Farmers markets as an authentic Tourism Experience

The Case of Dublin

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Introduction

Food is a central part of the visitor experience regardless of the holiday destination. However, the level of attention towards food choice can differ depending on the destinations image or on the holidaymaker's general interest in food. Leveraging their image of quality food, countries such as France and Italy have successfully managed to develop a growing food tourism market segment. According to Fáilte Ireland (National Tourism Development Authority) (2010.p.5) *in Ireland, tourist expenditure on food and drink in 2009 was close to €2 billion, representing the largest single component of individual visitor expenditure and exceeding the average spend on 'bed and board'* indicating the importance of food in the Irish tourism industry. This recognition has led to the development of a food tourism strategy, which among other goals, aims to develop a brand for Irish food and to communicate a clear message to the consumer as to Ireland's product offering (Fáilte Ireland, 2010).

Consumer trends indicate that people are demanding food that is traceable and of trusted environmentally friendly production. Farmers' markets are the logical outcome of these trends as they represent the local producer and let the consumer connect directly with the food product (Holloway & Kneafsey 2000 cited in Hall, Mitchell, Scott and Sharples, 2008). Authenticity is an important consideration in the topic of food and tourism, both as a possible issue and as a motivator or attraction (Taylor, 2001; Cohen, 2002; Beer, 2008; Sims, 2009; Chhabra, 2010). The high food quality, the trading atmosphere and ability to try and experience authentic food culture are significant motivators for consumers for attending markets (Kezis et al. 1998 cited in Hall et al. 2008).

This paper seeks to examine the role of authenticity of Irish food from a tourist perspective, to establish the level of consideration among tourists to visit farmers' markets in Dublin; to

determine factors that influence interest to visit farmers' markets in Dublin and to consider whether farmers' markets add value to the food tourism experience in Ireland.

The Role of Food in Tourism

Tasting national and local dishes and experiencing the flair of outdoor and indoor markets, as local traders and their customers pursue their daily business, are activities that are very popular for people on holiday (Henderson, 2009). The tourist gaze as described by Urry (1995) considered the tourist as an observer and human senses and emotions were disregarded. However, today the focus is also on tourists' senses and feelings (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Everett, 2008) of which taste and smell are crucial for the consideration of food. Food on holidays can constitute anything from eating in restaurants, hotels or street markets to having a picnic or taken home as souvenirs (Enteleca Research and Consultancy Ltd, 2000). It was also found in the UK (ibid) that 69% of holiday makers and visitors find that food has made a positive contribution to their holiday. Food has proven to be of significant economic value for the tourism industry with almost 40 % of tourist expense on food (Boyne,Williams & Hall 2002 cited in Karim & Geng-Qing Chi 2010, p. 532). It can also overcome seasonality (Everett & Aitchison, 2008), act as a development tool for a destinations sustainability (Sims, 2009) and maintain cultural heritage and strengthen local identity and image (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011; Karim & Geng-Qing Chi, 2010). As a result national tourist boards and other government agencies of many western countries such as Canada and Australia have identified food as one of their key foci for tourism strategies.

Food Tourism and the Food Tourist

Everett and Aitchison (2008) found that food tourists have common characteristics. These characteristics decline in intensity along a continuum corresponding to parallel listed tourist typologies. The food tourist can be characterised as 'someone knowledgeable, without young children, financially comfortable and keen to engage in food-related activities and pursuits.' (Everett&Aitchison,2008 p.161). Visitors to Ireland have to some extent similar characteristics; 43% are over 45 years old and 83% are from social classes AB (Managerial/Professional) and C1 (White Collar) (Fáilte Ireland, 2010b). This may indicate the potential of food tourism in Ireland and this has been recognised by policy makers in the country.

Policies and Perceptions

In Ireland Fáilte Ireland, in 2010 set out a food tourism strategy for the years 2011 to 2013. Their vision is that *'Ireland will be recognised 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, 2010a, p. 16). Bord Bía, in its document *Pathways for Growth* (Bell & Shelman, 2011) recognise tourism as a way of building awareness of Irish food. In Dublin, The Dublin City Development Plan 2011-2017 devote several policy statements aimed at the promotion and development of the food sector in Dublin as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Objectives to support food tourism

ID Number	Policy or Objective

RD6	To promote and facilitate a range of indoor and outdoor markets
RDO3	To promote and facilitate the early implementation of the City Markets Project, a vibrant retail food market, restaurant and leisure market, and a crucial development in integrating the city centre area.
RE10	To promote and facilitate the economic and employment generating and regeneration potential of the locally traded services sector, making the city more attractive/vibrant for residents, shoppers, visitors and workers, and to recognise the clustering benefits of, for example, cafes and restaurants.
REO6 (i)	To prepare a report and recommendations on how the economic and employment generating capacity of the locally traded services sector (including the feasibility of a food tourism strategy and the potential of street food vending) could be enhanced.

