

The Contradiction Between Culinary Innovation Research and Gastro Tourism Practice

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Abstract: This historical review explores a descriptive-informative overview of cuisine as a component of gastro-tourism and travel. The paper reports on contemporary culinary innovation offerings in a South African context, analysing the links – or absence thereof – between academia and the gastro-tourism industry, to illustrate the ambiguity between research and practice in culinary innovation and its effects on the gastro-tourism industry. The qualitative methodology employed was informed by the historically oriented systematic literature review process. This was guided by a structured approach to determine relevant source material that would be useful for the historical literature review purpose. Evidence searches for literature from various sources such as scholarly journals and professional magazines, grey literature and personal reviews within the industry were undertaken. The examples in this paper highlight the potential unstructured innovation taking place within the South African food service environment without supported evidence from academic research. Role-players in both research and the gastro-tourism fields could apply properly researched food heritage and gastro-nationalism interventions to draw tourists and allow them to experience innovative use of local indigenous produce and food heritage innovations. Examples include Wild Peach (*Landolphia kirkii*) or Sand Apricot Vine (*Umkuzi* in Zulu) fruit leather disk covering a cheese and fruit plate, or swirls of fruit leather used to decorate a carrot and *Marula* Bundt cake, made from bright *Umnumbela* or Transvaal Milk-plum purée, and *Marula* (*Sclerocarya birrea*) pulp in the carrot cake batter. The research highlights the limited available data, to establish a viable link between academia and the gastro-tourism industry. Despite this limitation, the paper foregrounds the efforts being made towards culinary innovation within the South African culinary industry. Simultaneously it also illustrates the originality of this research and the importance of improved collaboration.

Keywords: Gastro-tourism, Contemporary cuisine, Food innovation, New product development, Food heritage, Gastro-nationalism

1. Introduction and Background

Travel destinations, tour operators and the larger food and hospitality industries increasingly attribute greater importance to cuisine within ordinary and specifically gastro-tourism to promote travel destinations. Ever greater importance is attributed to food and beverages by the travel and tourism industries, in order to entice tourists, heighten their travel experience through food and beverages, and to set themselves apart from other culinary travel destinations (Martin, Izquierdo & Laguna-Garcia, 2021). Local food traditions, indigenous foods and ingredients, heritage dishes and recipes, and cultural cuisine play important roles in differentiating culinary destinations. As a multi-cultural country, South Africa has a rich culinary identity that has great potential to enhance the food and beverage experience of gastro-tourists. It is suggested that everyone from high-end restaurants to informal eateries benefits from offering local foods that would be of interest to the gastro-tourist (Jørstad, Roaldsen & Ljunggren, 2020).

However, gastro-tourism remains an under-researched academic area. Even though researchers study the concept of gastro- or food tourism, some ambiguity between research and industry practices remains. These under researched topics include aspects such as the impact of travelers' local food consumption value on tourist behaviour and many others (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020).

To celebrate the cuisine of a gastro-tourism destination or to present authentic gastro-tourism experiences, specific culinary and cultural food knowledge is required. Culinary innovation, and particularly cultural food innovation, has become an eminent promotional aspect for travel destinations. However, in most cases, culinary innovation in the food service milieu appears to take place 'organically' or naturally, by chance (Harrington, 2005). Many problems within the field of culinary innovation and new food product development occur, high failure rates being the most prominent (Stanton 2016). New food innovations are a particularly important and potentially critical aspect for the long-term success of any food service establishment. High failure rates could result from badly executed development, or because new innovations were not properly introduced to the customer. Consumers may have negative perceptions towards new innovations on offer. Failures in innovation and cultural food adaptations illustrate the disassociation between innovations and research, which highlights the need for better synergy between research in the academic environment and practice.

This research sought examples of culinary innovation to illustrate dissimilarities in the application of processes by food service practitioners and the potential lack that exists in the research environment. Special attention is paid to the food offerings in a contemporary South African context in terms of the gastro-cultural heritage and the way it informs tourism development. The question is what suitable examples of cultural culinary innovation in the hospitality industry may be of interest to the gastro-tourist to illustrate the contradiction in terms of lack of research. Therefore, the authors collected and described appropriate, published examples of cuisine exemplifying culinary innovation to illustrate the ambiguity between research and practice in culinary innovation and to draw attention to the relationship, or absence thereof, between academia and the gastro-tourism industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Limited Research and Gastro-Tourism Practices Collaborations

Food is used as a principal marketing component in assorted food tourism products by various role players (such as destination governing bodies, tourism industry operators, local restaurants and food service establishments) to draw potential tourists (Henderson, 2009).

