit acid. Oat bread was usually served with meat, but also broken into crumbs to thicken stews. The oldest alcoholic beverage, mead, was made from honey, water, herbs and spices. It was served with extra honey. Another popular beverage was Metheglin, sweet and spicy, being made of honey, rosemary, thyme and sweet briar. Sloe wine was one of the favourites as well. Milk was very important, being used to make cheese, butter or to be drunk fresh. Furthermore, seaweed was boiled with milk. After the mixture had thickened, it was mixed with honey served with fruits as a dessert. Eggs were highly consumed, too. However, neither eggs nor dairy produce were widely bought or sold on markets, but instead self-provided in families, by holding a cow and hens. In coastal areas,

people would eat eggs from wild birds. (DoChara, 2017) Plenty of fish were caught in rivers and lakes, the salmon being the most prized and considered magical. Fish was baked over an open fire or in a stew, with vegetables, herbs and seaweed. Some fish were salted, stored and used in winter. Little is known as to what kind of vegetables were eaten before the 8th century. However, it is assumed that they were rather gathered than grown, such as onions, leeks, nettles, sorrel and watercress. During summer season, berries were the most common sort of fruit to be collected. Between 800 and 1160, people would start growing vegetables like cainenn (supposedly from the onion family), celery, onion chive and leek, as well as some sort of carrots and parsnips. The Normans brought the cultivation of peas and beans. Later, turnips, kale and cabbage were grown, too. Salads were prepared with watercress, flowers and dandelion leaf. However, there is little change noticeable with regards to production and the way of cooking. (Linnane, 2000)

Hospitality was always important for the Irish and a question of honour. Strangers would be fed before asked what their business was. Great feasts were celebrated for special occasions. Until the Normans arrived, in the 12th century, Irish cuisine had been maintained quite well. At that time, the country was divided into areas and food was downgraded from land-owner to tenant. Moreover, with the mixed farming system, the shift in ownership and the subsidence of peasants, Irish agriculture ended abruptly. Norman and English landlords implemented a strict hierarchy, significantly influencing the Irish's diet in line with their position. (DoChara, 2017) With the discovery of the New World, the potato was introduced in Europe and would mean a significant turning point for Ireland. The potato became central in the Irish diet. It was their rescue, since the Norman and English landowners had made survival a struggle for most of the population. Together with oatmeal, the potato represented the two main, very nutritious components of the Irish cuisine, allowing the population to grow rapidly. Not much land was needed to cultivate potatoes and the Irish climate contributed to a massive production of them. Storing them was easy and they could be eaten during winter. (Linnane, 2000) Only by growing potatoes, families could finance their lives. Especially because of increasing prices for cereal and milk people became dependent on the potato. For the wealthier part of the population, food still showed an attractive variety. (DoChara, 2017) Cereal became more central in diets during the sixteenth century. (Clarkson & Crawford, 2001) Nevertheless, vegetables were cultivated and meat was produced. Black pudding was still a popular food as well. Shops were established in towns in the beginning of the 17th century, mostly bakers and butchers. (DoChara, 2017) Along the coast fisheries were developed. (Clarkson

& Crawford, 2001) With the arrival of English colonists, the Irish were brought strawberries, pears, cherries and plums. Large gardens were built, growing even exotic fruits like nectarines, peaches and figs. (DoChara, 2017) Dietary patterns were fundamentally changed in that time, along with a significant increase in demand, resulting from the growing population. It was the 17th century in which a gap developed between farmers and land owners. (Clarkson & Crawford, 2001) The beginning of the Modern Irish Cuisine came with the 18th century. Vegetables consumed showed a greater variety, honey and ale were replaced by sugar and tea. It can be suspected that components, being considered traditional today, were developed in the 18th century, such as soda bread, Irish stew, apple tart or potatoes and bacon. However, that would only apply to the rather wealthy part of the population. The poorer had made themselves exclusively dependent on the potato, and, consequently, extremely limited concerning their diet. (DoChara, 2017) The population was practically divided into two distinctive groups. Nevertheless, the consumption of the potato was given in all parts of the country and population. (Clarkson & Crawford, 2001) 1739 and 1845 the country suffered from two serious famines. The first one was caused by extremely cold weather and, thus, the destruction of the potato crop. The second one was caused by a major disease called the Potato Blight.

“This devastating disease rotted the potatoes in the ground, rendering entire crops inedible and obliterating the primary food source for millions of people.”

(DoChara, 2017)

This decreased the population by over 50% due to an incredibly high number of deaths and emigrates between 1845 and 1854. (Linnane, 2000) The government made efforts to provide relief by having food imported but the amounts were generally insufficient and sort of sporadic. Charitable organisations and aid in England provided both help and food. Committees in America raised money and sent food via ships to the island, which often returned with passengers considering emigration the last resort. The Society of Friends, also called Quakers, not only provided food but, more importantly, financial support for farmers to help replanting their fields. The Quakers' work is still being remembered today. Soup kitchens were set up, too. The most memorable donation came from the Choctaw tribe of American Indians amounting to \$170 (\$5000 today). Coming from an impoverished community, this small amount was a very strong gesture, being honoured to this day. Farmers having acquired large parts of land, whose owners had either died or left, passed these extensive areas to the next generation. They could now produce enough

excess for the market, especially vegetables like turnips and cabbage. In the 1860s, the Irish population could effort to eat again. (DoChara, 2017) The number of retailers grew from “[...] fewer than 24,000 in 1861 to almost 69,000 by the end of the century.” (Clarkson & Crawford, 2001, p.90). The main components of the Irish diet were porridge, potatoes, wholemeal bread and milk. In the following century, the situation improved. The industry of processed food developed and expanded into smaller towns and villages. Better railway systems and roads enabled people in rural areas to regularly make trips into town to buy delicate supplements to their own produce. Biscuits, tea and sugar were quite popular. The consumption of dairy products and meat amongst the poorer increased, while porridge, bread and potatoes remained the main food. (DoChara, 2017) In general, the Irish ate significantly better after the Famine, including the poorer. (Clarkson & Crawford, 2001) The typical Irish dinner, still being found in most families today, consisted of potatoes, meat and vegetables. With the 20th century, cooking habits and methods changed. The open fire was replaced by a fuel oven, later run by electricity, in almost every household. It took until the 1960s and 1970s for consumed food to became more diverse, even though the availability was plentiful. Rice and pasta were slowly added to the Irish diet. Eating out in Ireland was still quite uncommon. Menus would not vary much between provincial hotel restaurants. Most of the offered food was fried or over-boiled, simple and generally unhealthy. In the 1970s and 1980s, two trends arrived. On the one hand, the fast food industry would evolve, on the other hand, quality restaurants would arise, preparing interesting meals with lightly cooked vegetables and properly cooked meat. Both trends made the Irish eat out more regularly. (DoChara, 2017)

3.4 The start of culinary tourism in Ireland

Around the 1980s and 1990s, when French cuisine was ruling food culture in the country, Ireland would experience the most significant change in food history, caused by two women. It all began with Darina Allen’s graduation from the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism in Dublin in 1968. Looking to become a chef, Darina heard of a little farm restaurant in Cork. (Walsh, 2013) The farmer’s wife, Myrtle Allen, would use fresh produce every day and adapt the menu to what the garden had to offer, which was considered a cooking revolution back then. Darina applied for a position as a chef and got hired. (Moskin, 2010) She married Myrtle’s eldest son Tim in 1970. (Walsh, 2013) The two women created a new cuisine, by preparing home-grown ingredients in the style of French Cuisine. The food was the same, but the cooking and serving methods were

changed. The Ballymaloe farm restaurant became a popular international food destination and location for cooking classes. (Moskin, 2010) In 1983, Darina established the Ballymaloe Cookery School with her brother Rory O’Connell. (Allen, n.d.) She would travel the world to gather knowledge and inspiration to bring back to the school, later simply call her food heroes and invite them over for a guest appearance. These practical guest courses sparked a widely-spread interest and were quickly booked out. An important aspect of the education was and is horticulture. Per Darina Allen, one should know the basics of farming before entering a kitchen. (Walsh, 2013) In an interview with the New York Times in 2010, she stated “When you grow a vegetable yourself, you’re less likely to boil it to death”. (Moskin, 2010) The school is a huge success, visited by international students and ‘producing’ chefs that open restaurants and cookery schools all over the world. (Ballymaloe Cookery School, n.d.) Darina’s impact is immense in many ways. In the 1980s, many people had moved to the cities, farming – once a strong component in Irish culture – had decreased significantly due to a centralised distribution system and supermarkets being allowed to only buy two percent locally. Farmers were not able to sell their produce. It was about that time, when Darina had an epiphany on a market in San Francisco, realising that the solution was right there: farmer’s markets, of which Ireland now has 160. (Walsh, 2013) She helped bringing the country back to the strong agriculture it once had. In 1996, the Premio Langhe Ceretto in Italy honoured Darina Allen with the Società Edictrice Nazionale price for food and wine culture. In her acceptance speech, she spoke about the effect of EU regulations on food culture. She warned the Italians to maintain their culinary heritage before it’s too late. A founding member of the Slow Food Movement, founded in Italy in 1989, explained to her afterwards that she had expressed the philosophy of their organisation. As a natural consequence, Darina Allen launched Slow Food Ireland in 1998. (Allen, n.d.) The Slow Food Movement “[...] links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.” (Slow Food Ireland, n.d.) It follows the principles of food quality being at its best if *Good, Clean and Fair*. (Slow Food Ireland, n.d.) Darina Allen has published sixteen cookbooks (Moskin, 2010) and was on RTE TV, starring in her own cooking shows. She has received numerous awards and prizes for her achievements. (Walsh, 2013) It is easy to assume that Darina Allen’s work has exerted influence on Ireland’s tourism industry, simply because the increased overall awareness regarding the importance of sustainable development. Darina undeniably helped the country to establish a certain pride of its culinary heritage, not only in a matter of produce and agriculture, but also with regards to aspects related to the serving of food,

such as hospitality. Being a topic of interest, food started to be considered in the tourism industry as well. Globally, culinary tourism was already well-established. Ireland, however, joined this trend later than most. In 2010, Fáilte Ireland participated in the Culinary Tourism World Summit, the first conference ever held to assemble the leaders of this industry, discussing the development and sustaining of culinary tourism. (Culinary Tourism World Summit, n.d.) The world summit was produced by the International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA), which had been established in 2003 and is regarded as “[...] the forefront of education, research and trendspotting in the world’s food and beverage tourism industry.” (World Food Travel Association, n.d.) In November 2016, food in Ireland was being recognized as a contributor to the development of tourism, even though not on an institutional level. Good Food Ireland created a brand centring on the promotion of Irish cuisine. To better understand the reputation of the country and develop tourism strategies towards Ireland’s recognition as a food destination, Grant Thornton was commissioned by Good Food Ireland to carry out Business Insight Surveys. In the first survey of 2012, there was a common agreement among approved providers that “[...] local Irish food should be an integral part of Ireland’s international tourism marketing.” (Grant Thornton, 2012, p.3). Moreover, it showed that consumers increasingly valued and purchased local produce. (Grant Thornton & Good Food Ireland, 2012) The consumption has been identified to be constantly increasing in the following surveys. (Grant Thornton & Good Food Ireland, 2013, 2014) Good Food Ireland is a continually growing network of different stakeholders from the food and hospitality industry. Celebrating its 10th Anniversary in 2016, the organization honoured Ireland’s food heroes with the Best of the Decade Awards, Darina Allen and Rory O’Connell being one of the international Ambassadors of the decade with the successful directing of the Ballymaloe Cookery School. (Good Food Ireland, n.d.)

After having attended the world summit in Canada in 2010, Fáilte Ireland published a Food Tourism Implementation Framework 2011-2013, recognizing the strong relation between food and tourism and elaborating strategies building on this relationship. (Fáilte Ireland, 2010) An important organization related to food is Bord Bia, which was formed by the parliament in 1994, uniting the former Irish Meat and Livestock Board and food promotion tasks of the Irish Trade Board. (Bord Bia, n.d.) In 2013, Fáilte Ireland published their Food Tourism Activity Plan 2014-2016, following up on the implementation framework and providing strategies for the further development of the sector. (Fáilte Ireland, 2013)

Through the influence of one woman, Ireland could recreate its culinary heritage, develop pride of its food culture and showing effort to maintain it.

4. Research Methodology

Due to the focus on the Republic of Ireland, this paper is a case study. The location was chosen as the author has been living in this country for two years now and grown familiar with the local cuisine, culture and history. During the Master studies in Sustainable Tourism Management, other projects focussing on Ireland had been established prior to this one. A former task was related to culinary tourism, which was the core idea for this dissertation.