Source: Dublin City Development Plan 2011-2017, Dublin City Council

Food in the City to discuss the employment and economic development potential of the food sector for Dublin City. This paper gives insights into different aspects and issues such as opportunities, sub-sectors, policies, initiatives and food poverty. Whereas Bord Bía and Fáilte Ireland are highly focused on agricultural products and locally produced Irish brands, *Food in the City* also examines the international food sector, incorporating multinational brands and ethnical food stalls settling in Dublin to create a food culture of intercultural variety. This differing perception of Irish food by policy makers could have an impact on the image of food in Ireland.

Farmers' Markets in Dublin

According to the Dublin City Development Plan, Farmers' markets add to the diversity of the shopping experience in the city, lend vibrancy to the street activity and enliven civic spaces (Dublin City Council, p. 144). Farmers' markets are regular gatherings of local producers and growers to sell their produce directly to consumers (Dore & Frew 2000, p. 231). Brown (2001, cited in Hall et al. 2008, p. 201) highlights that at "true" farmers' markets, some if not all vendors must sell products from their own production. Ireland is a traditional agricultural economy and as Sassatelli and Scott (2001 cited in Hall & Sharples 2008) suggest these countries are more likely to engage in farmers' markets as a source of "embodied trust". According to Bord Bía (2012), farmers' markets in Ireland have experienced considerable growth in recent years from their being fewer than 100 markets in 2006 growing to almost 150 in 2012. Twenty-nine (29) farmers markets are located in Dublin (see www.bordbia.ie for full list) and these sell a diversity of both ingredients and cooked food products. A categorisation of these can be seen in table 2.

Table 2 Categories of farmers' markets in Dublin

Category	Description	Example
Private	Private organisers on for-profit basis, tend to be large with high stall fees and an affluent consumer base	Farmer's market Harcourt Street, Howth Harbour Market
Participatory markets	Run by wide range of stakeholders e.g. authorities, community development organisations, tourism groups, local authorities promoting local farmers and healthy living	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council: Markets in Dalkey, Marley Park and Dun Laoghaire
Farmer group/Community-based	Community group or producers work on non-for-profit basis	Typically located in the south and west of Ireland
Country Markets Ltd.	independent registered co-operative Society, locally operates markets of their members, 62 markets in Ireland	The Johnston Hall, Raheny

Source: McGovern (2007) and www. BordBía.ie

Food Tourism and Authenticity

In tourism the matter of staged authenticity has been discussed frequently. Taylor (2001) portrays it as the reproduction of cultural experiences for tourists. Those can be staged shows, restaurant meals or objects as souvenirs. Chhabra (2010) identifies the terms negotiated and constructed authenticity meaning that tourism experiences can be modified in some cases to meet the need of the audience. This may be an ingredient of local dishes that has to be replaced due to ethical reasons of acceptance, or 'strangeness' as Cohen and Avieli (2004) phrase it, or a way of producing food to make it more efficient. Chhabra (2010) argues that so called commodification of heritage can also be beneficial as it can help cultures to survive. It is also evident that many people on holiday seek some level of authenticity and genuineness in the destination, either in food or other parts of the culture (Enteleca Research and Consultancy Ltd, 2000). Cohen and Avieli (2004) state that raw materials in food are critical markers of authenticity. Food can also provide insights into the community, it can be a class marker or lifestyle and an emblem for culinary heritage (Bessiére 1998, p. 23) and this is what food tourists seek to find.

Using the food typologies discussed by Everett & Aitchison (2008 p. 162) it can be said that the laggard or recreational tourist cares very little for authenticity in their holiday (Cohen & Avieli, 2004 p. 773). They prefer to look for familiar food and do not risk delving into the strangeness

of the host culture. On the other side, experiential or food tourists are eager to experience the lifestyle through the food of the destination (ibid). Cohen and Avieli (2004) also mention that the further established a destination is, the less authenticity seeking tourists are attracted into choosing and visiting the place. So do visitors to Dublin (an established destination) visit farmers markets, do they seek authenticity and does this add to their tourism experience?