Gastro-tourism has only really been a prominent industry for both practitioners and researchers since the late 1990's (Mulcahy, 2019). It appears to have developed informally long before it was afforded any research focus interest. Better communication, transport networks and globalisation increased broader familiarity with unknown and foreign foods (Gajic, 2015; Mulcahy, 2019). Tourism role-players placed more focus on culinary heritage as a drawing card to tempt gastro-tourists to visit a specific destination and experience authentic culinary offerings, thus generating substantial income for a particular tourist destination (Mulcahy, 2019). Over the past two decades there has been a marked increase in gastro-tourism, with a suggested pre-COVID-19 global annual financial growth of 1.8 % per annum between 2019 to 2024 (Weinberger, 2020). Other scholars such as Hall (2020) noted an increase in the industrialisation of food as well as the hospitality and tourism industries, arguing that many of these initiatives were specifically invented to be used as a tool in gastro-tourism. Food has become increasingly important to attract tourists and has both a primary and supporting role in gastro-tourism. Food is considered a vital aspect of general and specifically gastro-tourism offerings, often guiding tourists' decision making about places to visit (Henderson, 2009; Mulcahy, 2019). The increased development of gastro-tourism has made the indispensable need for research in this field obvious (Mulcahy, 2019). Research in the field of gastro-tourism, particularly regarding the tourism product, the different destinations, the classifications of tourists, tourist decision-making behaviour and their expectations, is therefore vital and provides scientific authentication for tourism development.

Better teamwork between the gastro-tourism industry and similar academic research fields can upgrade and expand destination marketing as well as gastro-tourism developments. Difficulties in the gastro-tourism field can be alleviated with support from functional research to facilitate better destination tourist experiences as expected by the gastro-tourist. Furthermore, such collaboration between industry practices and research could facilitate better sustainable development within the industry. The importance of gastro-tourism is undisputed, as seen from a presentation by Erik Wolf, the president of the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) during a 2001 presentation (Wolf, 2006), emphasising the need for dedicated research that is supported by industry practitioners for an inclusive discourse to address growth and expansion. Similar focused research regarding the importance of gastro-tourism can be found from a number of research institutions in Canada, Australia, the USA and Europe (Getz, Robinson & Vujicic, 2014), even though uncertainty about the specific terminological development and conceptualisation of gastro-tourism still remains. Finally, Hall (2020) illustrates the specific need for collaboration between industry practitioners and academic research with an emphasis on what tourists eat. This furthers the discourse of social and economic aspects of gastro-tourism which need to be addressed, so that it is not only concerned with experiences, but that it makes a sustainable environmental contribution. A specific focus on sustainability, which includes waste as well as the celebration and protection of culinary heritage and authenticity, is a much-needed area of concern which will ultimately benefit gastro-tourism. Culinary innovation in the food and restaurant industry that showcases South African food offerings to the gastro-tourist, while taking into consideration culinary heritage and sustainability, needs attention from both research scholars and practitioners.

2.2 Culinary Innovation

The food industry needs a focus on innovation to improve organisational performance, success, and long-term survival. In the food or restaurant business, it is likely that innovation is driven by a company-centered, product-

focused, and causal approach. Most establishments follow this 'evolutionary-economical view of innovation' (Feuls, 2018). This implies that innovation in the food industry or restaurant context takes place through everyday practices and may not be an intentional practice. Many questions about the underlying dynamic and ongoing social processes of innovation within the foodservice industry remain, as it is still a greatly under-researched area (Feuls, 2018; Gherardi & Perrotta, 2014).

The culinary innovation process is defined as an experimental process consisting of two stages: conceptualisation of a new idea and secondly, when value is added through teamwork and dissemination (Albors-Garrigos, Barreto, García-Segovia, Martínez-Monzó and Hervás-Oliver (2013). Feuls (2018) on the other hand believes that organic innovation takes place in the culinary environment through three processes: innovation through repetition, innovation through adaptation, and innovation through differentiation. Harrington, Baggs and Ottenbacher (2009) identified seven steps in this 'organic' process in high-end restaurant settings, namely: idea generation, screening, trial and error, concept development, final testing, training and finally commercialisation.