It shall be pointed out that this paper includes a combination of different research methodologies that are of qualitative nature. As the goal was to uncover what would result in a SWOT analysis, information rather than data was collected. The above Literature Review not only provides knowledge regarding culinary tourism in general, but also allows a full understanding of the role both tourism and food play in Ireland, based on the history of each. The evolvement of culinary tourism is now clear. Building on the background information gathered in the Literature Review, a content analysis was carried out. The aim was to find as much material and information as possible related to the development of food tourism in Ireland. The before mentioned Implementation Framework and Activity Plan were therefore assessed in detail, along with reports and statistical publications. Furthermore, promotional webpages were analysed with regards to both content and structure. These webpages were also used to assemble food-related offers and activities. The leading question for the assessment was: What is being presented and how is it being presented? Aside from material specifically published in relation to culinary tourism, general publications were reviewed to see if food-related aspects were included and to thereby find out which level of importance is being ascribed to food by the tourism authorities and destination management organization. The results of these assessments were summarized in a SWOT analysis. The acronym SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. (Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2003). Strengths and weaknesses reflect internal aspects, which are within the control of managers, as they are related to performance. Opportunities and threats are external aspects, hence circumstances that can be reacted to, but not influenced by managers. A SWOT analysis is a statement of a current position. Based on the results of the analysis, strategies can be

developed. However, planning itself is not part of a SWOT analysis. It simply provides direction, as it shows what can be done. It is a planning tool that can uncover competitive advantages by collecting and classifying information. A SWOT analysis consists of four lists; however, it is advised to not list more than seven points per section. Furthermore, listed points must be supported by argumentation and evidence. (Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2003) In this paper, the internal part of the SWOT analysis was more extensive, in line with the authors suspicion that weaknesses would be found on the inside. The SWOT analysis is firstly summarized in a graphical depiction. Following that, each section, meaning weaknesses, strengths, threats and opportunities, is elaborated further and verified accordingly. Suggestions for future steps with regards to the promotion of culinary tourism in Ireland are given, however only briefly established, as planning is not part of a SWOT analysis and was not the purpose of this paper. It is simply a position statement, providing ideas and directions.

In addition to that, expert interviews were carried out through the use of questionnaires. The experts were asked to answer open questions regarding the development of culinary tourism as well as its marketing. Furthermore, recommendations were requested regarding the development of culinary tourism in Ireland. Expert interviews were chosen to be the empirical methodology of this dissertation, as they allow the interviewees to provide detailed information and thorough argumentation. (Adams & Cox, 2008) Furthermore, the evaluation of culinary tourism in Ireland required the contribution of knowledgeable players in the food industry, gastronomy and/or tourism in order to ensure the validity of any suggestions being made in the conclusion of this paper. Due to physical distance between the author of this paper and the targeted experts as well as limited time, interviews could not be carried out as is practice. The interview questions were sent to the interviewees in the form of questionnaires with open-end questions. The tightly structured interviews would, however, still allow the interviewees to include as much information as considered necessary and provide examples where applicable. The total number of questions was kept low to focus on the main issues to be addressed in the interviews. The questions were:

1. What goals and strategies must be developed to realize Ireland potential as a culinary tourism destination?
2. What role does the government have in preserving and innovating in raw materials, food traditions and food culture?

3. What meaning do you think local food and traditional dining experiences have for the marketing of Ireland, and what does it mean in the country's marketing?
4. What trends have you seen, as a player with long travel experience, in the way local food and dining experiences have or have not been put into use in the development of the marketing strategy into specific market segments? Do you have any examples?
5. What do you regard as key promotion features for culinary tourism in Ireland? And what adjustments are made to meet these? Have there been any changes?
6. Could you suggest any ideas that could be used in order to promote local products in a way that it would help to promote culinary tourism in the particular destination?

Fourteen experts were contacted in total. Six of them are based in Ireland and represent players in culinary tourism (Food Festival Hosts, Food Organizations, Pub Owners, etc.). Unfortunately, no reply was received from these experts. 8 professors teaching subjects related to gastronomy were contacted as well. Three of those found the time to answer the questions. The analysis of the expert interviews is based on these three questionnaires. The insight into culinary tourism in Ireland is partly missing, which is reflected in the generality of answers to questions specifically referring to Ireland. Nevertheless, all statements are valid and could be confronted with the argumentation given in the content analysis and SWOT analysis. Therefore, the expert interviews contribute to the overall purpose of this paper; providing a screenshot of the current state of culinary tourism in Ireland and making justified suggestions for improvement where applicable.

5. Results, Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Ireland's culinary offer

There are different ways in which food is related to tourism. Not only is it essential because of the human's basic need for nutrition but because it enables tourists to discover a destination's culture as well as take part in it. A look on Ireland's promotional websites has shown that food trails are a way to discover the country's food culture. Using discoverireland.com, examples were collected to be elaborated further. According to the webpage, 33 Food trails lead visitors through a certain region or city, enabling them to discover the country's food culture. *The Great Connemara Foodie Adventure* is a food trail in and around Galway, letting tourists discover typical seafood, traditional beer brewing and local cheese. The tour ends with an insight into organic farming and a cup of tea or

coffee paired with a slice of cake. The tour includes aspects that perfectly represent Irish food culture as established in a former chapter of this paper. The *Artisan Food Roads* are based in Cork but offer routes to both County Cork and County Kerry. These guided tours bring tourists and producers together, enabling visitors to learn more about local produce, how it is grown and what distinguishes it from other regions. The last example is *Wild Kitchen Wild Food Walks on Land & Seashore*. Food walks in which tourists explore edible plants, flowers, seaweed, herbs, berries and fruit. Participants will gain detailed knowledge and create unique experiences. Other food trails can appear in the form of pub crawls, whiskey tours or brewing tours. Food and drinks are equally represented and the variety of trails meets any specific interest. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) Besides food trails, 217 farmers markets could be found, including shops and farmers markets. *Irish Farmers Markets* located around Dublin from Friday to Sunday. Fresh local produce can be purchased by both residents and tourists. Hence, visitors gain a truly authentic experience. Other farmers markets can be found all over the country, at least one per county. Considering the endangering situation of farmers in the past, the number of farmers markets nowadays shows how strong agriculture is in Ireland, implicating the Irish's pride of their local produce. Besides farmers markets, whiskey shops, fish shops or general food shops are listed under "food markets". (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.)

Cookery schools are available as well, amounting to 40, among them the *Ballymaloe Cookery School* in Cork, established by Darina Allen as elaborated above. Another example is the *Pontoon Bridge Hotel Cookery School* in Mayo, offering small classes, day courses or overnight packages. Visitors can participate or simply watch. *The Kitchen in the Castle* is a cookery school in Howth Castle in County Dublin. Visitors can choose between courses of 2 hours and 45 minutes or programmes taking up to six weeks. The *Dunbrody Country House Cookery School* in Wexford offers one-day demonstration courses as well as two-day courses where students get to cook themselves, not only learning recipes but also about local produce. All these cookery schools are both suitable for Irish residents and visitors. Tourists can include short courses in their trip to Ireland or stay in a cookery school accommodation. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.)

There are 1086 restaurants listed on discoverireland.com with 1086 results. Among them, award winning bars, hotels and restaurants can be found. *The Lake Room Restaurant* is one example. It is part of the Aghadoe Heights Hotel in Killarney, County Kerry and offers a unique view from its terrace. *Eco Douglas* is located in Country Cork, serving contemporary recipes as well as traditional. However, this restaurant is best known for

adapting to trends from the dining industry. *The Old Street Wine Bar* in Malahide, County Dublin offers French and European cuisine, keeping the home-made dishes simple and fair-priced. The list of restaurants includes bars, cafés and restaurants that offer traditional as well as modern cuisine, local and international. The great variety meets every taste.

(Fáilte Ireland, n.d.)

The offer regarding culinary tourism in Ireland is quite impressive. The activities show a great diversity. Culinary holidays can be educational, for example through a course in a cookery school or by discovering edible plants on food trails. Tourists can choose to be active, both in the sense that they can cook or be physically active while tasting different foods and drinks, or rather passive by simply visiting different restaurants and pubs. The variety of ways to experience Irish food culture is ideal for culinary tourism to be successfully promoted as a distinguishable area in this country. The following chapter will assess the structure of the webpages used to assemble the above introduced culinary offer.

5.2 Ireland's promotional webpages in relation to food

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority of Ireland. They are supporting the tourism industry and aim to “sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination.” (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) Furthermore, they offer services for tourism businesses to support the improvement of the management and marketing of products and services. Fáilte Ireland also cooperates with different state agencies and representative bodies at both local and national levels. Together, they work on the implementation and advocacy of positive as well as practical strategies benefitting Irish tourism and economy. Another function is the promotion of the country as a holiday destination. To do so, they have developed the domestic marketing campaign *discoverireland.ie*. Moreover, the authority manages a network of nationwide tourist information centres providing advices and help for visitors. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) Another organisation is *Tourism Ireland*, which was established in 1998 and regulates the country's marketing overseas as a tourism destination. The company works closely with Fáilte Ireland to increase incoming tourism by advertising online, in newspapers, magazines, on TV, in cinemas and outdoor sites. Promotion focusses on Ireland's priority markets; Great Britain, the United States, Germany and France but also on certain segments in general, such as business travellers. Tourism Ireland publishes regular reviews and reports on the country's performance with regards to tourism which can be viewed on their webpage. Market profiles are available as well. (Tourism Ireland, n.d.) Information provided on

Tourism Ireland's webpage is for both visitors working in the industry and holiday planners. On the company's consumer website, Ireland.com, interested travellers can collect information and gain inspiration for their visit. When looking for Ireland's culinary offer on the consumer website, one can easily find suggestions under *Food and drink* by hovering over the subtitle *Experiences*. The opening page includes a promotional video showing different kinds of gastronomy, farming and farmers markets. It is short but successfully represents the variety of food that Ireland offers. Below the video, one can find an overview of food-related attractions, such as food trails, food festivals and farmers markets. In sections, the site promotes Ireland's natural produce. One can read more about certain kinds of food in specific areas or learn more about the best cafés and restaurants. Traditional meals and places can be found as well. The last section refers to cookery schools, festivals and tours. For each section, examples can be opened in another tab to view details. The site ends with recommendations: A whiskey tour, farmer's markets and Northern Ireland. The webpage is nicely structured. However, the overview of attractions (food trails etc.) does not let the webpage visitor click on a category to find out more. Should one wish to view a list of food trails or festivals, it is not clear how to do so. Looking for food trails, for example, remains unsuccessful until using the search field. One must actively search for "food trails" and then, scroll further down to find "Fabulous Food Trails" in the section "See & Do". After having selected this, the visitor is brought to a subpage focussing on touring holidays in Dublin. As part of a slide show, the first page presents the "Fab Food Trails". Details can be viewed by hitting "Read more" or the visitor can choose to visit the separate webpage to learn more about the food trails. A misleading expression given in the headline of the slide show is the wording "Pub crawls". This might be misunderstood as an attraction concentrating on the exploring of Ireland's alcoholic drinks rather than referring to food trails. On the first page of that slide show, one can proceed to the second page by clicking on an arrow or choose the "List view", which opens all ten search results for food trails. The list includes pub crawls, walking tours to discover both food and drinks as well as food trails. For every listed item, a separate webpage can be opened. (Tourism Ireland, n.d.) The list is a nice overview, providing further details which can easily be accessed. However, it is disappointing that there was no hyperlink implemented on the "Food and Drink" page, see figure 2, leading to the above described subpage with one click. Visitors should be led to the aspects of culinary tourism, food trails being an example in this case, rather than be required to actively search for it. There are too many steps to finding food trails on this webpage, causing the risk of visitors to lose

interest and stop researching. Another disadvantage is the default setting of the search criteria when opening the list view of search results. The listed trails are to be found only in Dublin due to the city being set under “Where?”. One will have to amend this manually to “Republic of Ireland” to receive nation-wide search results. (Ireland.com, n.d.)

