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Culinary tourism and rural development: exploring the dynamic of “the Greek Breakfast” initiative in Santorini

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Culinary tourism and rural development: exploring the dynamic of “the Greek Breakfast”
initiative in Santorini

ABSTRACT

During the last decade or so, culinary or food tourism has gained a prominent place in “special interest tourism” literature. It is widely believed that the (re)connection of tourist rural areas with their local agrifood base can contribute to sustainable and secure development away from the malfunctions of the prevalent mass tourism model. The paper explores the actual and potential interface between tourism and the local agrifood sector in Santorini, a small Mediterranean island and a major tourist destination, by examining the challenges and opportunities from the implementation of the “Greek Breakfast” initiative. The results of fieldwork research have revealed several impediments that hinder the project. Among other challenges, the absence of a coherent network of collaboration and communication among various stakeholders and the weak recognition of the benefits of food tourism by several local actors seem to be the more crucial ones.

Keywords: *culinary tourism, local food, special interest tourism, Santorini*

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Γαστρονομικός τουρισμός και ανάπτυξη της υπαίθρου: διερευνώντας τη δυναμική της
πρωτοβουλίας «Ελληνικό Πρωινό» στη Σαντορίνη

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Κατά την περασμένη δεκαετία, ο γαστρονομικός τουρισμός απέκτησε εξέχουσα θέση στη βιβλιογραφία για τις ειδικές μορφές τουρισμού. Αποτελεί κοινή αντίληψη ότι η επανασύνδεση των τουριστικών περιοχών της υπαίθρου με την τοπική αγροτροφική βάση μπορεί να συμβάλλει σε βιώσιμη και ασφαλή ανάπτυξη, μακριά από τις δυσλειτουργίες του κυρίαρχου προτύπου μαζικού τουρισμού. Το άρθρο διερευνά την υφιστάμενη και δυνατή διεπαφή ανάμεσα στον τουρισμό και τον τοπικό τομέα αγροδιατροφής στη Σαντορίνη, ένα μικρό νησί της Μεσογείου που αποτελεί ωστόσο μείζονα τουριστικό προορισμό, εξετάζοντας τις προκλήσεις και τις ευκαιρίες από την εφαρμογή της πολιτικής για το «Ελληνικό Πρωινό». Τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας πεδίου ανέδειξαν αρκετά εμπόδια που δυσχεραίνουν το πρόγραμμα. Ανάμεσα στα άλλα, η απουσία ενός συνεκτικού δικτύου συνεργασίας και επικοινωνίας μεταξύ των διαφορετικών εμπλεκόμενων και η μειωμένη αναγνώριση των ωφελειών του γαστρονομικού τουρισμού από αρκετούς τοπικούς εταίρους αναδεικνύονται ως τα πλέον κρίσιμα ζητήματα.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: γαστρονομικός τουρισμός, τοπικά τρόφιμα, ειδικές μορφές τουρισμού, Σαντορίνη

1. INTRODUCTION

South Aegean islands have been among the first to evolve into sea and sun tourist destinations. In 2017 the region attracted about 5.8 million visits from foreign travelers that is 18.8% of the total inbound tourism (31 million arrivals for Greece as a whole). Inbound tourists spent on average €625.5 per trip well above the national average of €457.8.¹ Conventional tourism dominates and has led to a spectacular performance of the insular economies. The regional GDP per capital, starting from a low base, reached the second best national performance in 2015, exceeded only by the capital city region. Employment opportunities in tourist related activities has hindered outmigration and attracted newcomers. Hence, the resident population has increased by 21% during the 1991-2011 period (EKKE and HSA, 2017).

However, the thriving, in quantitative terms, conventional tourist model has not led to a sustainable and secure local development. It is a model of low added value, poor multiplier effects and high seasonality, detached from the productive base and tradition of the host area (Melissourgos and Tsakopoulou, 2015; Tsartas et al., 2014; Spilanis and Vayanni, 2004). Furthermore, it is extremely fragile to external shocks and, more important still, there are serious doubts for its ability to be reproduced in the following years without drastic changes.