Methodology

A mixed method approach was employed for this study. The primary method was a quantitative research element in the form of a survey among tourists to Dublin. This was followed by three key informant interviews and finally a stall assessment of selected farmers' markets in Dublin. A mixed methods approach was applied because the topic is exploratory. Hesse-Biber (2010, p. 3) outline that a mixed method is useful in these cases as triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data secure the validity of a study and the complementarity of two datasets produce a more thorough comprehension of the research topic.

Visitors' attitudes towards the role of food on holidays and their consideration to visit a farmers' market in Dublin were examined in a survey format. The questionnaire was undertaken in several locations in the city centre of Dublin, mainly on Dame Street, Templebar Square and in front of Trinity College. These locations were chosen as the density of tourists was expected to be higher than at other locations. The choice proved successful as tourists were clearly identified and targeted. The sample criteria were that all respondents were to be overseas visitors, over 18 years old and visiting Dublin. Analysis was undertaken using SPSS and selective cross-tabulation of the results yielded more depth findings.

Semi structured interviews were also conducted to gain further insight in terms of food tourism strategies for Ireland and in particular Dublin. Key informants were;

Helen McDaid, Food Tourism Manager at Fáilte Ireland (FI)

Margaret Jeffares, Managing Director at Good Food Ireland (GFI) (an industry marketing group)

Kieran Rose, Senior Planner and initiator of the 'Food and the City' Strategy in Dublin City Council (DCC).

A selection of Farmers' markets in Dublin were also visited in order to determine the nature and variety of stalls the markets entailed to make conclusions on the ability to be potential authentic attractions for tourists. Markets were chosen at locations close to popular tourist sites and stalls were evaluated in terms of provision of raw ingredients, cooked products and stall ownership. The following markets were evaluated: Marlay Park, Rathfarnham; Peoples Park Dun Laoghaire; Howth and Temple Bar in the city centre.

Findings of the Survey

International Visitor Response

In total 102 surveys were answered. Respondents came from a range of different countries including the UK, Europe, Austalasia and the US. Participants aged between 18 and 25 years were the largest group accounting for 49% and the second largest group was 26-35 years of age (22%). The majority of respondents (44%) replied that food is relevant but not the primary reason why they had chosen to visit Dublin. Forty per cent of the respondents answered that food is a minor consideration. Twelve per cent have said that food is not relevant at all during their holiday. Only 4% of respondents suggested that food was the reason for choosing Ireland as a destination describing themselves as a food tourist.