According to Feuls (2018) the first process of innovation occurs when kitchens continuously repeat the same practice in which small variations constantly occur. These might, if positively evaluated, lead to a change in practices. Chefs and restaurant kitchens therefore imitate, adapt, refine and/or renew classical recipes, thus presenting their own version of the dish, translating their experiences into creative food items (Hornig & Hu, 2008). Innovation as adaptation (Feuls, 2018) seems to be an exclusive practice in high-end restaurants which have the staff, financial resources, space and time required for innovative development and creation apart from their normal kitchen environment. This space could be a chef's own kitchen, test kitchen or laboratory (Svejenova, Planellas & Vives, 2010). "Within these spaces, chefs consciously change tradition or well-known dishes by recreating, sampling, blending, reinventing, reinterpreting, interpreting, or deconstructing their cuisine" (Feuls, 2018). Lastly, innovation through differentiating is like the trend-mapping-process, where high-end development and innovation eventually moves into the retail environment and is found in the supermarket. The high-end restaurant with a dedicated innovation laboratory will present new ideas that will eventually be assimilated in their own offerings and will enable others to develop an understanding of culinary innovation through collaborating, consulting and possibly teaching (Feuls, 2018).

Innovation in such a culinary environment involves creativity that is often based on the chef's artistic aspirations and talent. The industry's acceptance of the chef's reputation and leadership often helps embed innovative change in the broader industry's practices. Such change and acceptance of innovations are further disseminated to the public through the media and other marketing tools.

Culinary innovation development in the food service industry is less formal and more organic. It is less focused on market and financial cost analyses, and more on networking with colleagues and suppliers of raw materials and ingredients. Innovation is a more natural process, where the chefs' tacit skills and knowledge determines the success of the innovation outcomes (Harrington, 2005). The knowledge evolution approach has been followed by various other researchers and the tacit-explicit as well as the synthetic to analytic evolution models have been considered in culinary innovation (Albors-Garrigos *et al.*, 2013). Culinary innovation was considered as an impulse based on tacit knowledge by Harrington (2005), allowing chefs and food innovators to develop competitive advantages. Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2005) later applied a new service development approach to innovation in hospitality. Market analysis and human resource management were found to be critical to successful collaboration between the food service industry and academia, where academia could valuably assist the food service industries (Albors-Garrigos *et al.*, 2013).

2.3 Industry/Practitioners and Gastro-Tourism

The food and culinary culture of a society are easily accessible means by which a society can convey cultural assets and elements to the gastro-tourist (Pekersen, 2020). Tour operators and the food industry in South Africa have increased their efforts to develop innovative food and beverage offerings to promote South Africa as a food destination. Innovation is capable of increasing competitiveness as well as supporting an increase in food tourism for the gastro-tourism world (Suryani & Claudya, 2021).

Tour operators and tourism practitioners are in business to generate profit. Their core business is making money and contributing to the economy. It can thus happen that 'authenticity' is lost, and that culinary innovation takes place without taking the gastro-tourist into consideration. To present authentic gastro-tourism experiences that reflect the food and beverages of a destination, specific culinary and cultural knowledge is required. Research

institutions such as universities can provide such knowledge, but this requires collaboration between academia and industry.

Since the main interest of the gastro-tourism industry is local food, a close relationship between food and tourism has developed over the past number of years (Ellis, Park, Kim & Yeoman, 2018). Given that academia and the industry continues to work independently, there is considerable space for collaborative research as food tourism is an ever expanding scholarly research area (Andersson, Mossberg & Therkelsen, 2017).

Food is an essential element in a tourist's selection of a destination and the anticipated experience it has to offer. It has therefore become imperative to not only focus on research from a theoretical point of view but to also include the expertise of practitioners. When tourists select a travel destination they expect tourism products that are authentic, represents value and quality, and are supported by well researched facts (Gheorghe, Tudorache & Nistoreanu, 2014). Contemporary tourists are more informed and experienced; they seek the origin of gastronomic experiences, the story and history behind the food so as to have an authentic culinary experience based on culinary heritage (Gheorghe *et al.*, 2014; Richards, 2012).

To meet the practical challenges of planning and providing innovative and authentic food tourism experiences, more input by academia is essential. Practitioners should embrace the research done by academics and apply the principles and applicable data to provide a memorable food experience based on facts and meeting the needs of the contemporary gastro-tourist.

3. Methodology

The aim of this paper was to offer a narrative overview, through suitable examples, of South African culinary innovation developments to illustrate the lack of research in academia.