Tentatively at first, more persistently amid the prolonged crisis affecting the country, central and regional authorities, local communities and entrepreneurs alike, are looking for a way out of the conventional tourist model towards more specialized, experience based tourism services. There is no wide agreement as to the direction or the priorities to be set towards a sustainable model of tourism development on the Aegean islands. However, there is a general understanding that the (re)connection of the local tourism with the local agrifood base should be a priority. Regional authorities are called to implement a strategy for sustainable growth within the framework of the EU policy for smart specialization. Food tourism is an integral part of this strategy (RoSA, 2015).

Contrary to the impediments set by the natural environment, limited and poor quality soils and scarcity of water, several islands had developed a wide agricultural base as a result of intensive labor and land (terraces) agricultural techniques (Hadjimichalis, 1987). Difficulties in sea transport and high shipping costs were critical for food imports. Until quite recently, insular food economies were enjoying spatial monopoly status. This situation has changed gradually during the last 30 - 40 years. With considerable delay, compared to the

¹ Bank of Greece, <https://www.bankofgreece.gr/Pages/el/Statistics/externalsector/balance/travelling.aspx>. Data does not include cruises.

continental parts of country, even the smallest and more remote islands have been well integrated to the established national food consumption patterns led by the expansion of big grocery retail chains (Skordili, 2013). In parallel, the growing tourist flows have diminished the local agrifood sector as a result of two common processes activated during the transformation of agricultural rural areas to tourist destinations (Timms and Conway, 2012; Rhiney, 2011; Bramwell, 2004; Tsartas, 2004). First, both land and labor have increasingly been devoted towards new more profitable and more exciting types of tourist activity. Second, mass tourism promotes, to a large extent, international nutrition patterns making extensive use of cheap standardized imported goods close to the nutritional preferences of the “average” international client (Alonso and Liu, 2012). As a result, several islands suffer from the disruption of longstanding agrifood productive systems, the abandonment of local specialties and the gradual loss of local identity, as well as, a critical degradation of the natural landscape and increased intraregional inequalities.

Food or culinary tourism can take several forms: visits to farms and local processing firms, food festivals, cooking classes, trails through the history of artisanal products, food tastings, or just a good meal in a local hotel or restaurant. The substitution of several imported agrifood products by locally sourced food is expected to stimulate the local productive base, revitalize forgotten local production systems and traditional skills and reduce food miles. Moreover, the exposure of tourists at local, authentic food and different cultures enhances their experiences and demotes global food homogenization and the erosion of local culture (Richards, 2015; Everret and Aitchinson, 2008).

The paper explores the actual and potential interface between tourism and the local agrifood sector in Santorini, a small Mediterranean island that is a major tourism destination, by examining the challenges and opportunities from the implementation of the “Greek Breakfast” initiative.

Santorini is an interesting case to study since it combines rich agricultural tradition with a wide tourist base. The island, thanks to the dramatic scenery of the caldera, stands out as a brand on its own and attracts tourists from all over the world and all income categories. Through the years, it has shifted from a mass tourism destination in the eighties to a complex regime: partially upscale tourism, though patterns of mass tourism such as all-inclusive packages can still be observed in the southern part of the island. A number of policies have been implemented during the past years to strengthen the links between tourism and the agro food sector on Santorini. One of the most prominent has been the Greek Breakfast, an initiative launched by the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels in 2010, aiming to enrich breakfast

offered by Greek hotels with local and regional products and dishes. So far however the progress of the project has been slow.