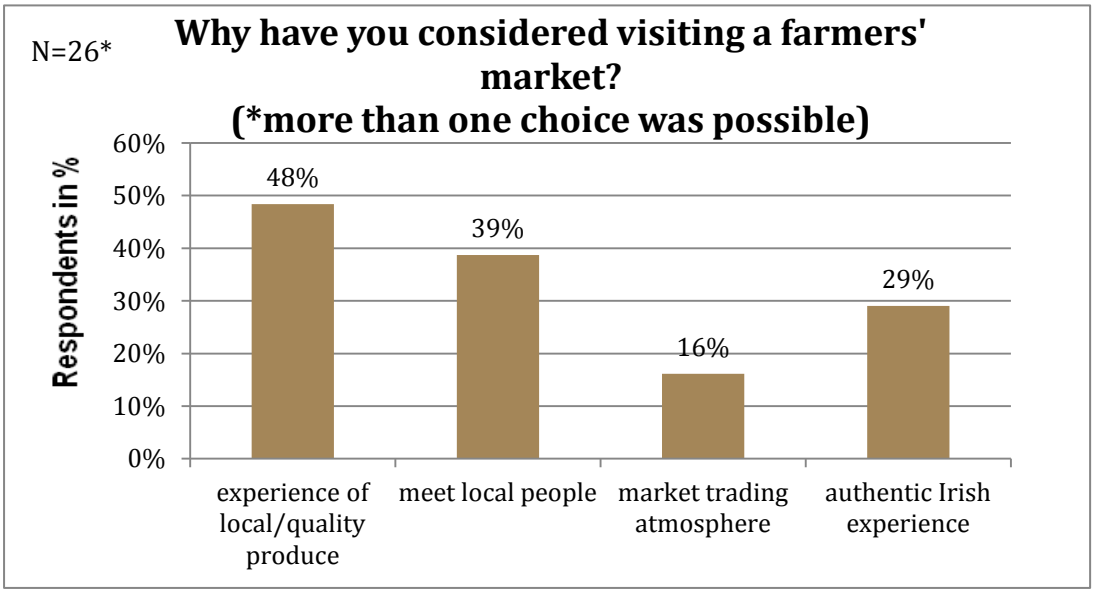
Authenticity

Findings show that 67% of the respondents agreed that the origin of the ingredients is what makes food authentic in Ireland. Only 33% found that being known to be typically from Ireland is what makes food authentic not the ingredients. With the purpose of finding out what visitors know about Irish food culture a further question asked the respondent to name an Irish food product. Overall 45 cooked Irish food products and 66 Irish ingredients were mentioned by the respondents. The respondents were also asked to rate the importance of consuming food which is typical to the destination of their holiday on a Likert rating scale of 1-5. A majority (62 %) rated that trying typical food from the destination is relatively important (1-3) with 17% rating it as very important.

Consideration to Visit Farmers' Markets in Dublin

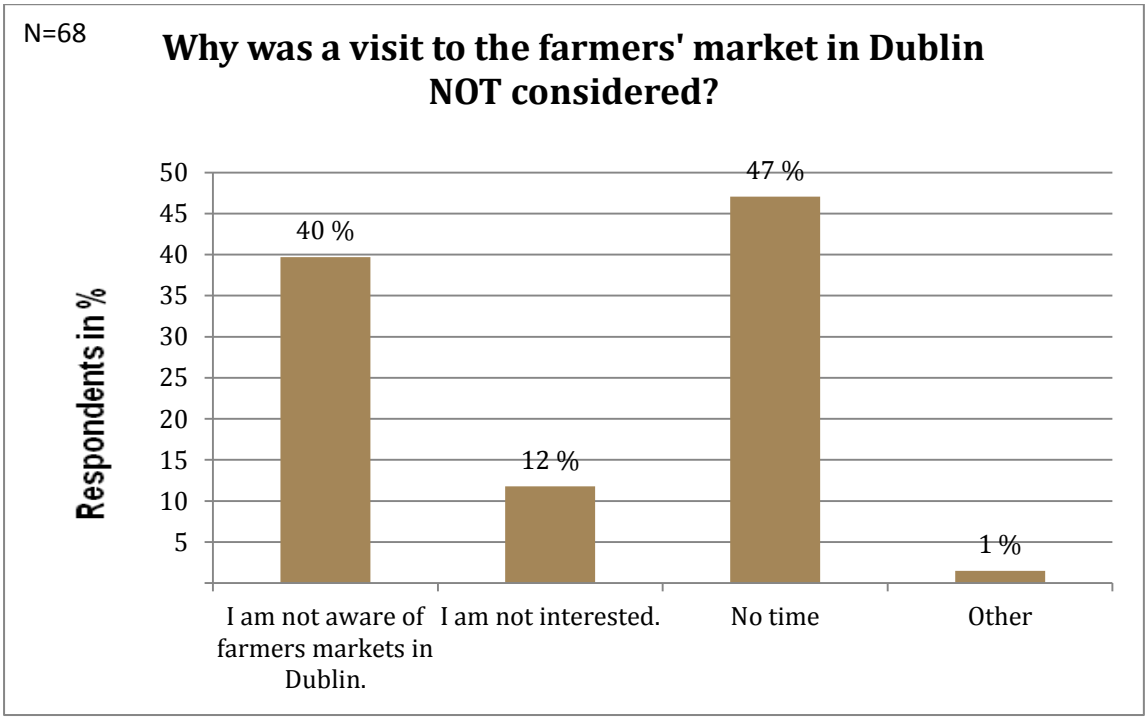
The vast majority of respondents (74%) stated that they had not considered visiting a farmers market while in Dublin. Of the 26% that did, the most frequent motives were to experience local produce (48%), to meet local people (39%), to have an authentic Irish experience (29%) and to enjoy the market atmosphere (16%) as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Why have you considered visiting a farmers' market?*



The main reasons for not considering to visit a farmers market were that visitors had no time (47%) and that they were not aware of farmers' markets in Dublin (40 %). Twelve per cent answered that they were not interested in visiting farmers' markets.