For this research the qualitative methodology employed was informed by the historically oriented systematic literature review process (Bortolini, Nogueira Cortimiglia, Danilevicz & Ghezzi, 2021). It was furthermore guided by a structured approach to determine relevant source material that would be useful for the historical literature review purpose (Chambers & Forlin, 2021; Snyder, 2019). Evidence searches were extracted from scholarly journals and professional magazines dealing with food innovation and culinary heritage. Search strings in various combinations and exploring several databases, using words such as Culinary Innovation, Food Heritage, Cultural Food, Gastro Tourism, South Africa, Food Tourism, were employed.

The most relevant publications in terms of culinary innovation and gastro-tourism were included and ranked. The sample reflects those that included cases of culinary innovation using local produce, and cultural food and/or indigenous cuisine examples that showcased South African culinary innovation though food heritage as a marketing tool for gastro-tourism. A second round of searches in grey literature, which included popular magazines, websites, and food blogs, was done. This process used internet search engines to locate direct and indirect works. A third group of sources was obtained by snowball sampling, using the authors' own industry and culinary work contacts.

After screening the literature to establish if the selected sources meet the inclusion criteria (namely culinary innovation and gastro-tourism), a first exploratory read of titles and abstracts was done to verify to what extent the relevant publications conformed to the research. Thereafter, analytical reading of the sources was done to explore the main topic. The extracted data was analysed against the inclusion themes and appropriate examples used as results (Chambers & Forlin, 2021). Sources containing evidence of Menu Items, Food Photos and Menu and Feedback Descriptions by staff and customers were sought. Because a limited number of examples met the screening criteria, evidence was directly reported in the result section.

As a historical review was conducted, the authors did not limit the searches to specific time periods, in contrast with the usual focus of literature reviews on the most current literature. This was done in order to provide a narrative perspective of the antecedents of culinary innovation in a gastro-tourism context (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019).

A systematic historical review was used as a methodology to illustrate the contradiction between culinary innovation and gastro-tourism practices. Further research is however suggested to establish how large and impactful the discrepancy between gastro-tourism and academia may be, as well as the effects it may hold for both research and practice.

4. Results

Like many other countries, South Africa has only recently started taking full advantage of culinary innovation within the gastro-tourism area. The Cape Province of South Africa and its winelands have for some time been considered South Africa's premier gastro-tourism destination. Much of the available cultural-heritage culinary innovation examples developed for the gastro-tourist can be found in this province, such as the recent addition of Michelin chef Jan-Hendrik van der Westhuizen's Klein Jan in the Tswalu Game Reserve in the Northern Cape. Others include Wolfgat in the small West Coast town of Paternoster and Foliage in Franschoek (Unilever, 2021). Innovation in these establishments is creatively and expertly executed, building on the cultural food heritage of the country. Van der Westhuizen's reinterpretation of an éclair which is filled with one of South Africa's most iconic candies, Peppermint Crisp, is an example. He says: "If you've never had the pleasure, it's essentially luminous green, crunchy, mint-flavoured candy enrobed in milk chocolate – and is available at every corner shop, tuck shop and supermarket in the country" (Van der Westhuizen, 2022). Customers are given an emotional connection to something edible that is essentially a very South African taste or heritage food experience. Even in academia, food innovation has recently been much more prominent, such as a Wild Peach (*Landolphia kirkii*) or Sand Apricot Vine (*Umkuzi* in Zulu) (Fox & Young, 1988) fruit leather disk covering a cheese and fruit plate, as observed in Figure 1. Or swirls of fruit leather used to decorate a carrot and *Marula* Bundt cake (Figure 2). The fruit leather is made from bright *Umnumbela* (Zulu word) or Transvaal Milk-plum (*Stamvrug*, Afrikaans word) (Van Wyk & Gericke, 2018) purée, while *Marula* (*Sclerocarya birrea*) pulp is incorporated into the carrot cake batter. It is estimated that as many as 12 000 fruits can be collected from one tree in one day (Fox & Young, 1988) (Figure 3 for the fruit). The cake is decorated with *Spekboom* (Afrikaans word) (*Portulacaria afra*) leaves, and African Marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) flower petals. Of course, not all heritage food products are indigenous, such as the Strawberry Guava (*Psidium cattleianum*), which, although classified as an invasive species, can only be foraged in the wild and produces excellent material for innovation (Figure 4).