The rest of the paper is structured in three parts. The next part reviews the current debate on the emerging culinary tourism in rural areas and identifies its potential benefits and sources of impediments. Part three starts with a brief presentation of the Greek Breakfast initiative and continues with the results of recent fieldwork research examining the implementation of the initiative on Santorini. The ultimate part attempts to bring together the various points of analysis and suggests policy directions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

During the last decade or so, culinary tourism has gained a prominent place in “special interest tourism” literature. Worldwide, a growing number of tourists are willing to embrace more diversified aspects of the places they visit, away from the highly homogenized offers of the prevailing mass tourism model. In this respect, local food and local gastronomy have become an integral part of the tourists' experience and a stimulator of rural development. One after another central and regional governments use culinary tourism as a powerful tool to regenerate rural economies, to sustain their rich agricultural heritage and preserve diverse regional identities (Everett and Aitchison, 2008).

Culinary tourism is largely associated with benefits for everyone involved. It is widely assumed that producers can find new markets and a valuable source of income, tourism entrepreneurs can upgrade in the tourism value chain, visitors enjoy authentic experiences of the place and high quality personalized services, while local residents benefit from a better quality of life. More specifically, local producers see their sales rising since local products with high production costs can only be sustained by the tourism market. They also look forward to new export markets as tourists acquire a taste for their products and bring it back home. Caterers, on their part, appreciate the quality of the products and relationships of trust with the producers (Hjalager et al., 2016; Lee and Wall, 2012; Sims, 2010; Everett and Aitchison, 2008).

However, these potential benefits are not straightforward and easy to obtain. A closer look at several studies exploring food tourism projects in varied types of rural areas shows that the relationship between tourism and the local agrifood sector is multifaceted, complex and geographically specific (Kalfagianni and Skordili, 2018; Dana et al., 2014; Bartella, 2011; Welter, 2011). The interface of the tourist sector with inherent features of the rural areas and the rural business environment poses several challenges that need to be overcome.

Numerous studies highlight a series of inherent difficulties stemming from the limited base and remoteness of rural areas. Rural areas suffer from a restricted resource base, including land, water and labor. These limitations are more acute for tourist areas since there is a gradual transfer of resources from the primary sector to the more profitable and exciting tourism related activities (Timms and Conway, 2012; Bramwell, 2004). Hence, local products are available in limited quantities, high prices and, quite often, for short periods. Independent local producers find it difficult to meet the strict requirements of buyers for reliable deliveries and specific quality standards (Boesen et al., 2016; Smith and Xiao, 2008; Smith and Hall, 2003).

Small businesses operating in rural areas usually have no access to capital and little information in order to exploit the benefits of food tourism (Everett and Slocum, 2013; Labrianidis et al., 2004). Research on the benefits of wine tourism to winery entrepreneurs on the Canary Islands has shown that small wineries have only marginally benefited or not at all. Small size prevents local wineries from getting involved in wine routes, as they have limited staff and funds to invest in hosting bus tours (in preparing food, for example, or fixing the entrance to improve accessibility). Although they realize the potential to market their products among some segments of the millions of tourists that visit their islands every year, they stress the need for better governance to enhance cooperation with the hotel sector and among the wineries themselves (Alonso and Liu, 2012).

Hence, independent producers and small firms are, too often, excluded from food tourism projects in favor of larger competitors. Several successful food tourism projects are led by large hotel chains in cooperation with established food suppliers, targeting high income tourists alone. Prominent examples are the high-priced culinary vacations in quite a lot luxurious resorts in Southern France, Tuscany and the Cotswolds in the UK. These projects are characterized by an exclusive interest on state-of-the-art gastronomy applying sophisticated techniques with superior quality ingredients. Such unilateralism is also eminent in the wider debate on Alternative Food Networks and raises serious moral concerns (Kalfagianni and Skordili, 2018; Pirog et al., 2014). In the framework of increased social inequality and restrained household budgets it is obvious that any culinary tourism project should pay attention to the equally important and rather overlooked social and economic aspects of sustainability. It is crucial that local food chains provide a valuable source of income and employment to weak actors of supply chains, apply fair labor practices, give a boost to rural economies and supply the market with good quality food in affordable prices.