Figure 2 Reasons why a visit to a Farmers market was NOT considered



In order to determine influencing factors on whether the visitor had considered going to a farmers' market in Dublin selective cross-tabulation was undertaken. It was found that respondents that have been to Ireland before were more likely to consider a visit to a farmers' market (37%) than respondents that were visiting for the first time (20%). However the Chi-Square Test shows a value of 0.085 which means that a dependency between the two factors cannot be statistically verified. However it was found that respondents that usually go to farmers' markets on holidays are more likely to consider a visit to a farmers' market in Dublin. The Chi-Square Test confirms the interdependence between visiting farmers' markets when on holiday and the consideration to visit a market in Dublin. It was also found that respondents that go to farmers' markets at home are more likely to consider a visit to a market in Dublin (34%). This interdependence was confirmed by the Chi-Square Test result of 0.003.

Overall, the primary research shows that authentic Irish food is primarily based on quality ingredients from Ireland. Farmers' markets are an attraction generally when on holidays but in Dublin respondents were either not aware of their existence or did not have the time to visit them.

An overview of Farmers markets visited

A total of 140 stalls were counted in the four locations visited. The count differentiated between Irish and non-Irish stalls and between those offering cooked foods and raw ingredients/products. Taking craft stalls out of the total figure, the majority of cooked foods (27%) were non-Irish stalls and the majority of ingredient stalls were of Irish origins (34%). It was also found that some ingredient producers such as meat stalls extended their offer with to-go offers of cooked samples for instance hot dogs or burgers.

Food Tourism or Food AND Tourism

The findings from the three key informant interviews provided a framework on which to analyse the survey findings with a number of key points emerging in relation to the study. Firstly, there appears to be a discrepancy between public and provider viewpoints. According to Fáilte Ireland food tourism is at the starting point of its development in Ireland and this was confirmed by 84 percent of the respondents answered that food was not the main reason for choosing Ireland as a destination and 12% said that food was not relevant at all. The ultimate goal for the future is for Ireland to be a food destination, confirms Fáilte Ireland (ibid) through the development of a food tourism strategy and further marketing. On the other hand, GFI stresses that 522 food tourism providers in GFI are actively taking part in the provision of food tourism through both products and experiences. These wish to grow this market but it is the public bodies that will have to drive this development. This discrepancy between public and private standpoints and intentions creates a gap. One rationale for it could be an existing level of uncertainty or misunderstanding for the term "food tourism" in the Irish context. According to Henderson (2009) food tourism is travelling with the motivation to visit a food production area. As food is such an essential section of general tourism, managing food tourism as a separate market segment for Ireland displays a complex affair and because of this misunderstandings may occur. GFI members are for their understanding already operating within the field of food tourism but in fact it may not be the "true" food tourist who is their consumer. According to Enteleca Research Consultancy (2000) food tourists take local food as decision making factor for holiday destination choice, however this research shows that respondents in that category were a minority (4%). It may be rather the general tourist who also happens to be interested in tasting food from local areas. As this research shows food plays an important role within visitor's holiday making experience (44% said it is a relevant consideration) and the majority of people want to try local cuisine when on holidays. This group of visitors however are not the food tourists as Long (2004) and Henderson (2009) define them. This particular food tourist according to FI is not yet prevalent in this country.

Visitor's Understanding of Irish Food and the Role of Authenticity

With the intention of trying to define the unique meaning of authentic Irish food, all three key informant interviewees agreed that Irish ingredients in particular are key to Irish food culture. Respondents were aware of this fact as when asked to name familiar Irish food, the majority (60%) named an ingredient rather than a cooked meal. A gap between this perception and the association to an Irish food cuisine was detected in this research. Respondents only named a small variety of Irish cooked dishes such as Irish Stew and Fish & Chips. This could be explained by the lack of description of ingredients. The "Place on a Plate" initiative of Fáilte Ireland is working towards more ingredient specific information.

Everett and Aitchison (2008) established that levels of importance for trying local cuisine on holidays depends on tourist typologies however it may be argued that this way of seeking authentic experiences is becoming more prevalent across all typologies. Four in five diners believe it is important that restaurants use local produce (Bord Bia 2010) and this study also found that 67% of the respondents believe that authentic Irish food is in fact using products and

ingredients from Ireland rather than the food being from Ireland figuratively. According to Cohen and Avieli (2004) raw materials are the critical markers of authenticity which may be the reason for this research result. Bell and Shelman (2011) outline that tourism can be a tool to raise awareness for Irish food, it is believed that farmers' markets could be essential to this proposition. The fact that ingredients or raw materials are markers for authenticity, famers' markets as the point of sale for ingredients can be identified as a place for experiencing authentic Irish food.