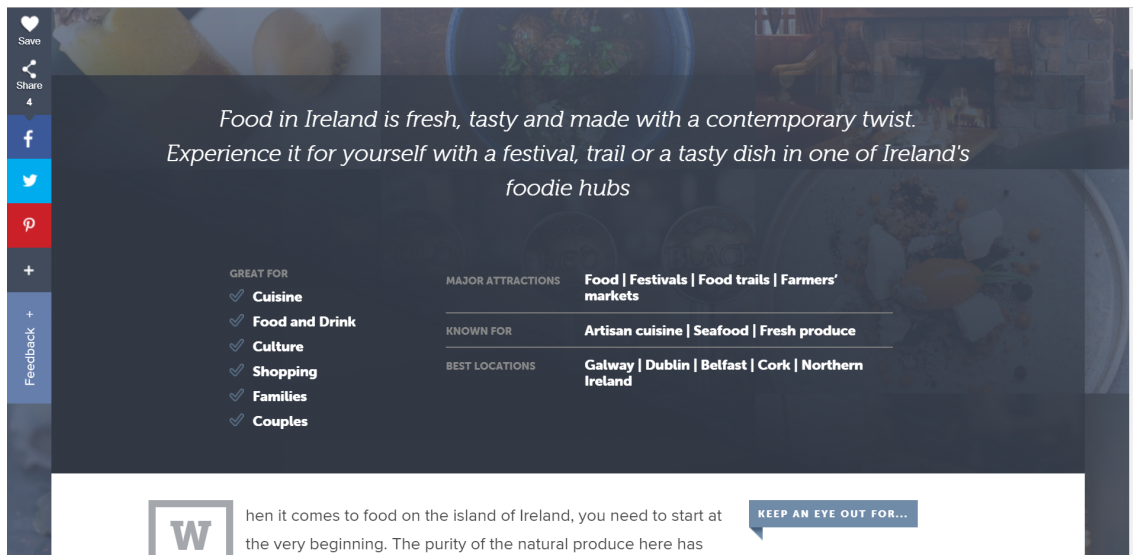


Figure 2. Ireland.com. (n.d.) *Food and Drink*. Retrieved December 11, 2017, from <https://www.ireland.com/en-gb/what-is-available/food-and-drink/>. Screenshot by author

Just as one needs to search for food trails, interested visitors must do the same for food festivals, as there is no hyperlink implemented on the page shown in figure 2. Farmer’s markets however, can be discovered more easily, as this category is being promoted under “We Recommend” further down the page. After selecting “Farmer’s markets”, one can read about the characteristics of Irish markets distinguishing them from others. A quote of Darina Allen, who started the movement is included as well. Further down, Tourism Ireland gives short descriptions to five recommendable markets. (Ireland.com, n.d.) On the bottom of the page different suggestions regarding food in Ireland can be seen and selected to continue the research.

Ireland.com provides sufficient information for planning one’s culinary holidays in Ireland, however, the visitor is not led to the information but required to search pro-actively, increasing the number of clicks and consequently extending the time one is spending on the webpage. Certain visitors might be prepared and willing to do so because they know what they are looking for. But there might be visitors trying to gain inspiration and create an overview for themselves regarding the offer. This is very difficult for someone who does know which kind of activities there in culinary tourism, as there is no guidance on this webpage. Visitors should be directed more in line with pro-active promotion. As is it

now, potential visitors that are thinking about culinary holidays in Ireland for the first time, might lose interest and simply switch to other destinations. And that simply because the research takes a little too much time, a problem easily solved by the according IT department.

As mentioned above, Fáilte Ireland launched discoverireland.com for the promotion of the country as a tourism destination. This page has also been examined with regards to the search for culinary vacation in Ireland from a potential visitor's perspective. Unlike Ireland.com, this webpage leads to the required information with one click. On the start page, a visitor can simply hover over "Things to do" and select "Irish Food". They are led to a page providing an overview of food trails, food markets, cookery schools and restaurants in the centre of the page, just below certain suggestions chocolate-related attractions, cookery schools as well as craft brewing experiences. The table in the centre of the page listing the attractions of the sections mentioned above can be sorted alphabetically or by rating. The visitor can also decide whether to view 20, 40 or 80 results per page. One can furthermore reduce the results to specific areas. The list is a perfectly structured overview enabling visitors to gain a quick impression of the overall offer. Moreover, every attraction mentioned is hyperlinked. Further information can easily be viewed by clicking on the attraction of interest. This alone makes this webpage much more recommendable than Tourism Ireland's consumer website. On the left-hand side of the "Irish Food" page on discoverireland.com, *food trail highlights* and some small calendar offer shortcuts to specific food trails, to "Festivals & Events" and even to "Foodie TV". On the left-hand side of the list of food trails, food markets, cookery schools and restaurants one can see two events taking place in the current or following week. By selecting "Show all Festivals and Events", the visitor is led to the subpage "What's on". Search results are automatically reduced to food festivals but can be filtered differently, such as by a start and ending date, allowing visitors to specifically look for events taking place during their stay in Ireland. The results can furthermore be reduced to certain counties and one can choose between a map view and list view. Going back to our original page "Food in Ireland", the before mentioned "Foodie TV" is implemented on the left-hand side as well. By selecting it, the visitor comes to an overview of promotional and informative videos, mostly related to food festivals but also to certain food heritage, such as potatoes or cheese. Finally, related websites are shown with regards to food in Ireland. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) One example is bordbia.ie, the website of the Irish Food Board. (Bord Bia, n.d.)

Discoverireland.com is a convenient and informative tool to get to know the touristic offer in Ireland. Only by one click, visitors can discover all aspects of culinary tourism in Ireland at once without being overwhelmed. The site is well-structured and can be adapted to the individual needs of each visitor by refining the search. The site is suitable for visitors only looking for inspiration, let us call them first-time culinary tourists, as well as experienced food travellers looking for specific offers while planning their trip. It is therefore very recommendable as a research tool for all kinds of culinary tourists.

The screenshot displays the 'Discover Irish cuisine' section of the Discover Ireland website. On the left, there are three food trail highlights: 'Burren Food Trail' (beef and lamb), 'Trail Kilkenny' (artisan cheese and fine city eateries), and 'Irish Whiskey Trail' (a free touring guide to distilleries). Below these is a 'This Week' and 'Coming Up' section listing events like 'Small Roads Theatre and Dining Festival' and 'Listowel Food Fair'. The main content area features a search bar for restaurants, a grid of food images, and navigation buttons for 'Food trails', 'Food markets', 'Cookery schools', and 'Restaurants'. A pagination bar shows 'Showing 1-20 of 33' results, with '1 2 Last' and 'Sort by: Random' options. The first result is 'Carlingford Brewing Company', described as a food trail and tour.

Figure 3. Discoverireland.com. (n.d.). *Things to do – Irish Food*. Retrieved December 11, 2017, from <https://www.discoverireland.ie/Things-To-Do/Food-in-Ireland>. Screenshot by author

5.3 Publications by Ireland's tourism authorities

5.3.1 Food Tourism Implementation Framework

Besides the existing of an offer with regards to food tourism, according strategic measurements must be taken by the country's responsible tourism authority, not only for promotional but organizational purposes. It is not enough for activities and attractions to be available if they are not advertised. Ireland recognized culinary tourism as a segment in 2010 and published a Food Tourism Implementation Framework. The national framework was created for the years 2011 – 2013 by Fáilte Ireland. It expresses the popularity of food tourism in other destinations and the importance of fundamental cooperation between the stakeholders of the segment for it to be successful. Strategy and cooperation are keywords

in the framework, which was developed by a working group of representatives of the tourism industry. The priority tasks for the framework were the development and promotion of a clear brand, value and quality, the support of the sector, appropriate research and benchmarking. With the help of these approaches, Fáilte Ireland aimed to support stakeholders of culinary tourism, increase the country's recognition as a food tourism destination and ensure high quality within the segment itself. A major aim expressed in the framework was to exceed the visitors' expectations by offering unique experiences. After having reviewed visitor's perceptions, Fáilte Ireland was aware of an overall positive evaluation of the country's food related services. However, direct competitors were better rated regarding prices. Furthermore, the need to ensure high quality standards among all food tourism stakeholders was recognized as well as the need for strategy and coordination. The latter is consequently the purpose of the food tourism implementation framework. The framework was created in accordance with The Visitor Experiential Model, which includes the following crucial criteria: Quality and Value, Availability and Authenticity. It was supposed to direct and guide all stakeholders involved in food tourism with the help of three further activities: Research and Benchmarking, Marketing and Promotion, Business and Sector Supports. In the year of the framework's publication, the offer with regards to food tourism had already been versatile and represented a significant economic value, with food and drink being the largest integral of visitor expenditure. The identified target segment for culinary tourism were culturally interested visitors, mainly coming from the USA and Great Britain. Domestic visitors had shown increasing interest in food related activities, proven by rising numbers at food fairs for example. With regards to visitor satisfaction, Ireland successfully exceeded the expectations for 80% of American visitors. However, 30% of British and 25% of German visitors left disappointed. Fáilte Ireland therefore recognized the need for improvement here. The quality of Irish food and the food-related offer were rated high, especially the service, and yet showed potential to improve due to the evaluation of the price-performance ratio negatively influencing the visitor's expectations. The tourism authority collected the stakeholders involved in food tourism in Ireland and illustrated them in table 1. When having a look at the table, one attraction seems to be missing: food trails. For whatever reason, those are not included in this overview. Fáilte Ireland expresses the challenges coming with the great variety of attractions, mainly the maintenance of high quality amongst all. As part of the preparation of the framework, Fáilte Ireland carried out a SWOT analysis in accordance with the before mentioned Visitor Experience Model. The

results showed the potential of creating truly authentic and unique food experiences using the already positive image of Ireland as an unspoilt and natural destination. In line with that, the country would have to successfully differentiate itself from competing destinations, which requires well-thought-out strategies and promotional campaigns. Another potential lied in food interlinking visitors and locals, enabling tourists to closely experience the country’s culture and heritage. Therein lies the opportunity to promote unique experiences. Also related to promotion, the analysis identified food as a none-well-presented imagery in promotional media. Consequently, this field could not be noticed as a unique attraction before. Measurements towards an according promotion however would also increase the risk of disappointing visitors should the expectations created through marketing not be met. Regarding visitor satisfaction the framework expresses the need for constant monitoring and reacting to trends, as the latter can affect expectations. The last but significant aspect pointed out is the insufficient accessibility of locally produced food. This refers to the identification of local produce on menus in restaurants, hotels etc., which was recognized as unsatisfactory through the analysis. (Fáilte Ireland, 2010)

CATEGORY	ESTABLISHMENTS	EMPLOYEES
Producers <i>(artisan, speciality and small food firms)</i>	350	3,000 est. <i>(Source: Bord Bia)</i>
Hotels	902	52,300
Guesthouses	303	1,900
Self Catering <i>Comprises – 95 Caravan and Camping, 103 Hostels, 196 Group Self catering</i>	421	3,000
Licensed Restaurants	2,295	32,900
Non Licensed Restaurants	1,337	16,100
Public Houses	7,843	54,000
Food Markets <i>This includes Farmer and Country Markets, of which 34 adhere to the Good Practice Standard for Farmers’ Markets launched by Bord Bia June 2009</i>	186	N/A
Food Festivals	47	
Cookery Schools	42	
Total	13,696	163,200

Table 1. *Sector composition and employment levels* (Fáilte Ireland, 2010, p. 13)

When participating in the 2010 Culinary Tourism World Summit in Canada, Fáilte Ireland received the confirmation that the above stated challenges had been identified correctly.

Great potential was confirmed to be given but requiring according coordination between the stakeholders. (Fáilte Ireland, 2010) Based on the main challenges, the implementation framework was established to provide a strategic guideline with regards to the promotion of the country as a culinary destination as well as actions towards securing that expectations would not only be met but exceeded. Another purpose was to increase all stakeholders' benefits along with the development of culinary tourism. The framework was created in accordance with certain principles, as shown in figure 4.



Figure 4. *Food Destination Development Principles*. (Fáilte Ireland, 2010, p.16)

As Fáilte Ireland (2010) states, “[t]he implementation framework, designed in line with these principles, is primarily concerned with increasing the availability, authenticity, quality and value for money of local and regional food-related experiences.” (p. 16). Strong emphasis would lie on typically Irish food-related offers and activities. (Fáilte Ireland, n.d.) The benefits expected from applying this framework were more effective marketing and promotion, the development of a reputation for quality food and value, increased visitor satisfaction, improved profitability, increased visitor numbers and revenue. The framework was guided by a new vision to deliver unforgettable food experiences for visitors:

“Ireland will be recognized by visitors for the availability, quality and value of our local and regional food experiences which evokes a unique sense of place, culture and hospitality.” (Fáilte Ireland, 2010, p. 17)

The realization of the framework would reflect the responses to the through the SWOT analysis identified challenges and opportunities, as shown in figure 5.