Central and regional authorities have undertaken numerous initiatives to support the participation of smaller local firms in culinary tourism projects in rural areas. Several tourist countries have introduced a series of policies to enhance linkages between tourism and the local agrifood sector. They associate borrowing from commercial banks by hotels to local food production and environmental protection, give awards to good practices and reward relevant research with grants (Berno, 2011). Others subsidize the creation of start-ups by younger locals with higher educational qualifications or by newcomers, since these firms are usually better equipped and have the capacity to exploit the opportunities offered by food tourism projects (Labrianidis et al., 2004).

However, several studies from different geographical settings suggest that the more efficient tool to enhance the interface between the local agrifood and tourist activities is to build and sustain a coherent network of the stakeholders involved (Everett and Slocum, 2013; OECD, 2012). Culinary tourism is a fragmented activity that brings together stakeholders from various sectors: farmers, food processing and tourism businessmen, service providers, local and regional authorities, business associations, chefs, food writers. Networks offer a place to collaborate, communicate and disseminate information. Synergies and shared access to resources and knowledge can overcome the inadequacies stemming from small-scale and may stimulate local development. It is well documented that networks supported and managed by public authorities enjoy better access to funding and valuable inside information (Lee et al., 2015). At the same time, they all acknowledge the difficulties of building, managing and sustaining such a network. Challenges stem from the diversity and interconnected interests of the players involved, from the persistence of small producers to work as isolated entities, as well as from the unsteady approval of participants to the leading figures that assume considerable responsibilities (Everett and Slocum, 2013).

3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GREEK BREAKFAST INITIATIVE ON SANTORINI

Santorini, one of the most renowned tourist destinations in the world, has a rich agrifood tradition. It is home to a number of traditional products designated with the Protected Destination of Origin status: cherry tomato, fava, specific types of white dry and sweet wines. During the thirty years period 1991-2011 employment in the primary sector has reduced its share to total employment from 8.49% to 3.53% (EKKE & HSA, 2017). In parallel, large parts of agricultural land have been invaded by construction and residential activities related to the development of tourism. It is indicative that the amount of land devoted to grape

cultivation has diminished from over 20.000 km² in 1970 to less than 15.000 km² in 2004 (Cincinatty, 2004). However, the total production of grapes has remained stable.

Quite recently, local authorities and local business associations have taken various initiatives to establish food tourism, in the framework of a wider strategy to diversify the tourist product offered and upgrade the position of the island in the global tourist value chain. Their main aim is to expose the culinary heritage of the island and strengthen the links between the local agrifood sector and tourism. They believe that marketing restaurant and hotel cuisine as local is crucial and declared 2013 as *Year of local gastronomy* [I2].² Moreover, several hotels and restaurants of the island participate in national and regional food tourism projects, such as the Aegean Cuisine or the Greek Breakfast initiatives.

The South Aegean Chambers of Commerce launched the Aegean cuisine project as early as 2008, with the vision that local cuisine would become an integral part of the experience of tourists travelling to the Aegean archipelago. The goal is to create a certified network of restaurants, hotels, local producers and shops that will offer visitors a taste of the Aegean cuisine. During its initial phase the project adopted a bottom-up approach, organizing a series of consultation events on the islands engaging entrepreneurs, chefs and food writers in a dialogue about the Aegean Cuisine. The first businesses officially entered the network in 2011. A second round of certification started in 2014 and new standards were established in association with the Greek branch of the international certification organization TÜV. Products must come from the Aegean islands, meat and fish are preferably fresh and traditional recipes must form a distinctive part of the menu (CChoC, 2014). At present the network counts 152 certified restaurants on the Cyclades and 121 on the Dodecanese, (CCoC and CCoD, 2017). Recent research study on the outcomes of the project on Naxos has shown that members appreciate being part of the project. Still, more needs to be done to promote the project to foreign tourists and to enhance collaboration with local producers (Raftopoulos, 2017).