Figure 1: Wild Peach (*Landolphia kirkii*) Fruit Leather: Authors own



Figure 2: *Umnumbela* Fruit Leather Adorns a *Marula* Carrot Cake: Authors own



Figure 3: Fresh *Marulas (Sclerocarya birrea)*: Authors own



Figure 4: Fresh *Strawberry Guava (Psidium cattleyanum)*: Authors own

Innovation could be as simple as infusing a new flavour into something familiar, such as South African steamed breads (*idombolo*) with the added flavour of indigenous *Mondia whitei*, presented in a *Huā juǎn* (Mandarin twisted roll) shape (see Figure 5) (Fisher, 2021). Steamed breads have a long and rich history in the South African cuisine, and these modern adaptations celebrate a delicious indigenous flavouring, *Mondia whitei*, also known as White's ginger, tonic root or in the Zulu language as "umondi" or "mundi," (Aremu, Cheesman, Finnie & Van Staden, 2011). Innovation could also be as simple as using suitable indigenous fruits to make pâte de fruits. Figure 6 shows from top left to right *Makataan* or *Tsamma (Citrillus lanatus)*, Wild Custard Apple (*Annona senegalensis*), Wild Peach (*Landolphia kirkii*) or Sand Apricot Vine (Umkuzi in Zulu), *Amatungulu* or Natal plum (*Carissa macrocarpa*), Cape Rough Skin Lemon (*Citrus jambhiri* 'Cape rough'), Cape Gooseberry (*Physalis peruviana*).



Figure 5: *Mondia Whitei* Steamed *idombolo (Huā juǎn Mandarin Twisted Roll)*: Authors own



Figure 6: Selection of South African indigenous Pâte de Fruits: Authors own

Other examples include the use of Kalahari truffle, Buchu, Mebos custard and Nara oil from the Namibian Desert plant !Nara (*Acanthosicyos horridus*) at Le Quartier Français, Rooibos tea to create a smoke flavour at Ellerman House, or in a Rooibos rice pudding at Tsala Treetop Lodge (Marshall, Christelow, Morris & Du Plessis, 2011).

Natsuko Shoji, the Tokyo chef-owner of restaurant Été and awardee of Asia's Best Female Chef 2022 title (Steen, 2022) says that often when we think of 'fine dining', we tend to disassociate ourselves from it. Small portions on a large fancy plate, high price points, and food that looks too surreal to take a bite from cause consumers to find the local ramen shop a more attractive option. This sentiment is confirmed by food journalist Georgina Crouth (2023) in a newspaper article titled "Tourists want to taste South Africa, not 'fine dining'".

The food tourism industry is large and continues to grow, not only in South Africa but also on the African continent. Food tourism should focus on the local food, culture and history of a certain place and should aim to attract travelers who want to experience local cuisine and food culture, of which there is ample diversity in South Africa.

Food innovation within the South African gastro-tourism industry appears to take place no differently from that in similar food destination areas worldwide. South Africa has recently seen notable growth in innovation offerings which celebrate gastro-nationalism and food heritage, utilising indigenous ingredients and applying the rich food cultural practices of the country.

5. Conclusion, Reflections, and Recommendations

The use and influence of nationalist sentiments in the production and marketing of food is referred to as gastro-nationalism (DeSoucey, 2012). This research set out to illustrate, through various examples of food and menus, that culinary innovation in a South African context and the development of a national culinary identity appear to be taking place in isolation, without functional substantive research. Role players in South African food service establishments are coming to understand and celebrate the country's own gastro-nationalism. Innovation is a critical component enabling food service establishments to re-invent or adapt classics that may appeal to the gastro-tourist and others. The celebration of local heritage food is taking place at such a fast rate, that a brand-new cooking competition was launched, to 'Rediscover Indigenous Mzansi Ingredients' at the same time that the research concluded - see Figure 7 (People-Planet-Plate-initiative, 2023). Mzansi is the informal Xhosa word for South Africa.



Figure 7 Harvesting Heritage Culinary Competition (People-Planet-Plate-initiative, 2023)

Considerable expansion in international research divisions within the global restaurant industry has been noted, where restaurants and food companies spend enormous resources on research sections (Tan, Tan, Yeo & Ching, 2019). Researchers maintain the growing importance and significant role that the culinary innovation process performs within the food manufacturing and food service industries (Harrington *et al.*, 2009). Such culinary innovation however appears to mostly happen organically or naturally by chance, mostly disassociated from gastro innovation research being conducted in academia, and the innovation outputs are mostly confined to the establishment's menus. This innovation work however has a lot of academic research potential.