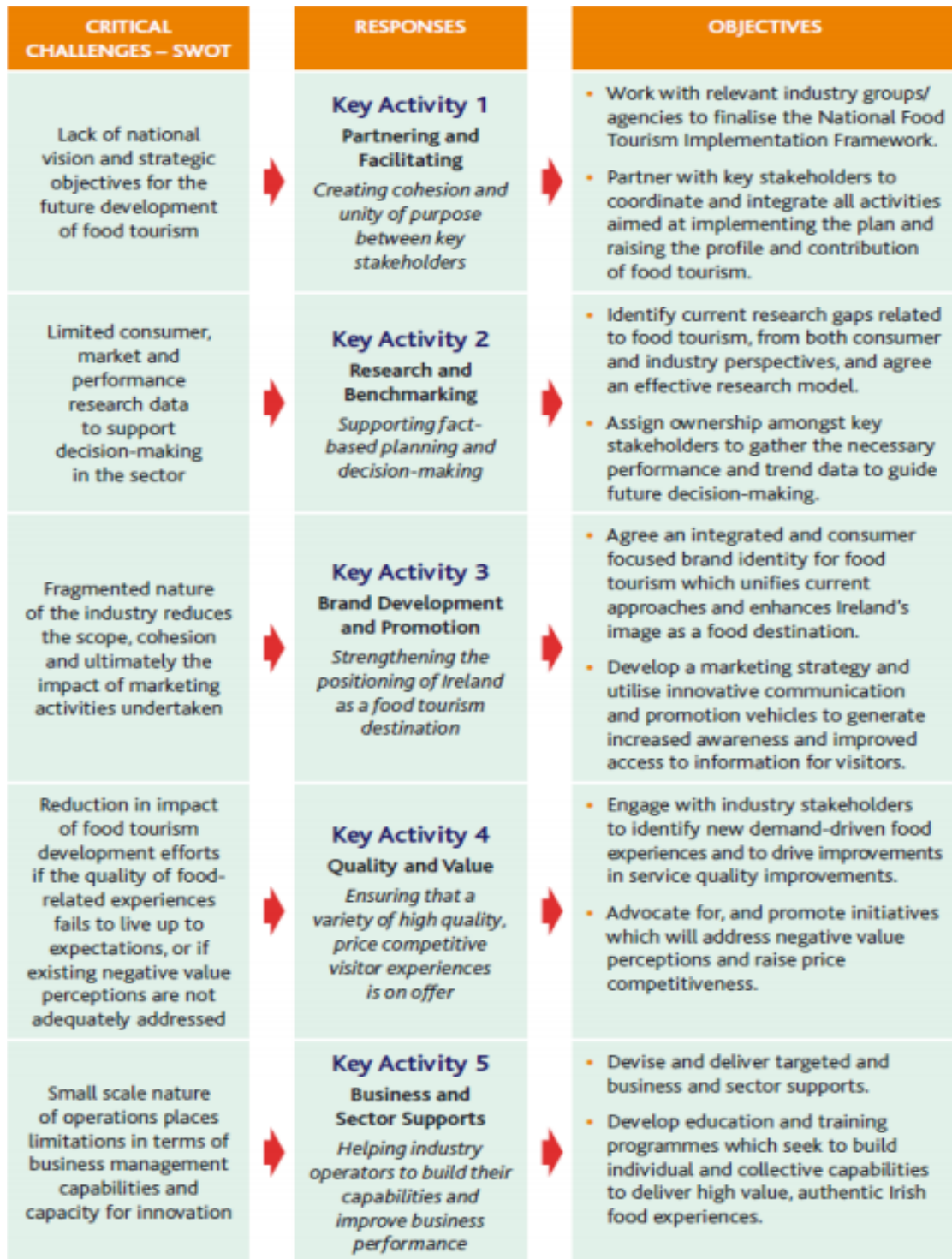


Figure 5. *Key Activities and Objectives*. (Fáilte Ireland, 2010, p.18)

The key objectives of the framework would therefore be the growth in visitor numbers, revenue and food tourism related employment, new business opportunities for producers and providers, better value for money and enhanced visitor satisfaction levels, improved

product quality and service standards as well as an expanded range and variety of authentic Irish food experiences. To achieve all this, the board determined priority tasks, which were subdivided in categories. *Partnering and facilitating* is one category, which involves the coordination of all stakeholders. On the one hand, this comes with the challenge of meeting individual needs, on the other hand, it provides the opportunity for the different interest groups to develop the ability to work together in order to achieve a common goal rather than focussing on self-interest. *Research and Benchmarking* is a category emphasising accurate and up-to-date research. In line with that, a framework would be established to collect data, enabling the industry to constantly monitor consumer needs and expectations. The framework would involve agreed roles and responsibilities amongst the stakeholders. *Brand Development and Promotion* shall deliver a clear message to visitors with regards to the offer. Not only the content but also tools and platforms would be improved to increase the awareness of food-related attractions. *Quality and Value*, as a category, focusses on the visitor satisfaction. Addressing the performance-ratio issue identified in the before mentioned survey, all players would need to improve their offer regarding variety, accessibility and pricing. This is a challenging task, since it forces each player to take ownership and show self-responsibility. *Business and Sector Support* had been identified to be needed among stakeholders of food tourism. This category of tasks would involve an improved promotion of available resources as well as educational opportunities. Moreover, Fáilte Ireland intended to promote innovation and support new initiatives. With the above listed tasks, the board aimed to “[...] maximise [the] attractiveness as a food tourism destination in terms of variety, quality and perceived value for money.” (Fáilte Ireland, 2010, p.25) This would require the support of Fáilte Ireland as well as ownership on the part of all stakeholders. (Fáilte Ireland, 2010)

The Implementation Framework perfectly justifies the necessity of culinary tourism having to be coordinated for it to be a successful tourism area. Especially the development of a brand and according promotion are very important, as the offer was already given but not yet advertised as much as it could have been. The framework is strong regarding concrete measurements to be taken. In some cases, publications like this can seem rather general and theoretical. However, this document states clearly what needs to be done and how. The actions to be taken are described comprehensively and promise to show tangible results. As the author did not know the promotional webpages prior to the implementation of food tourism, it was not possible to compare their state before and after the realization of the

framework. Only its current state could be assessed, which still was sufficient for the analysis to be carried out. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to be able to identify changes on ireland.com or discoverireland.com after the implementation of food tourism.

5.3.2 Food Tourism Activity Plan

Following the implementation framework, the Food Tourism Activity Plan was developed for the years 2014-2016. In this document, the outcome of the implementation framework is being evaluated and further steps are being determined. The plan foresees experiential tourism as an objective for the further development of culinary tourism as a segment. The implementation of the framework had shown success regarding visitor perceptions. The satisfaction had significantly increased, as reflected in table 2.

	2010			2012	
	% of respondents signifying the highest satisfaction rating				
	Hotel	Pub	→	Hotel	Pub
Quality	28%	28%	→	47%	36%
Price	15%	15%	→	34%	25%
Service	36%	35%	→	52%	43%

Source: Fáilte Ireland Holiday Maker Surveys

Table 2. *Trends in visitor perceptions regarding their food experiences between 2010 and 2012.* (Fáilte Ireland, 2013, p.5)

With regards to the five areas of activity, the framework resulted in tangible outcomes, showing that the awareness of the segment’s potential and importance was successfully raised. The outcomes can be seen in table 3.

Partnering and Facilitating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Food Tourism Development Network was established comprising 22 peer-nominated Food Ambassadors.
Research and Benchmarking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad range of applied and academic research has been completed to better inform food tourism developments.
Brand Development and Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food tourism was integrated into Discover Ireland domestic campaigns; one food specific campaign alone had a reach of 3.5 million.
Quality and Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'Place on a Plate' initiative encouraged businesses to promote and deliver memorable food experiences and impacted over 300 operators.
Business Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extensive suite of online food-focused business tools has been added to the Fáilte Ireland corporate website.

Table 3. *Outcomes from the Food Implementation Framework.* (Fáilte Ireland, 2013, p.5)

The framework, therefore, met the expectations set by the board. However, the strategic planning was to be continued properly to sustain and increase the success of the framework. In line with that, Fáilte Ireland chose the following approach for further development: experiential tourism. This concept entails creating a food experience by combining elements in the most memorable and unique way. The board had defined three dimensions for the creation of food experiences: service, stories and product. Especially food experiences are being considered a great contribution to Ireland’s tourism in general. Key market segments had been identified to which the Irish food experience would appeal most, so that marketing strategies could be developed accordingly. Three segments were prioritised: *social energisers*, *culturally curious* and *great escapers*. Visitors were thereby categorized by their motivation, which differentiates this plan from the former model, which was based on needs. As the activity plan follows up on the implementation framework, the board shifted its priorities and emphasis. The implementation of food tourism had successfully increased the awareness of the importance of food tourism and helped creating a common objective among all stakeholders involved in this segment. The activity plan would now build on this motivation as a foundation, with Fáilte Ireland as a supportive and guiding institution, rather than determining. (Fáilte Ireland, 2013) Together with Food Ambassadors and Food Operators, the board would work towards the realization of the following vision: “Ireland will be recognized by visitors for memorable food experiences which evoke a unique sense of place, culture and hospitality.” (Fáilte Ireland, 2012, p.10) To achieve this vision, six objectives were determined, which are listed below:

- “To provide the necessary thought leadership for food experience development in Ireland, acting as catalyst for change and empowering others to achieve it.

- To gather and disseminate market insights and best practices which will inform all food experience developments in Irish tourism.
- To engage with national and local stakeholders to promote the concept of experience development, emphasise the role that food plays within it, and describe how the concept can be practically applied.
- To work with Food Ambassadors to continue raising awareness of the great Irish food experiences available and building our food reputation at home and abroad.
- To provide a suite of direct and online resources which contribute to the expansion of memorable food experiences throughout Ireland.
- To future-proof the industry by continuously identifying existing and potential capability gaps and liaising with education providers on how to bridge them.”
(Fáilte Ireland, 2013, p.10)

The objectives have been integrated in an intervention model, developed by Fáilte Ireland for the activity plan. This model furthermore references key factors as to how the board will support food tourism, namely national and local focus as well as quality standards and education. The activities planned were meant to be guided by certain strategic themes: thought leadership (based on gathered insights and best practices), enhancing food experiences (by partnering with internal and external stakeholders), championing food experiences (involving both the promotion of existing experiences and the creation of new ones) and capacity building (constant identification of skills and knowledge, gaps and solutions). The three main activities addressing these themes were: inform, engage and enable. (Fáilte Ireland, 2013) Applied, the intervention model resulted in figure 6.

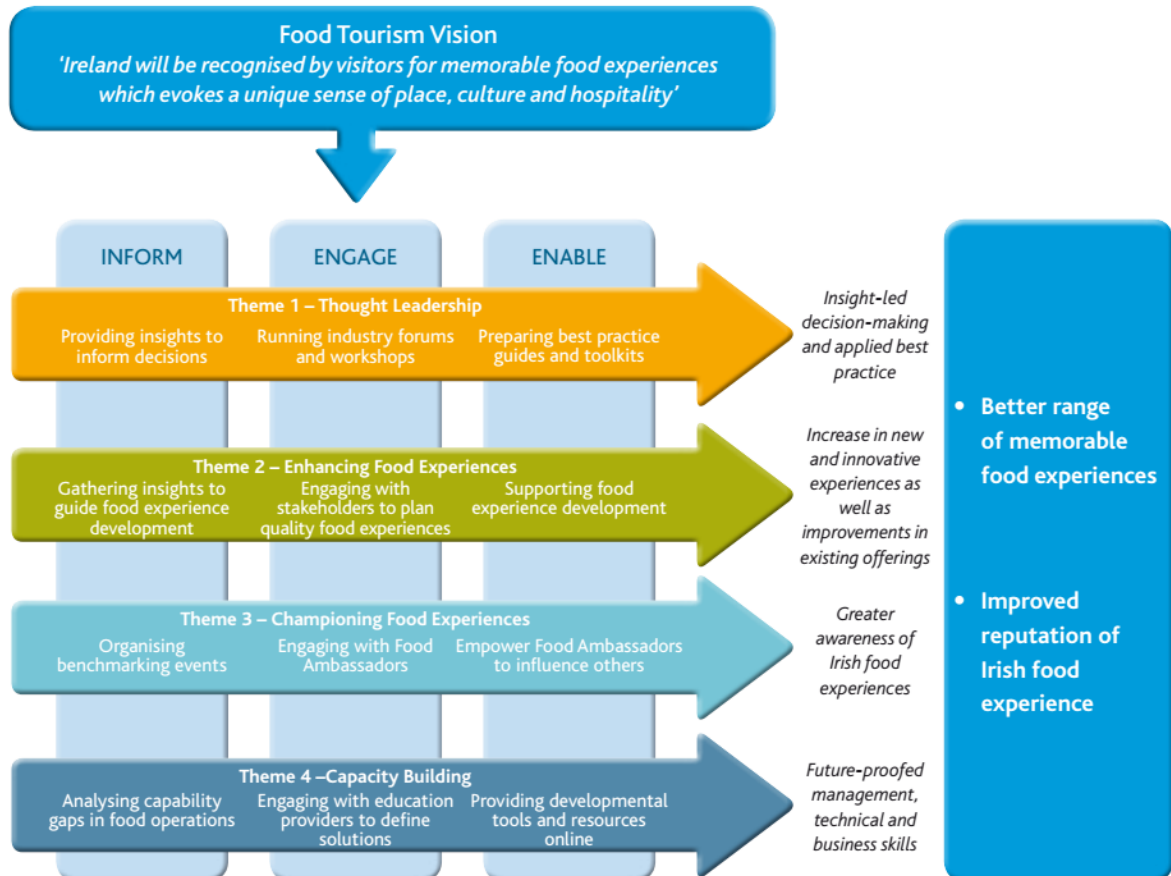


Figure 6. *Food Tourism Intervention Model – Application.* (Fáilte Ireland, 2013, p.46)