3.1 *The Greek Breakfast initiative*

The Greek Breakfast initiative started in 2010, when the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels felt the need to enrich breakfast offered by Greek hotels with local products and dishes from all regions of the country. The project was ambitious from the very start, aiming at what seems

² The interviewees that took part in the Santorini survey have been number from I1 to I28.

even today a major shift in the mentality of Greek hoteliers from mass tourism to the experience of locality.

In the initial stage, a major study was undertaken to explore on the one hand the type of breakfast then offered by the great majority of Greek hotels, mainly continental and buffet style breakfast that provided hotel guests with familiar flavors and typical mass tourism services and, on the other, the experience of hotels already offering local Greek products for breakfast. Local portfolios were created for every region of the country, in which tangible and intangible goods related to food (products, recipes, stories about food, production techniques) as well as the human force working in fields related to the local gastronomy were listed (HCoH, 2010). These portfolios have since been used to create model breakfasts for each place.

Being a policy about locality designed at the national level, if the project is to succeed it is crucial that local actors get involved. It is therefore upon the local association of hotel owners to take the initiative and invite the Chamber over to present its proposal for the particular region [I3]. The proposal is widely discussed with representatives of the local community (local authorities, tourism businesses, producers, chefs, the local press, local cultural institutions) and an agreement is reached upon as to which products and recipes should be included in the model breakfast of the region. (HCoH, 2010).

Entry procedures were quite simple. The Chamber did not check hotel suppliers and the main criterion for admission was a commitment to local food and a passion for locality. Greek breakfast products must be properly labeled in the buffet or offered in a special corner of the room to be distinguished from other types of products offered for breakfast (HCoH, 2010).

However, the project moved on slowly. Part of this delay is explained by the fact that the project was launched at a time of crisis, when hotel bookings were at a very low price and reducing cost was of prime importance to Greek hotel owners. Cost is a recurrent issue with hotel owners and national authorities persistently arguing that local producers shouldn't treat hotels as retail customers, but instead acknowledge the fact that hotels can become an additional steady source of income. Another issue is path dependence, namely the feeling that hotels should continue to cater for their foreign visitors as they did because a continental or an English breakfast is what tourists are already familiar with, especially in a mass tourism sea and sun destination. Domestic tourists that would more readily savor the delicacies of a Greek breakfast have decreased considerably in recent years. Hotel owners were therefore much less eager to enter the project than local producers who were seeking for new markets

to sell their products. All parts acknowledge the fact that the Greek Breakfast did not even exist as a concept before and the Greek Chamber of Hotels had to build a new brand name from scratch [13]. This trend is opposed to higher rates of participation in mainland regions due to winter and all year round resorts such as Pelion, Zagori and Metsovo attracting domestic tourism and branded as traditional and authentic.

So, in June 2013 120 hotels had entered the project, quite a small number compared to the total of 9.677 hotels in Greece at the time. To encourage entrepreneurs to adopt the label the Ministry of Tourism has granted extra points to hotels participating in the project for the official classification of hotels and has also permitted other types of tourist accommodation such as rooms to let to enter the project. This has given the project a significant boost. At present it counts 1074 hotels and model breakfasts have been formed for various parts of Greece. The project currently evolved into a more formal scheme, based on specific standards and procedures. The label is given for two years following inspection. Suppliers for yogurt, milk, cheese, honey, oil and sausages must belong to the respective national registries approved by the Ministry of Rural Development and Food. Feta must be PDO whereas the menu is checked to include local cheese, sausages, pies, sweets and dishes (HCoH, 2017).