The Level of Interest in Visiting Farmers Markets

The majority of respondents (74%) answered that they had not considered visiting a farmers' market in Dublin and this was because they were not aware of the existence of farmers' markets (40%) or they had no time (47%) as they had visited Dublin as a short break destination. Although Bord Bia and GFI promote farmers markets through their websites, a comprehensive marketing strategy has not been undertaken so far to position Ireland as an integrated food tourism destination such as has been done successfully according to Holloway et al. (2009) in places such as France and Italy. The perception of Irish food can be another reason as to why respondents did not consider a visit to a farmers' market. As O'Connor (2001) concluded tourist's awareness and knowledge of Irish food is limited. In addition Dublin may be seen as a European city rather than an authentic Irish destination. DCC points out that people that come to Dublin also value its international flair with its ethnical eateries and multicultural inhabitants. It was found that respondents that generally go to farmers' markets in holiday destinations were more likely to consider a visit to a farmers market in Dublin indicating the popularity of visiting markets by holidaymakers (Henderson 2009).Respondents that had visited a farmer market identified the experience of authentic Irish products (48%) and the opportunity to meet local people (39%) as a main stimulus for doing so. This is important as Irish people are the number one reason why visitors consider Ireland as a holiday destination and the main advantage vis-à-vis other destinations according to Fáilte Irelands visitor attitudes survey (2011).

Added Value to the Experience?

The key informant interviews revealed that existing farmers' markets in Dublin were not identified as a significant tourist attraction for visitors as FI confirms "it is not a motivator for visiting Dublin. It adds to the ambience". This is also confirmed by the quantitative results of this research as respondents mainly did not consider visiting a market in Dublin. However, FI also highlights that a market of the size and volume comparable to the English market in Cork would fulfill the potential for farmers' markets to be an attractive significant tourist attraction. This potential was indeed recognised by the Dublin City Council who are investing in redeveloping the Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Market of Dublin to facilitate fifty percent of the area to be transferred into retail space for stallholders. Rose also adds that the market will be initially developed to serve the local community but he recognises the potential for the tourist market. The value of farmers' markets is that this is the place where those ingredients can be experienced at first hand. GFI mentions that the area of food tourism and farmers' markets are conforming with the destination brand message of Ireland. It is marketed as a destination to discover and experience. The notion of authenticity fits comfortably into this

mission. Farmers' markets can contribute to this brand image as markets display the opportunity for visitors to discover and try authentic Irish food, to meet local people and to be part of Irish culture. Ultimately it could represent an enriching value for the image of Irish food and for the tourist experience in Dublin.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For food tourism to become a successful niche market for Ireland it is crucial to have a coordinated vision, closer networking and transparent communication between all stakeholders. It is important that all stakeholders have the same understanding in terms of defining who the food tourist is to Ireland or whether the emphasis is simply placed on food *in* tourism. Regular networking events such as a quarterly Industry Breakfasts could be held for representatives from the different stakeholder groups to exchange ideas and align common visions for future developments.

Farmers' markets are not only the place to experience authentic food culture but also a place to meet Irish people, which according to Fáilte Ireland's visitor survey (2010) is one of the main reasons for tourists coming to Ireland. More emphasis is required on integrating farmers' markets into overall food tourism strategies and also for the ongoing development of the new Fruit and Vegetable Market in Dublin to be valued as an authentic tourism attraction for future strategies.

There is a need for a marketing strategy of food tourism development incorporating a stronger and integrated marketing approach towards farmers' markets. As respondents also appreciate the opportunity to meet local people, a campaign introducing the stallholders in short YouTube videos disseminated through on-line communication channels. Leading on from this a collaborative branded online shop would facilitate distribution of products to tourists, to accommodation providers and gastronomes.

Farmers' markets provide the scene to experience Irish food as part of living Irish culture involving all senses which enriches the experience thus servicing the Sightseer and Culture Seeker, which according to Tourism Ireland (2007) is Irelands best visitor prospect. Farmers' markets should be recognised as a cultural sight for tourists providing an experience using all the senses which according to Cohen and Avieli (2004) and Everett (2008) is part of the modern understanding of tourism experiences. The degree of authenticity associated with them should be embedded into both strategies and delivery.

Future research is required as to how Dublin's farmers' markets can include more cultural experiences incorporating authenticity for tourists. This could also pertain to the domestic tourism market. Future research on the degree of interest and issues of authenticity should also be explored concerning the development of the Fruit and Vegetable Market in Dublin once it is complete. Its location and size will no doubt provide a tourist attraction that should have considerable impact; however this will be dependent on an integrated approach to both provision and marketing.

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