As these activities are quite general, Fáilte Ireland created an activity map, precisising the steps to be taken towards the development of unique food experiences. The board points out that it is important not only to coordinate the stakeholders to maintain a common vision from their side but also for the stakeholders themselves to pro-actively contribute to the development process and take ownership. Plans and maps provided by Fáilte Ireland may be used as guidelines and starting points for stakeholders to develop their individual strategies. The activity map includes 10 activities, which have been assigned to the strategic themes, whereby they can apply to more than one theme. For each activity, the board defined two to three key tasks, specifying the actions that will be taken in the realization process. The main activities are displayed in the form of a list shown below. The key tasks of the activities can be found on page 49 – 51 in the Food Tourism Activity Plan 2014-2016. (Fáilte Ireland, 2013)

List of Activities:

Activity 1: Gather and disseminate research and insights

Activity 2: Create cohesion and unity of purpose across the food tourism landscape

Activity 3: Develop a unified and differentiating message around Irish food experiences to enable a consistent marketing approach

Activity 4: Support improved Promotion of Irish Food Experiences

Activity 5: Develop a practical model to enable operators to deliver food experiences

Activity 6: Oversee the evolution of the Food Tourism Development Network

Activity 7: Influence, stimulate and cultivate the development of innovative food experiences

Activity 8: Enable development of visitor ready food experiences

Activity 9: Assist and enhance quality and standards in delivering world class experiences

Activity 10: Advocate for the future-proofing of tourism and hospitality skills and capabilities

The board had also determined performance indicators to monitor the progress of the implementation and later impact of the plan. The key performance indicators were assigned to the strategic themes. In the conclusion, Fáilte Ireland emphasizes that the activities and key tasks are responsive to the suggestions of the Food Ambassadors which were consulted for the establishment of the Food Tourism Activity Plan 2014-2016. With the contribution of key stakeholders, the realization of the plan would not only contribute to the optimization of the segment culinary tourism in Ireland but also of tourism in general, since it could positively impact the country's overall image as a destination. (Fáilte Ireland, 2013)

After having examined the promotional webpages regarding culinary tourism, it is noticeable that of the above listed activities, number 4 to be exact, seems to have been carried out only partially. As shown in a previous chapter, discoverisland.com indeed promotes food tourism in Ireland perfectly. Ireland.com on the other hand still requires improvement due to the effort required to gather information. It is to be hoped that according changes are already planned or being worked on, as online resources were

recognized as significant in figure 6. Therefore, not just one webpage should have been optimized in this matter.

5.3.3 Facts and Figures

According to the quite recent evolution of food tourism in Ireland, the country's visitor reports, called "Facts & Figures" from the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 have been reviewed. There was no report for 2017 when this paper was written. As mentioned earlier, Ireland has been showing constant growth in visitor numbers. The number has grown from 8.4 million in 2014 to 9.5 million 2015 and a record number of 10.3 million visitors in 2016. The island's travel industry is undeniably successful and consequently reflects a significant part of the economy. In 2016, the revenue broke a record with 5.3 billion EUR. Each report shows where visitors came from. Ireland's strongest key market is Great Britain with an average share of 43.67% in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016. Also displayed are the main reasons for travelling to Ireland. These are categorized into: holiday, visiting friends and family, business and other. The revenue is divided in sections to show what visitors spent money for during their stay, which are: Bed & Board, Food & Drink, Sightseeing & Entertainment, Internal Transport, Shopping and Misc. With an average of 33.33% in the three years reviewed, food and drink represent a crucial part of visitor's spending.

(Tourism Ireland, 2014, 2015 & 2016) This number proves the importance of this section. The reports also show how long visitors generally staid and where. Moreover, the holiday makers are divided in socio economic groups, age groups and first-time or repeating visitors. Other than the reports from 2014 and 2015, the facts and figures from 2016 also include a diagram showing global tourism trends. Ireland's visitor numbers are being compared to tourism in Europe and world tourism. As this nicely reflects the country's success in tourism, it will hopefully be included in future facts and figures.

Unfortunately, the reports do not refer to culinary tourism or food as a reason for visitors to travel to Ireland. The category "holiday" as a reason could simply be divided into subcategories, which could be reflected in only one more graphic in these reports. People go on holidays for several reasons. Therefore, it might be useful for this research category to be more specific. Subcategories could be: food, wellness, physical activities (e.g. hiking) or events. It could show if tourists were aware of Ireland's culinary offer and if it was the or one of the motivations to travel to the green island.

5.3.4 Situation and Outlook Analysis Reports

The Situation & Outlook Analysis Reports are published every month. The oldest report available on tourismireland.com is from December 2013, it is to be assumed that this was the first SOAR published. Each report contains data reflecting the development of tourism in Ireland. The focus lies on economic aspects. Based on the numbers from the past, each report involves estimated trends for the upcoming months.

Having reviewed the SOAR from December 2015, 2016 and 2017, it becomes, again, clear that most of Ireland's visitors are coming from the United Kingdom; however, this market has been showing a decrease in 2017. Other key markets are Mainland Europe and North America. (Tourism Ireland, 2015, 2016 & 2017) Besides arrivals and visitors, each report also includes data regarding air and sea connectivity, total passenger numbers divided by airports and hotel accommodation. Furthermore, an outlook for the following year is provided, as the reviewed reports have been published in December. This outlook is based on statements made by stakeholders of the industry. For the year 2018, the board expected hotel prices and availability to continue being an issue for the British market in comparison with other destinations, which would require corresponding actions in development strategies. For the markets North America and Australia, the collected data and trends would assume rather steadily increasing visitor numbers. The same is expected for Mainland Europe, however, in central areas like Dublin, prices and availability must be treated with conscious. (Tourism Ireland, 2018)

These reports are very general and therefore, do not refer to tourism areas, such as culinary tourism. The purpose of these documents lies elsewhere. Therefore, there is no suggestion to be made in relation to food tourism. The inclusion of this topic makes more sense in other sorts of publications.

5.3.5 Market Profiles

Market Profiles created by Tourism Ireland have been reviewed as well during this paper's analysis. These profiles have been established for different markets, each summarizing facts about Ireland's visitors, on which future development plans can be based on. For this paper, the focus lies on Great Britain, USA, and Germany, as these have been the key markets for years.

47% of Ireland's visitors in 2016 came from Great Britain, which reflects an increase of 8% compared to the previous year. The revenue share was 28% of all visitors to Ireland.

37% of this revenue was spent on food and drinks by each visitor. That exceeds the spend on accommodation by 10% and proves the role this area plays in the tourism product. The reason for the British to visit Ireland was mostly to visit family and friends. However, 35% were holiday makers, which is a strong number compared to business visitors, which made 17%. Ireland is the 5th most popular destination among the British, as 77% are interested in visiting the island. 44% are even planning to visit in the next three years, which is a very promising number. The best prospects for Ireland are two core segments; culturally curious and social energizer holiday makers, as they account for 54% of all holidaymakers from Great Britain. This is especially interesting concerning culinary tourism, as the same segments were identified as being most relevant for the promotion of food tourism. 52% of Ireland's visitors used search engines to gather inspiration and decide on a destination. 63% of all British visitors planned their trip using online sources. Hence, online promotion is crucial to maintain or rather increase visitor numbers. (Tourism Ireland, 2017)

Mainland Europe is the second most important market for the island of Ireland, as 15% of all visitors in 2016 came from Germany (6%), France (5%), Spain (4%) and Italy (3%). For this paper, the focus lied on the market profile for Germany, as it is the third largest market. German visitors made 8% of the overall revenue. Each German visitor spent 30% of their share on food and drinks. 66% of the German visitors were holidaymakers, of which 46% were culturally curious. 72% of the Germans are interested in visiting Ireland, which makes the island the 8th most popular destination for this market. 66% percent of the German visitors gathered inspiration through search engines and incredible 94% planned their visit using online sources. The German market practically relies on online information and promotion. (Tourism Ireland, 2017) With that being said, it is very unfortunate that discoverisland.com, the most useful webpage regarding research related to culinary tourism, is only available in English. Almost half of the German visitors are culturally curious and, consequently, potential culinary tourists. It could have such a great effect on the success of food tourism's promotion if information on discoverisland.com was available in German. This might turn out to be a key market with regards to culinary tourism in Ireland, if according action is taken.

The USA was the second largest source market with a 13% share of all visitors in 2016. Each visitor from the USA spent 31% revenue on food and drinks, just a little less than on accommodation (33%). 67% of visitors from the USA were holidaymakers. 39% of these were culturally curious and 22% were social energizers. The island of Ireland is the USA's

8th most popular destination with 67% interested holidaymakers. 39% are planning on visiting in the next three years. It is quite clear how these potential visitors are gaining information, as 62% last year used search engines for inspiration and impressive 95% used online sources to plan their visit. Hence, promotion should be carried out accordingly on those channels. (Tourism Ireland, 2017) As already stated above, because of the intense use of online resources, it is very important to maintain the currently ideal structure of discoverireland.com but, more importantly, to improve the promotion of culinary tourism on ireland.com to educate potential visitors about what this country can offer in connection to this. However, the relevant segments are strongly represented amongst American holidaymakers. Therefore, it is questionable if pro-active promotion of culinary tourism would be profitable regarding the American market.

5.3.6 GB path to growth 2012-2016

Since Great Britain is the most important key market, the author has examined publications related to marketing strategies addressing this very market. Ireland's latest publication when this paper was established was the *GB Path to Growth*, a development plan for 2012-2016, published by Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC). Together, they share the title *The Tourism Recovery Taskforce*. The path involves marketing strategies addressing the core target segments identified regarding visitors from Great Britain, which are *social energizers*, *culturally curious* and *secret escapers*, which are the same segments identified to be relevant for culinary tourism. The *social energizers* usually travel in groups or as couples, are quite young and seek something new and exciting. The *culturally curious* come alone or with their partner, are older and looking for experiences that broaden their mind by learning something new. *Secret escapers* are young and love to spend their stay in preferably untouched rural areas to be close to nature. The reasons for focussing on these segments are also given in the document. *Social energizers* offer the instantaneous opportunity, as the offer they are seeking is already there, it only needs to be promoted more efficiently. *Culturally curious* are customers of high value, since their interest lies in all side of the country (city, rural areas etc.). The *great escapers* are mostly seeking relaxing holidays in rural areas, which Ireland has the potential of delivering. (The Tourism Recovery Taskforce, 2012) It is stated, that “[i]f the country would manage to increase the share in all three segments, this could lead to 137.000 additional visitors. We can grow our share by developing and communicating the experiences (see section 3.2) in

the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland (NI) that are relevant to each segment. This implies a move from product development to experience development, and a shift from capital investment to investment in cultural animation and entertainment.” (The Tourism Recovery Taskforce, 2012, p.19).

Workshops helped identifying key words and focus aspects. In line with these, experience propositions for each market segment were developed to respond to motivations, requirements and interests. For *social energizers* those were: City Plus (city plus coastal and mountain areas), festivals and events, contemporary music and culture, city animation tours, markets (food and others) and city card (visitor pass). The propositions for the *culturally curious* were: The Hibernian Heritage Trail, The Wild Atlantic Way, Titanic and Maritime Belfast, Giants Causeway and The Causeway Coastal Route as well as Derry and Londonderry. For the *great escapers*, experiences would have to be more structured. Scenic rural areas exist. However, their potential would have to be unlocked. (The Tourism Recovery Taskforce, 2012) Table 4 shows the propositions for each segment.

Target segment	Experience type	Proposition
Social Energisers	Vibe of the City	For people who are seeking fun and excitement, immerse yourself in Dublin, Belfast and our other great cities' energetic vibe for the whole weekend. You can really be at the heart of things, day and night. Get involved in the extraordinary day-time experiences and adventures inside the city and close by. And later, enjoy the unique atmosphere of our night-time experiences.
Culturally Curious	Living Historical Stories Awakening the Senses	For people who like to broaden their minds, immerse yourself in the fascinating discoveries you can make about Ireland's rich and diverse history and culture. Be exposed to our different way of seeing the world, and find out how we bring it all to life. These inspiring and interesting experiences are all within easy reach of each other.
Great Escapers	Living Historical Stories Getting Active in Nature	For explorers, escape your day-to-day routine and immerse yourself in Ireland's beautiful scenery and nature, to escape your day to day routines. Reconnect and bond with your loved ones and enjoy our outstanding natural phenomena and unrivalled historical sights, It couldn't be easier or more accessible than in Ireland.