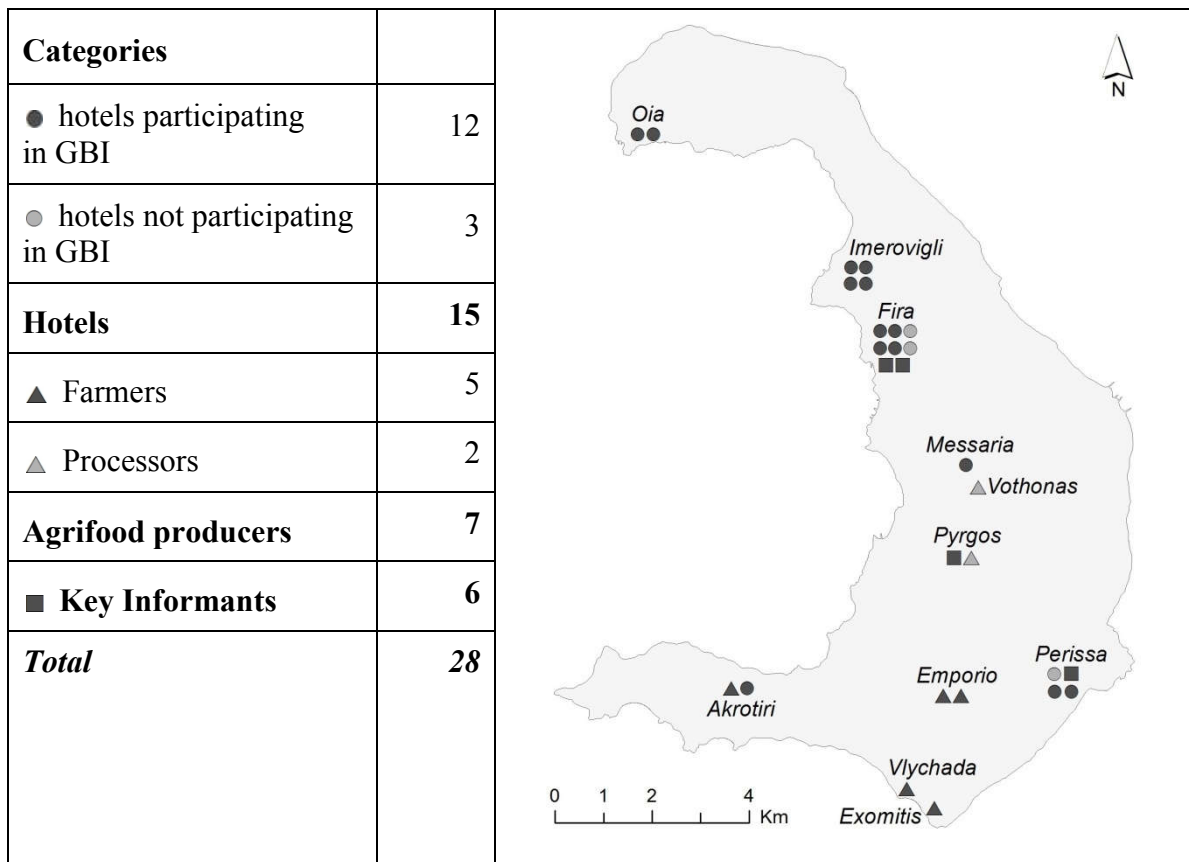
3.2 Field work results

Although Santorini was among the first destinations to form its own model Greek Breakfast, the data shows an impressively low participation rate. A field work research was organized in order to have a thorough understanding of the evolution of the project and the contextual factors that determined its outcomes. The research took place in two consecutive stages, in October 2015 and June 2017. It comprised extended interviews with stakeholders, as shown in more detail in the following figure. Twenty-eight interviewees (assigned as I1- I28) took part in the survey and were willing to be recorded. It must be noted that a number of prominent figures has participated in both rounds of the fieldwork survey. A small number of interviews, mainly at the initial stage of research, have been realized in Athens.

In June 2017, 23 out of a total of 281 hotels on the island had entered the project. It seems therefore that the project remains indifferent to the large part of hotel owners on the island. A closer look reveals strikingly different reasons for upper and lower class hotels.