For competitors in the food service industry to differentiate themselves from each other and to grow and expand through food reviews and restaurant guides, establishments must set trends, which they achieve through innovation. Some correlation between the high-end restaurant industry and the couture clothing industries have been identified. Both couture and high-end restaurants set trends, build images and establish quality standards that are often adopted by the industry as a whole (Albors-Garrigos *et al.*, 2013; Surlemont & Johnson, 2005). On the other hand, authors Albors-Garrigos *et al.* (2013) are uncertain whether culinary service may be categorised as a craft or as an industry, which seems to hamper the culinary innovation process. The authors of this paper maintain that the recent merging of culinary arts and food science, also referred to as culinary sciences or Culinology[®], could complicate matters even more by opening a new area of academic research potential. Organic development and innovation may also be particular to specific styles of food service establishments, such as high-end restaurants as opposed to chain restaurants (QSR, quick casual, etc.) that may have separate culinary innovation sections and dedicated R&D teams (Harrington *et al.*, 2009). Researchers Harrington (2005) and Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2005) caution us about the problems associated with new innovations. Although innovation is acknowledged as a critical development aspect for the long-term success and growth of most establishments in the food service industry, high failure rates resulting from badly researched and executed innovations are also noted. The failure of innovations could also be attributed to the fact that they were not correctly introduced to the consumer or that customers may have negative associations with new food innovations found on menus (Harrington *et al.*, 2009).

The new food innovation failures within the food service industry are the basis of this research. The aim is to illustrate the potential contradiction between 'unstructured' culinary innovation and gastro-tourism offerings

within the food service industry, and those happening in academia, which mostly relies on validated empirical evidence to support findings. According to authors Braun and Bockelmann (2016) the role-players who conduct food innovation within the food service industry applies absorptive and desorptive capacities to generate and market culinary innovations. Desorptive capacity is said to be the safe transfer of knowledge from the sender, while absorptive capacity enables the acquisition and assimilation of external knowledge by the recipient (Roldán Bravo, Stevenson, Moreno & Lloréns Montes, 2020). This furthermore explains how high-end food service establishments would be influenced by what goes on around them, i.e., their absorptive capacities.

There is a constant demand from independent and/or high-end restaurants to deliver new innovative recipes and menu dishes, but the development process may not necessarily always consider feedback from consumers. Research has shown that for establishments to excel in culinary innovation, people with a natural personal predisposition are needed. Innovators in the food world need specific personalities, abilities, and extensive knowledge that they may have acquired through training and repetitive practices. This includes the practical knowledge, skills and application of rules which are integrated and internalised by kitchen workers. Furthermore, innovative chefs need a wide-ranging understanding and knowledge that they have gained through reflexive thinking about their kitchen practices (Gomez, Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2003). It can therefore be surmised that chefs, who are mostly naturally talented organic innovators, are often selected specifically for these abilities and attributes. The concern however is that food service establishments often do not have the required resources (finances, human capacity, time, etc.) to undertake extensive research of what consumers expect from new products and innovations. Establishments consequently often rely on a process where innovations are presented to customers, and where their success is measured through sales and potential complements or criticism to determine the feasibility of the innovation.

This narrative historical review postulates that absorption should not only happen organically, but that role-players in the food service industries should be actively engaged in academic research. This will guarantee that research is not conducted in isolation but that the organic absorption process which takes place in the food and gastro-tourism environments, is also informed by research. The authors furthermore suggest much more focused collaboration between the gastro-tourism industries and the food research environment. An environment should be created where gastro-tourism can inform the research to be conducted, and where research findings can feed back into the gastro-tourism world. Collaboration of this nature could contribute to a research strategy where a gastro-tourism product can be delivered based on actual underlying and supportive research. Culinary heritage, food authenticity, and the art and science of product development research should form the basis for developing well-informed innovative culinary products. Such a research approach and collaboration could be informed by what tourists eat and the environmental contexts in which they find themselves (Hall, 2020). It is therefore of the utmost importance that food service practitioners within the gastro-tourism environment must support and embrace the research conducted by academia and apply such principles and applicable data to provide memorable food experiences. An achievable goal, such as meeting the experience needs of the contemporary gastro-tourist, providing sustainable culinary tourism products and protecting the environment, should be set. This is needed to reverse current gastro-tourism practices based on mostly industrialised food without any celebration of the local destination food heritage or gastro-nationalism.

This study reflects on the limited data that is available regarding culinary innovation and gastro-tourism within the South African region. A concerted effort should be made to stimulate collaboration and mutual information exchanges between gastro-tourism practitioners and researchers to contribute to sustained development of data that would benefit both parties.

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