Table 4. *Experience propositions by target segment and experience type.* (The Tourism Recovery Taskforce, 2012, p.19)

The communications programme designed in line with this development plan was meant to inspire and shorten the decision-making process. The efficiency would be increased choosing channels according to each segment. The best channels for *social energizers* would be television, radio, cinema, apps and social media. The *culturally curious* are best reached through history and food targeted campaigns, TV, news, bulletins radio and selected webpages. *Great escapers* would not be approached directly, but addressed via,

for example, online content, social media, PR and lifestyle networks. The effectiveness of the chosen channels would be monitored and evaluated. All three segments strongly use online sources to both gather information and book their holidays. Booking webpages, special interest tour operators and online tourism agencies would therefore play a big role in proposing experiences to each segment. Moreover, the information on promotional webpages, such as discoverireland.com, would have to be revised. Addressing the value would also be important, however, not necessarily regarding prices but rather quality. One example mentioned are *Better Food Value Experiences*, referring to mid-day dining, which is important to British visitors but requires improvement. In line with the development plan, stakeholders of the tourism industry would create detailed operational plans for each target segment. The implementation of these plans would involve constant monitoring to measure its success. (The Tourism Recovery Taskforce, 2012)

It is striking that the identified main segments in the British market are identical with the ones identified in the Food Tourism Implementation Framework. It supports the opinion that British visitors are potential culinary tourists and according promotion could help strengthen this area. The implementation framework was published before the GB Path to Growth. Therefore, when having identified these three segments, one could have noticed this common ground easily. Marketing strategies could have related much more to food tourism. It seems obvious, but somehow, this chance was missed by the board. It lets one assume that culinary tourism was or is not yet fully seen as a profitable area by tourism authorities. Plans from the framework could have simply been adapted to the British market. Why this opportunity was not taken will remain an unanswered question.



5.4 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The most important strength in relation to culinary tourism in Ireland is the diverse offer. Experiences are already available and must only be promoted accordingly. In Ireland, one cannot only find a great variety of gastronomic offers, but also cookery schools, food trails, food festivals and more. The experiences referred to in marketing strategies published by Fáilte Ireland do exist, they do not need to be created, which enables tourism authorities to simply build on what is given and focus on promotional strategies. The culinary offer is very strong on this island.

Part of that is the agriculture, which is deeply rooted in the Irish history and a strength with regards to culinary tourism. Not only residents but also visitors prefer buying local

produce. From a tourist's point of view, visiting a farmer's market and buying produce that has been grown by an Irish farmer on Irish land could not be more authentic. It is an experience making visitors feel like one of the locals, which is the kind of experience Fáilte Ireland wanted to promote according to the before-reviewed implementation framework and activity plan. This experience does not have to be created, it is available at present. Many visitors have already made this experience. Local produce is also available in Supermarkets and Restaurants, which further proves how important agriculture is in this country. It is undeniably a strength.

Another strength is discoverisland.com. As elaborated above, this promotional webpage provides access to activities and attractions available in Ireland, inter alia regarding culinary holidays. The variety of offers related to food and drinks is perfectly reflected and further information to each offer can easily be found. It is both suitable for experienced food travellers and first-time culinary tourists. One can only gain inspiration or start with the detailed planning of their holidays in Ireland using this webpage. It is the ideal tool with regards to the promotion of culinary tourism in Ireland.

As established in the literature review, the history of food in Ireland was quite controversial. However, that is what makes it interesting. The great famine was a dark time for the Irish, but it represents the relationship of the Irish and the potato. It is a unique factor, distinguishing this destination from others and, if handled properly, it can be a competitive advantage against other European destinations. The potato still plays an important role in the Irish's nutrition, despite this vegetable causing the population to decrease rapidly. This sort of distinguishable history is therefore a strength, especially in relation to culinary tourism or rather its promotion.

Not to be forgotten, the Food Tourism Implementation Framework and Food Tourism Activity Plan are considered a strength in this analysis. These publications prove that culinary tourism had been recognized as a profitable and popular tourism area. The strategies and plans outlined in these documents were comprehensive and promising. The importance of online platforms and tools had been noticed and was considered accordingly. Key segments were identified and promotional measures developed to address each segment appropriately. There was nothing to be faulted with regards to these two publications per se. The only flaw lies in the outstanding follow-up work and the realization of elaborated strategies.

Weaknesses

Finding material regarding culinary tourism published by the tourism authorities of Ireland is quite a challenge, as one must know what to search for and invest time to locate the publications related to this topic. Having found and reviewed both the implementation framework and the activity plan, the strategies seemed very promising and it was to be assumed that the tourism authorities were eager to continue strengthening this tourism area. But, ever since the activity plan, no further publications could be found following up on these two documents. One would expect an evaluation of the execution of the strategies developed in these plans. During 2017, the author regularly screened the available material in relation to culinary tourism in Ireland and could identify no such follow-up work. It is unclear if there are further publications to come. As a result, there is a lack of continuity regarding the strategical planning of culinary tourism, which is disappointing, as the introductory work was promising and the offer is clearly given, as elaborated in the strengths-section.

The next point given as a weakness in the SWOT analysis is arguable. The reports “Facts & Figures” are held rather general. Especially with regards to the reasons for tourists to visit Ireland. The category “holidays” could easily be divided in subcategories but that might defeat the purpose of these reports. The document serves the reader as a quick overview of one year’s tourism performance. Six pages could be considered the perfect number. Nevertheless, it leaves one with open questions, especially regarding the reasons for travelling to Ireland. Furthermore, the Food Tourism Activity plan involved the activity of gathering insights, which could be done through the Facts & Figures. Holidays as a category is too general in the author’s eyes. It could be divided into subcategories, which could be represented in only one more graph. Not only in relation to culinary tourism, but also with regards to other areas more detailed information might be useful concerning the reasons for travelling to Ireland, as stated in a previous chapter.

When reviewing the country’s promotional webpages regarding the offer related to culinary tourism, the marketing was noticeably passive, especially on Ireland.com. The visitor must be aware of what they are searching for. The options are nicely displayed, information is presented in a way that one can gain a sufficient impression of products and activities related to food or drink in Ireland. However, promotion remains rather reserved, as further details must actively be searched for due to missing links. Hours can go by when trying to find information on aspects mentioned on the food tourism starting page, which is not acceptable. It might leave the impression that Ireland is entirely convinced of the

country's culinary offer being worth promoted, although articles, once found, do reflect a certain pride regarding Irish food culture. Therefore, the structure of the webpage contradicts the content. Irish food is being praised and yet not actively promoted. While discoverireland.com is very strong regarding the display and accessibility of information, the webpage itself is not easily found. When searching on Google for "culinary tourism Ireland", "food tourism Ireland", "food in Ireland" or "food and drinks in Ireland" several webpages are being suggested but discoverireland.com. The author only found this webpage during research regarding the tourism board. It is fairly easily found when simply searching for "ireland", however, culinary interested visitors might miss this webpage due to more specific search queries. Discoverireland.com is ideal to learn about the culinary offer in Ireland, however, it is questionable in how far this is relevant if potential visitors are not led to it.

The lack of pro-active online promotion also contradicts the GB path to growth as well as all other publications reviewed in this paper. Each of them highlighted the importance of online resources based on the strong usage of which by visitors. Since the diverse range of food-related experience already exists, major changes towards the success of culinary tourism would have to be made in its online marketing. Both the Implementation Framework and Activity Plan stated this.

Another weakness related to this webpage is the fact that information is only available in English. As mentioned earlier, Germany is a key market. 94% of German visitors planned their holidays using online platforms. Furthermore, 46% of this market are culturally curious, which means that almost half the German visitors are potential culinary tourists. Therefore, it would make sense to not only promote discoverisland.com to this market but translate the webpage into German. As for the moment, even if Germans interested in visiting Ireland can find this webpage, they might averse to use it for their planning due to a language barrier.

Threats

A regional analysis of outbound travel in the UK has shown that long haul travel is becoming more popular among the British. (Future Market Insights, n.d.) That means interest in European destinations could decline and – in line with that – the number of British visitors in Ireland. Visitors from the UK have been Ireland's key market for years. However, the country must be pro-active with regards to promoting itself, for example in relation to culinary tourism, which is well-established and further developed compared in

other destinations, such as Canada. Long haul destinations evoke a natural fascination as they seem to be more special the further they are away from Europe. Other examples would be places in Asia with an especially strong culinary identity, where visitors can try insects and similar unusual food, which is one of the reasons for their popularity and another factor possibly affecting the perception of Ireland among culinary interested travellers.

Furthermore, Ireland competes with destinations within Europe that naturally attract visitors because of ideal weather circumstances, a fact the green island is not known for. Regarding the British market, Ireland competes with Spain, Italy and France, as shown in figure 7. These destinations attract visitors by offering warm temperatures, a lot of sunshine and culinary specialties, such as wine or, in Italy, Pizza, Pasta and Espresso. Consequently, Ireland is facing strong competitors in relation to tourism in general but also food tourism. This is another reason to be more pro-active in promoting and advertising the island's culinary offer.

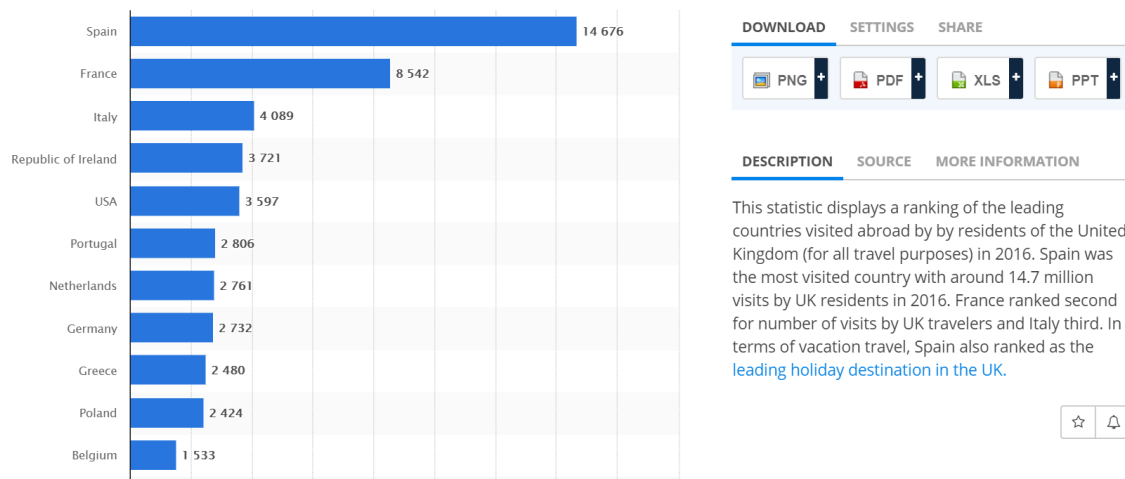


Figure 7. *statista.com (n.d.) Leading countries visited by residents of the United Kingdom (UK) in 2016 (in 1000 visits)* Retrieved December 18, 2017, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/578815/most-visited-countries-united-kingdom-uk-residents/>. Screenshot by author

Another threat could be the decrease in visitor numbers from the UK, which was mentioned earlier as one of the results of the most recent SOARs. Great Britain has been the biggest key market for years. However, Ireland cannot rest on this. Even key markets must be actively reached out to and educated about the different experiences awaiting. If according action is not taken, there might be a further decrease of British visitors, which is a serious threat.

Opportunities

As elaborated above, the importance of agriculture and the availability of local produce is striking. It enables tourists to taste the country. It also corresponds to the trend of organic food being increasingly requested in well-developed countries. Consumers prefer to know where the food they buy is coming from and the support of local producers is increasing. Ireland's strong agriculture therefore meets current needs among consumers of food and drinks and is a supporting factor during the development of culinary tourism in this country. Hence, farmers markets should be promoted more extensively as well.

Moreover, Ireland can distinguish itself from the above mentioned competing European destinations by advertising culinary experiences all-year-round, the weather is not especially warm or sunny, but quite constant. While temperatures usually remain below 25°C in Summer, they also generally stay above 0°C during winter. This consistency and, of course, frequent rainfall, contribute to a diversity of produce, especially regarding vegetables. It also supports the growth of palm trees; which visitors would not expect in this country and could be another beneficial factor used in marketing messages. The country can easily advertise its ability to deliver food experiences during all four seasons. It is a characteristic not every destination can promote.

An outbound travel analysis showed that Great Britain is one of the top five spenders with regards to outbound tourism. (Future Market Insights, n.d.) The British are mainly holiday makers and mostly culturally curious travellers with regards to the destination Ireland. Consequently, the UK can be sustained as a key market if the potential is being recognized, meaning, addressing culinary tourism in campaigns directed to the key segments, as the profile of a culinary tourists corresponds to what is being described as culturally curious travellers. The opportunities seem rather obvious but are still not being referred to in the *GB Path to Growth*, even though the identified key segments are the same as for culinary tourism. The Food Activity Plan was very promising regarding a coordinated marketing of culinary tourism, as one of the key activities was the development of a unified and differentiating message around Irish food experiences to enable a consistent marketing approach. The author was not able to identify such messages but holds the opinion that videos on the platform YouTube would be one way of sharing Ireland's food culture with the world. There are promotional videos related to tourism in Ireland. Concerning culinary tourism, however, the amount of publications is rather poor. Even though food trails could be a perfect product to be advertised and draw attention to both certain regions and specific food or drinks. They would also show how flexible and active food holidays can be. Some

of these suggestions might even be in process already.