FIGURE 1

Categorical and geographical distribution of the interviewees



Higher hotel classes: luxury food vs local food

As in all parts of Greece, participation is stronger in 4* and 5* hotel classes, where hotels target the up market tourist segment and can therefore afford the extra cost of buying local products. Still, participation rate remains remarkably low: only 20 hotels are distributed in equal shares between the 4* (total 85) and 5* (total 34) classes. It seems that the project remains indifferent to a large part and *this could be in part because they consider it indifferent to their clientele* [I3]. Too often it is taken for granted that more and more consumers are interested in eating locally grown food searching for quality and authenticity. However, the hotel managers that participated in the research have identified a wide range of preferences among their clients.

Only a segment of them value highly a traditional breakfast marked by the culinary heritage of Santorini. They are people with a more sophisticated knowledge of food searching for new tastes, local traditions and authenticity. They come, mostly, from the USA and NW

Europe. Among them, the Scandinavians have been identified as the most prominent group [I15]. At the other end of the spectrum are found tourists coming from the emerging markets of Asia. Quite recently, Chinese and Indians have started to arrive in big numbers on Santorini. They are less experienced tourists following highly differentiated nutritional patterns. Hence, it is not a surprise that they are reticent to try local food and recipes. Totally unfamiliar with the Aegean culinary heritage they are looking for their own cuisines in the numerous Chinese and Indian restaurants that have sprouted on the island soon after their arrival [I16].

Among these two extremes lies the big majority of affluent tourists who seem to be coming after all for quite different reasons and seek new experiences. As put by an upper class hotel owner, *“Tourists are full. They have been to many places, to the best of places. They have tasted the best of products. What they seek is experience”* [I14].

Tradition and authenticity are rather low on their agenda. However, they show a strong interest for gastronomy. The majority of upper class hotels give special attention to the food they offer and have established award receiving restaurants. Hotel managers prefer to market their cuisine as Mediterranean and creative rather than local and authentic. They provide their clients all the meals of the day. Quite often breakfast includes a selection of local, Aegean or even continental Greece delicacies, in novel combinations and creative processing techniques [I14, I7, I8, I9]. However, the domestic touch is a rather small supplement of the main menu which follows the familiar international tastes and norms.

Luxury resorts offer a full range of services to their clients and make an effort to keep them indoors as much as possible. The crowded character of the island during the high season facilitates this strategy. Hence the majority of high-income tourists visiting the island have a very partial idea of the place, the people and the natural environment [I7]. This hinders their interest for the local heritage and the local products. They can only visit carefully selected wineries and restaurants chosen by hotels.

Lower classes: high cost and lack of information

The participation in lower categories is minimal: just 2 (total 62) in 3* and 1 (total 66) in 2* categories (HCoH, 2017). Lower class hotels managers share the view that they are unable to include local products in their breakfast due to the high cost of local supplies [I21]. The issue of cost is crucial since it is well known that small lower class hotels work on cost squeeze conditions between tourist operators and low income clients. With a few exceptions, they have not made an effort to enrich their breakfast since they assume that their clientele is

indifferent to local food, that local ingredients are not suitable for breakfast and, more significantly, that they are unable to face the bureaucracy and the delays to enter the project [I4, I10].³

Hybrid supply chains

Culinary tourism on the island seems to rely upon hybrid value chains, supplementing one another. Permanent local networks of supply seem nonexistent.

The island can provide small quantities of a small number of products. It is a common belief among farmers and agrifood processors that the local tourist market and the USA export market are the only ones capable of paying a suitable price for their products, enough to compensate producers for their high production costs [I27, I28, and I23]. It is also well known that fava produced on the island is not adequate to cover the increase demand of the PDO product, while fava cultivated on adjacent islands, even in Turkey, is used as Santorini fava [I22 - I28]. The locals do not see this as necessarily bad since *“Even if they taste a dish prepared with low cost fava imported from Turkey, tourists still are acquainted with a product that was unknown to them and can ask for it back home”* [I4].