As shown earlier in this paper, Ireland shows a great variety of experiences regarding culinary tourism. Travellers can visit food festivals, discover food trails, take cookery classes, visit farmers markets and much more. Hence, what is truly missing is a strong promotion of these attractions and activities. The challenges lie in according marketing strategies and using the right platforms. All market profiles assessed above showed a strong usage of online platforms for planning holidays. This is a circumstance that needs to be reacted to accordingly. Again, discoverireland.com is a perfect platform to gather information about Ireland's culinary offer. It just needs to be promoted to the key markets. Developing a mobile version of this webpage or even an App might be very profitable and correspond to the globally increasing use of online resources.

Another opportunity could be the history of food in this country. Even though there are negative memories, the difficult relationship with food, especially the potato, can be integrated in promotional campaigns and distinguish the country from competing destination. Berlin in Germany is an example of containing attractions that reflect dark times but are magnets for tourists, for example Checkpoint Charlie or the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Tourist attractions can be a tool of education. Therefore, the history of Irish food is a strength in relation to culinary tourism and can indeed support the promotion of it. However, in this case the offer itself or rather experiences would have to be created, for example history food trails, walking tours focussing on the history of food, museums displaying the history of food, especially the potato. It shall be mentioned that there is a monument in memory of the great famine in Dublin, located close to the Docklands at the Liffey. This could be integrated in promotional material.

A further point to be mentioned are the key markets Ireland could maintain in the past. Most of the country's visitors come from Great Britain, Mainland Europe (e.g. Germany) and the USA. A significant part of visitors from these key markets are repeat visitors. Moreover, as the Facts & Figures showed, the interest in visiting Ireland is very high in all these key markets. That allows marketing strategies to focus on specific segments and, in line with that, certain offers to be promoted, such as culinary tourism. It also necessary to differentiate both offer and promotion to maintain these key markets. As a sufficient diversity of culinary experience is already available, it must simply be included in promotional campaigns addressing the key markets to educate them about the many-sidedness of Ireland and attract different segments from these markets.

5.5 Expert Interviews

In this chapter, the results of the expert interviews will be reviewed and commented on. The answers to each question have been summarized in tables. Below each table, the drift of the experts' statements is linked to the argumentation in former chapters of this dissertation. The original answers can be found in full detail in the attachment of this paper. It must be noted that the interviewees are not players in culinary tourism in Ireland. As a result, some of the questions referring to Ireland were answered rather generally. Thus, suggestions might not be applicable, as recommended actions might have been taken already, of which the experts are simply not aware.

Table 5: Answers to question 1

1. What goals and strategies must be developed to realize Ireland potential as a culinary tourism destination?	
Expert	Summary of responses
Expert 1 Professor Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop good relationships with suitable distribution channels • Emphasize unique selling points, distinguishing the destination from others • Establish a strong internet presence in line with developed online marketing strategies, including social media
Expert 2 Professor France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus marketing strategies on the target group “deliberate culinary tourists” → highlight authenticity and sustainability
Expert 3 Journalist Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out an inventory of all gastronomic features to create a distinguishing profile • Educating tourists regarding their role in culinary tourism and the advantages of maintaining the Irish food culture for the economy of the destination (e.g. generating jobs)

Question number 1 asked the experts to define the required core settings to make Ireland be seen as a culinary tourism destination. Expert 1 explains the necessity of the cooperation between the DMOs and distribution channels to successfully promote the country's competitive advantages. It must be ensured that the desired image is being delivered to the chosen target groups. One of the main channels to position Ireland as a culinary destination would be the internet, including social media. Online presence and an according marketing strategy are crucial. This supports a major aspect pointed out in the SWOT analysis of this paper. The two main webpages run by Ireland's DMO do include food-related activities. One of the pages, however, shows significant weaknesses with

regards to the structure and layout of information. As shown, Ireland.com requires the visitor to invest a lot of time and clicks to find out more about food tourism in Ireland. If a visitor is discontent with having to put effort into their research, they are very likely to leave the webpage. They might not only be attracted by another webpage promoting Ireland, but even a webpage promoting an entirely different destination. Both webpages are linked to social media. Discoverireland.ie mentions Facebook and Instagram, Ireland.com lists Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Google Plus. Following Tourism Ireland on Instagram, it could be noticed that recent posts have not referred to food or drinks, but instead to landscapes and sights across the country. Appetizing pictures of meals or local produce could easily make followers aware of Ireland's culinary offer and would help creating an image as a destination worth seeing because of its food culture.

Expert 2 suggests focussing on 'deliberate culinary tourists'. This type of tourist is eager to learn about the local cuisine through the interaction with locals to make truly authentic experiences. These travellers show interest in sustainability and the culinary background of a destination. Having reviewed the Ireland's implementation framework and activity plan for food tourism, it can be confirmed that the country has identified the most suitable target group: the culturally curious. The description of culturally curious tourists fits the characterization of the 'deliberate culinary tourists'. Authentic, memorable experience, preferably involving the interaction with locals, and the chance to learn about traditions and heritage is what these tourists look for when travelling. Ireland has taken a major step towards the successful development of culinary tourism by identifying the suitable target group. The review of Ireland's marketing strategies also shows that these unique selling points are being promoted.

Expert 3 highlights the necessity of tourism authorities being aware of all food-related activities available to establish the image of a culinary tourism destination. The so-called inventory has been carried out in Ireland according to the Food Tourism Implementation Framework, which has been reviewed above. A striking point was the missing of food trails in the table summarizing the food-related offer. This leaves the impression that the tourism authorities are not aware of all activities that can be promoted to culinary interested travellers and makes the inventory incomplete. Another important aspect mentioned by expert 3 is the education of tourists with regards to the various advantages the maintenance of Irish food heritage can have. Not only does it protect intellectual property but also preserves and creates jobs, thereby contributing to the well-being of the country's economy. This is not being considered in existing marketing strategies regarding

food tourism in Ireland. The country does promote its heritage and distinctiveness, economic aspects, however, cannot be found in the communication promoting Ireland’s culinary culture. Including the economic advantage could contribute to the perception of Ireland as destination in general and also attract the desired target group by demonstrating the striving for sustainability.

Table 6: Answers to question 2

2. What role does the government have in preserving and innovating in raw materials, food traditions and food culture?	
Expert	Summary of responses
Expert 1 Professor Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help developing products connected to the destination’s theme • Fund gastronomic routes of national interest promotion
Expert 2 Professor France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect local produce through local agricultural policies • Facilitate local food production, distribution and sale by developing public health policies • Make food core feature of the Tourism Development education system
Expert 3 Journalist Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively maintain Irish food culture as intellectual property to maintain distinctiveness and, hence, a competitive advantage

Question number 2 asked for key tasks the government would be responsible for to maintain a country’s culinary heritage in the experts’ opinion. Expert 1 considers the development of theme-related products essential as well as the funding of gastronomic programmes, as they are of national interest. Promoting a country’s food culture internally contributes to the nation’s pride of their identity. Governmental funding represents the belief in local food culture and the intention to protect it. This can help creating a national desire to maintain the culinary heritage, which can be used in marketing strategies.

Distinctive cultures attract, of course, culturally curious travellers, including culinary tourists. The importance of building a healthy cultural identity in Ireland to create an image as a culinary destination has been elaborated in chapter 2 and is herewith supported by the statement of expert 1.

Expert 2 suggests the protection of local produce through the implementation of agricultural policies in order to sustain the cultural heritage as a main task. Furthermore, according to this expert, the government is responsible for facilitating the production, distribution and sale of local food, which can be realized by developing public health policies. Looking at the number of Food Organizations focussing on the pureness and

quality of local produce, such as *Slow Food Ireland*, this country shows a strong motivation to protect their culinary heritage and traditional production. Farming is a main characteristic of Ireland’s food culture and the before introduced organizations have helped building communities of producers and distributors, which all together protect local food. An interesting point expert 2 makes is the inclusion of food as a core feature of the Tourism Development education system. This is a prudent approach as the internal knowledge of culinary heritage and its relation to tourism will influence the promotion of which in marketing strategies. Attributing high importance to food during the education of, for example, future marketers can contribute to sustaining culinary culture and distinguishing a destination from others by promoting this feature accordingly. In Ireland, the internal awareness but, most importantly, intention to promote the country as a culinary destination seems rather low. One could argue that the reason lies in insufficient education of tourism developers.

Expert 3 considers the proactive maintenance of culinary heritage to be a key task. By protecting this kind of intellectual property, a destination can distinguish itself from others and thereby create a competitive advantage. This corresponds to aspects pointed out in the answers to question 1, which shows that marketing strategies and promotion can only work if the groundwork has been laid accordingly. The government needs to build the base and establish the conditions under which culinary tourism can successfully be developed and marketed. Ireland’s government has only recently been showing the intention to develop culinary tourism and is still progressing slowly. Strategies and plans seem rather general and theoretically. The country is rather reacting to global trends than perceiving their culinary heritage and proactively using it as a competitive advantage.

Table 7: Answers to questions 3

3. What meaning do you think local food and traditional dining experiences have for the marketing of Ireland, and what does it mean in the country’s marketing?	
Expert	Summary of responses
Expert 1 Professor Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for something new and different, experiences that are memorable due to distinctiveness → Offer and promote experiences and exploration as unique opportunities
Expert 2 Professor France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the consumers/target group. Culturally curious: → Focus on promoting authentic food experiences rather than gourmet

	→ Allow interaction with locals
Expert 3 Journalist Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gastronomy can easily adapt to trends and changes (e.g. globalization); food culture usually marks a society's greater changes • It is a social business, allowing interaction between locals and tourists, producers and consumers

Question 3 asked to share their opinion on the role of local food and gastronomic experiences in the marketing of Ireland as a tourism destination. The answers were noticeably general.

Expert 1 stresses that unique selling points are essential. To attract the right target group, which is searching for new and different experiences, a country must offer and promote such opportunities. Exploring a destination's culture will create distinctive memories, leaving a lasting impression and maybe initiating a second visit. It is upon the DMOs to identify the unique experiences and proactively promote them, which has been outlined in chapter 2.2 and is supported by this expert's comment.

Expert 2 considers knowledge about the target group crucial in the marketing of a tourism destination. Ireland has identified the culturally curious tourists as the most suitable target group for culinary tourism. Therefore, authentic food experiences should be promoted rather than gourmet food. The interaction with locals is highly appreciated by this target group. Thus, the chance to experience this should be included in marketing strategies. Ireland offers various activities involving the interaction with locals, such as cooking classes, farm stays and more. As elaborated in chapter 5, the country shows ideal conditions to implement culinary tourism as a segment. This potential is, however, not being promoted as strongly as it could be.

Expert 3 explains that gastronomy is a flexible field, as it easily adapts to trends and changes. In marketing, this would mean that both globally popular and traditional foods could be promoted. Hence, different groups can be targeted in according campaigns, if food is given a big enough share in marketing strategies. Furthermore, expert 3 refers to the gastronomy allowing interaction between tourists and locals, making it a social business. Even consumers and producers can come together, for example at farmers' markets. This should be promoted in marketing messages approaching the desired target group: culturally curious. Having reviewed Ireland's promotional webpages regarding food-related experiences and attractions, it can be confirmed that the authenticity and interaction with locals is highlighted. The country does perceive its gastronomy as an

importance part of the overall image. Nevertheless, there is a lack of proactiveness when it comes to creating the image of a culinary destination.

Table 8: Answers to question 4

4. What trends have you seen, as a player with long travel experience, in the way local food and dining experiences have or have not been put into use in the development of the marketing strategy into specific market segments? Do you have any examples?	
Expert	Summary of responses
Expert 1 Professor Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paris targets tourists with a higher socio-economic background
Expert 2 Professor France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • France follows the concept “Cuisine de Terroir”; local production and consumption • Consumers can make connections with the place and method of production as well as people involved through the consumption at the point of sale
Expert 3 Journalist Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Scary Food” concept on the West Coast of Norway; they successfully created an image based on farming traditions • <i>Smalahove</i>, a traditional national meal has become part of the country’s brand as a tourism destination

Question 4 had the experts give examples for marketing strategies addressing a certain target group by promoting particular local foods or gastronomic experiences. Expert 1 refers to Paris, which targets tourists coming from a higher socio-economic background. Unfortunately, no further information is given as to how this segment is being addressed and which sort of local foods are chiefly being promoted. But, a recommendation is provided by this expert with regards to the segment Ireland should target. In line with earlier statements from these interviews, this expert suggests to promote Ireland’s local food experiences to tourists with a middle to high income. The country should target travellers strongly interested in culture, including the culinary aspect. As stated before, Ireland has already identified the culturally curious tourists as the ideal target group for the promotion of culinary tourism, which corresponds to this expert’s recommendation. Expert 2 also gives France as an example and is more specific. The concept “Cuisine de Terrior” highlights the advantages of the local production and consumption of food. The shorter the supply chain, the more authentic is the experience. Moreover, the consumer is given the chance to gain additional knowledge concerning the culture of the destination, as traditions and procedures can be experienced. The same strategy is being recommended for Ireland’s marketing of culinary tourism. According to expert 2, Ireland can proactively

promote this kind of experiences to reach the desired target group. Having reviewed the country’s promotional webpages, it can be confirmed that Ireland does promote authentic experiences, however, not as proactively as advisable. The Food Tourism Implementation Framework and Strategy Plan both express the intention of addressing the suitable target group by specifically highlighting local food and social activities. But, proactivity is still not visible when looking at the before evaluated promotional webpages.