Only a small number of hotels have established direct relationships with local and domestic independent procurers. They make use of a small number of products coming from Santorini and adjacent islands suppliers (cheese from Ios and Naxos or cured meat from Myconos) [I1]. They also make use of remote domestic suppliers for specialized high quality food products [I7, I8 and I10].

The majority of the participants in the program feel that they cannot rely upon independent small suppliers to cater for their needs. From their point of view, availability is not stable, prices are high, while there is a lack of quality controls. Hotels keep separate arrangements with small producers and buy the great bulk of their suppliers from wholesalers or even from local retailers. It is interesting to note that there are well organized wholesales supply networks of fresh fruit and vegetables from Crete. As stated by a prominent figure of culinary tourism on the island, *“Stand outside Lidl early in the morning and you will see the usual suspects shopping”* (I1). Luxury resorts belonging to chains are more attached to the chain than the local area and make use of the networks of suppliers of the parent company for the wider area.

³ However, results from a country-wide survey on the outcomes of the Greek Breakfast initiative show that the managers of very small units that indeed enter the project acknowledge that the benefits of increased bookings and customer loyalty are considerable, in contrast to the managers of larger upper class units (Kyriakaki et al., 2016, p. 249).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Fieldwork research has shown that the slow progress of the Greek Breakfast initiative on Santorini can be attributed to a number of interrelated factors. Among others, the limited agrifood productive base of the island, the enclaved character of the upper hotel classes, the cost squeeze and the lack of information for the lower classes, seem to be responsible for the poor performance of the island.

The consequences from the absence of a network of collaboration and communication among the various stakeholders involved in culinary tourism are obvious. There is a profound deficit of information mainly among the hotel owners of lower classes. Field work research has revealed that they were poorly informed about the benefits they could gain from participating in the project, or the recipes that were developed by local chefs making use of local ingredients. Also, there is a notable suspicion and disconnection between local producers and potential buyers. Several hotel owners bypass local producers and replace them with the more convenient and reliable wholesale and retail networks.

Regional and local authorities and business associations have launched several initiatives to bridge the gap between producers and the tourism sector, to facilitate cooperation and disseminate information to several stakeholders. So far, their efforts to build and support a network have failed. Quite recently the South Aegean has been nominated European Region of Gastronomy for 2019, a title awarded by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism, a network of global experts supported by leading European Institutions. The three-year action plan includes projects that cope with what past experience has proved to be impediments to establishing a network between agrifood and tourism businesses (RoSA, 2016). In this framework, the recent announcement of the foundation of a new regional body responsible for coordinating initiatives to promote food tourism and the agrifood sector seems promising.

A necessary prerequisite for the efficiency of a network is the recognition of the benefits of local food tourism by all stakeholders. Fieldwork research has shown that hotel managers, even the ones that participate in the Greek Breakfast initiative, do not value the benefits of food tourism and local food sourcing. This may be attributed to the favourable business environment for Greek tourism during the last years. Hotel owners are not inclined to make changes in their business practices during a period of high profitability. It is difficult to comprehend the real value of local food sourcing if you adopt a very restrictive view of place and time, if the limits of your world are identical with the boundaries of your business.

Research has testified that no matter how eloquent the rhetoric used by public authorities about protecting the local culture and society and how important this strategy seems to be in the long run, stakeholders are drawn to projects about food tourism by their need to protect and grow their business. Business people should re-adjust their lens: from the borders of their firm to the local area, from the present to a medium and long-term planning, from immediate profit maximization to long-term competitiveness of the firm. Their main asset is not luxury or high quality services, but the natural beauty and heritage of the place. Local hotels should grow deep roots with the host area and make all the necessary adjustments to ensure the sustainable future of the island.

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