Expert 3 gives two examples, both to be found in Norway. One is the ‘Scary Food’ concept on the West Coast. This concept is based on farming traditions that challenge the one experiencing them. *Smalahove* is the most popular traditional dish and is now part of Norway’s tourism brand. A sheep’s head is being salted, smoked and twofold. Being served a split head is unusual and can be challenging. This experience provides a unique sort of thrill, distinguishing the country from others and reflecting an important part of Western Norway’s image as a tourism destination. Ireland’s traditions do not entail such extremes. Nevertheless, farming is deeply rooted on this island and still an important part of the food culture. The review of the promotional webpages has shown that Ireland does offer experiences that let tourists live the traditions of farming. Examples were food trails, which did not only include guided tours but also to dive into the production of local food, learning about farming traditions by doing. Again, Ireland already offers a culinary experience suggested by one of our experts.

Table 9: Answers to question 5

5. What do you regard as key promotion features for culinary tourism in Ireland? And what adjustments are made to meet these? Have there been any changes?	
Expert	Summary of responses
Expert 1 Professor Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the variety of food-related activities and experiences • Ensure reasonable pricing in restaurants, friendly service personnel, menus in different languages etc.
Expert 2 Professor France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take an imaginative, experiential and interactive approach
Expert 3 Journalist Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use social media • Promote experiences • Offer flexible / <i>create-your-own</i> food experience packages to consumers • Incorporate environmentally sustainable development

Question 5 asked our experts for key features in the promotion of culinary tourism in Ireland and if they were aware of any according adjustments in marketing strategies. Expert 1 stresses the variety of food-related experiences, which should be promoted properly. Furthermore, reasonable pricing in restaurants, friendly service and menus in different languages are being suggested as adjustments. The variety of food-related activities is indeed given, as elaborated before. The promotion of which can still be improved, especially with regards to the promotional webpage Ireland.com. As outlined in chapter 5.2, this webpage requires a lot of clicks and time for visitors to find out about the different activities and attractions available with related to food. Information is practically hidden, which leaves visitors not actively searching for culinary experiences uninformed. Therefore, the implementation of hyperlinks was suggested, which would contribute to the emphasis on Ireland's variety of food-related activities. Proactivity can create culinary tourists, as it can inspire potential visitors to invest more time of their stay into experiencing Ireland's food culture. Reasonable pricing has indeed been addressed in the Food Tourism Implementation Framework. The visitor satisfaction was noticeably low in 2010 (see table 2), but had improved in the year 2012 as a result of according changes to prices. Still, based on personal experience, it can be confirmed that culinary activities remain rather expensive in Ireland compared to other countries, especially in the Dublin area. Lowering prices in restaurants and pubs would not only improve the tourists' experiences but also the quality of life for citizens.

Expert 2 recommends imagination, experiments and interaction as an approach to promoting key features of culinary tourism. This corresponds to what expert 1 has expressed in relation to question 3: different and unique experiences should be promoted to distinguish the destination from others. Ireland offers such experiences, such as the before mentioned food trails on which farming can be tried by the tourists themselves, with the help of the producers. The interaction with locals is thereby given when travellers experiment with traditional farming procedures, creating an authentic experience that leave a lasting memory. Cooking classes in combination with vacation stays are another example of the existing culinary offer in Ireland. Visitors can spend weekends in, for example, farm hotels and participate in cooking classes to learn about traditional Irish recipes by trying them out.

Expert 3 confirms the other experts' recommendations by suggesting the promotion of experiences (rather than products) and of experience-packages that tourists can create themselves or adjust to their individual interests. Regarding marketing, social media is a

crucial channel to promote culinary experiences. As mentioned, Tourism Ireland has an Instagram account. However, the organization is not very active and if posts occur, they are not related to food. It would be advisable to create posts focussing on certain dishes or food-related activities, to raise awareness and attract culinary interested tourists. Expert 3 furthermore recommends to include environmentally sustainable development in marketing strategies related to culinary tourism. Indeed, Ireland’s number of food organizations, protecting farming traditions and ensuring the maintenance of organic farming would doubtlessly justify the promotion of sustainable development. Slow Food Ireland, which has been introduced in chapter 3.4 would be the front runner of sustainable development with regards to Ireland’s food culture. Tourism Ireland could cooperate directly with the movement to create marketing strategies.

Table 10: Answers to question 6

6. Could you suggest any ideas that could be used in order to promote local products in a way that it would help to promote culinary tourism in the particular destination?	
Expert	Summary of responses
Expert 1 Professor Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking workshops • Food and drink markets, festivals, tours and trails • Visits of wineries, distilleries, etc. • Wine, beer or sprit tasting
Expert 2 Professor France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food festivals • Various culinary activities offering interaction with locals • Establish culinary itineraries
Expert 3 Journalist Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase interaction with locals • Implement on-the-spot promotion (e.g. leaflets in hotels) • Include culinary components in general packages

Question 6 asked for suggestions on how to promote local food in the form of experiences that could contribute to the promotion of culinary tourism in a certain destination. Expert 1 suggests cooking workshops, markets, festivals, tours and trails, visits of wineries and distilleries and tastings. In chapter 5.1, it became clear that Ireland does offer all these experiences. It has been outlined that the potential for the successful implementation of culinary tourism in this country is immense, due to the variety of food-related activities available to tourists. The promotional webpage discoverireland.ie provides a well-structured overview of all these as well as further information on each experience. The culinary offer is therefore part of Ireland’s promotion as a tourism destination. ireland.com

provides information with regards to culinary experiences in Ireland as well, however, the earlier explained issues concerning layout and structure entail the danger of leaving visitors unaware of the country's food experiences.

Expert 2 also lists food festivals as an attraction to promote local food, along with any activities enabling tourists to interact with locals. Based on chapter 5.1, examples for such activities in Ireland would be food markets, food trails and farm visits. Furthermore, expert 2 suggests the establishment of culinary itineraries, thus creating packages consisting of different food-related activities. Such 'food holidays' could not be found when reviewing Ireland's culinary offer but could certainly be developed, due to the variety of food-related activities that are available.

Like expert 2, expert 3 stresses the interaction with locals as an aspect that should be included in the promotion of culinary tourism. Moreover, it is being suggested to implement promotion on-the-spot, such as leaflets in hotels. Another recommendation is the inclusion of culinary components in general travel packages. Examples of how this is being realized in Ireland are pub crawls in Dublin, which are guided tours through a selection of pubs. An up-front payment usually includes one drink in each establishment. Hostels lay out leaflets promoting these pub crawls are often the meeting point. This concept could be implemented for food trails as well.

A lot of the above elaborated recommendations regarding the development of culinary tourism are not applicable to Ireland, as they can already be found in the country. Ireland does show a great variety of food-related activities, a deeply rooted food culture, authentic experiences and interaction with locals. Not all experts chosen for the interviews were entirely familiar with Ireland's food tourism. Nevertheless, reasonable and viable points were made with regards to the promotion of culinary tourism in general and in Ireland. Key points that correspond to the argumentation in the preceding analyses are the promotion on the internet including social media and pro-activity across all channels concerning food-related activities in order to create an image as a culinary attractive destination. The experts confirm that Ireland's strengths should be emphasized in marketing strategies, as they meet the interests of typical culinary tourists. The main strengths were authenticity, variety and the opportunity to experience Irish food culture rather than just consume it.

6. Conclusion

Food is an essential part of our lives. Not only because of its nutritional importance but also because it reflects our environment. It can symbolize heritage, wealth and a social tool, especially regarding communication. It can also link us to a certain social group or terrain, since "[...]eating habits are the foundation of a collective identity and, consequently, of alterity." (Bessièrè, 1998, p.24) Tourists would like to 'eat' the culture of the terrain they are visiting.

"The term terroir refers to a specific area with an outspoken cultural and historical identity. It includes the accumulation and transmission of local know-how. This is how we come to speak of local cultural produce and local cuisine" (Bessièrè, 1998, p.31)

Culinary tourism not only enables local communities, especially farmers and producers, to re-establish pride of their heritage but also to maintain their heritage. The maintenance of culinary heritage is a dynamic process, meaning it is protected by creatively being restored. By using the skills and know-how, the past can be revived and adapted to fit into the past as well as future. As shown above, this has taken place in Ireland. Due to the country's history, Irish food culture had almost vanished when Darina Allen recreated it by simply putting a little twist to it. A whole new movement started. The country became aware of its heritage and of the importance to maintain it, not only because of its value regarding tourism, but because it strengthens the country's cultural identity. The stronger the identity, the better a country can distinguish itself from others. This again can form a competitive advantage in relation to tourism. If correctly promoted, Ireland can attract visitors with its culinary heritage. The assessment of culinary tourism in Ireland has shown that the offer is clearly given. The conditions are ideal: a strong agriculture, a great variety of experiences allowing an exchange between locals and visitors, the availability of diverse and fresh produce all-year round and the commitment of the country to maintain high quality produce reflected by various organizations, such as Good Food Ireland, Slow Food Ireland, and even an Irish Food Board (Bord Bia). This country enables visitors to explore Irish food in numerous ways. However, culinary tourism still does not seem to be considered a valuable area by tourism authorities. The two assessed publications, the Implementation Framework and Activity Plan, promised a successful introduction of culinary tourism. Unfortunately, there is no follow-up work to be found yet, building on the basis created by

these two publications. If there are publications and the author was simply not able to locate them, that is a weakness as well, for business insights should be easily accessible for research purposes. Assuming there is no such follow-up work, the situation of culinary tourism in Ireland is related to open questions: Was the Activity Plan successfully carried out? Could Fáilte Ireland not reach certain goals? Can the share of culinary tourism in relation to the overall tourism product be identified? In short, what is the outcome of the activity plan and which steps does the board plan do address new or on-going issues? What were the achievements of the realization of the activity plan? How does Fáilte Ireland intend to build on those? The above assessment of the current situation of culinary tourism uncovered an incredible potential and various opportunities. One example is the strong usage of online resources by tourists when informing themselves before their visit. Hence, online resources, meaning promotional webpages must be designed accordingly. The culinary offer should be promoted pro-actively, influencing visitors and educating them with regards to culinary tourism. Moreover, as the GB Path to Growth states, most of the British visitors are holiday makers with a high number of culturally curious. This perfectly corresponds to culinary tourism, as the exact same segment was identified to be relevant for this area. Therefore, it is disappointing that the Path to Growth does not involve strategies regarding food-related experiences. All three key segments in the British market match with the ones ideal for the promotion of culinary tourism. Addressing food in marketing campaigns could attract more tourists from Great Britain and be a way of avoiding a further decrease in visitor numbers in this market.

A lot of opportunities are not being taken when assessing culinary tourism in Ireland. An issue that kept appearing during the evolution of tourism in Ireland seems to occur again. It took the country years to show a systematic approach and to establish one authority responsible for the development of tourism. The first step towards the successful development of culinary tourism in Ireland might be the establishment of a Food Tourism Board exclusively responsible for the development of culinary tourism. This would allow the coordination of all stakeholders involved and lead to a strategic and active promotion of food tourism. As has been elaborated in the analyses and evaluation of the expert interviews, basic conditions for the successful development of culinary tourism in Ireland are given. Food and food-related activities are being promoted as well. However, pro-activity is still missing. Should Ireland intent to create an image as a culinary destination, the country must first see itself as such. Pride in the country's culinary heritage is already reflected in the number of food organizations and is also expressed on promotional

webpages. Cooperation between these organization in order to promote Irish food for tourism purposes is currently not noticeable. A significant weakness and possibly obstacle in the effective promotion of culinary tourism in Ireland is the assessed webpage Ireland.com. Run by the country's Destination Management Organization, the webpage is one of the most important channels regarding promotion. When searching for 'Ireland' on Google, Ireland.com is the first webpage showing up. Visitors interested in food-related activities will easily find a general website, as described above. However, from the 'Food in Ireland' site on, finding further information is difficult to find. Visitors are very likely to stop searching and leave the page. Internet promotion is crucial in destination management, as confirmed by the experts interviewed. Changes suggested earlier could easily and quickly be implemented on Ireland.com in order to facilitate the visitor's way to the information they are looking for or even lead them to offers that should be highlighted. Applying pro-activity to the promotion of culinary tourism on the webpage Ireland.com could be the first but significant step towards the international awareness of this island's culinary offer. In addition to that, discoverisland.com should be translated into German and French, corresponding to the key markets that have been identified in the past and recent tourism statistics. Having assessed culinary tourism in Ireland, it has become clear that opportunities are being overseen and great potential is consequently not being used.

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