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**“Food Tells a Story in Every Bite”:
Co-Creating a Gastronomic Profile Through Food Tours**



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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores co-creation between producers within food tourism. The role of gastronomy in tourism is gaining much attention because food is quickly becoming a language with which to communicate nature, culture, emotions, and identity (Lupton, 1996). Gastronomic activities, such as food tours, cooking courses, or food festivals, bring producers together to exchange and share similar interests, skills, and knowledge in order to co-create and convey their gastronomic profile to guests. This qualitative study utilizes observations, personal semi-structured interviews, and content analysis to research gastronomic activities within which co-creation takes place between producers. These three mixed methods were conducted with food tour companies and local food businesses to see why these producers come together to participate in food tours as well as how they co-create a gastronomic profile of a region through the food tours. The findings showed that producers may participate in food tours for the following reasons: exposure; community support; supporting a unique tour concept that promotes education; intimacy; passion and enjoyment. Lastly, this study revealed that the relationship between a food tour network and a place's gastronomic profile is quite close. This is because the producers working together in the food tours co-create and convey their gastronomic profile through visual, auditory and gustatory components. Showing off the local, unique restaurants in the food tours, telling background histories and stories of the place and its staff, and offering samples of fresh, local flavors are all components that bring producers together in order to tell a story about a restaurant or destination.

Key Words: food tourism, food tours, gastronomy, gastronomic profile, co-creation, multisensory

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Gastronomy and Food Tours

People eat everyday regardless of being at home or on holiday, but only over the last fifteen years or so have the terms gastronomy and food tourism slowly started to arise within the tourism industry (Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Macionis, and Cambourne, 2003; Long, 2004; Lupton, 1996). With globalization and peoples' increasing demand for unique, interesting culinary experiences, numerous locations around the world are searching for ways to convey meaning through quality gastronomic activities. People are beginning to recognize food as being expressive of identity and culture (Bessièrè, 1998); and for that reason, destinations have started using their gastronomic personalities to differentiate themselves from others and show visitors who they are (Hall *et al.*, 2003).

According to Kivela and Crotts (2006: 354), gastronomy was once referred to “exclusively as the art of cooking and good eating”; however, it later evolved to include “the relationship between culture and food”, and today certain food-enthusiasts refer to gastronomy as involving the “tasting, preparing, experiencing, experimenting, researching, discovering, understanding, and writing about food”. The term ‘gastronomy’ encompasses an extensive amount of knowledge, and when related to tourism the experiences, studies, and understanding of food can be endless. It should also be mentioned that food-related activities revolving around the idea of food production, cooking, and/or eating within the context of this thesis can be referred to as gastronomic activities. These activities, such as food festivals, cooking courses, food tours or taste trails, wine and food tastings, or visitations to farms and other local production sites, require the collaboration of multiple producers. Within this study, I will only be focusing on food tours as my main interest of gastronomic activities as this is a way of exploring a network of multiple producers working together to provide engaging multisensory experiences. These tours maintain “a significant food component” (Hall *et al.*, 2003: 149), and may include a combination of visitations to farms, wineries, breweries, restaurants, food production sites, and/or specialty food shops food.

By providing gastronomic activities, producers invite the guests to utilize all five senses in order to completely immerse themselves in the culture of the destination or place that they are visiting (Everett, 2008; Sims, 2008). These multisensory engagements enhance the creation of experiences allowing guests to gather more knowledge about the place, culture, culinary behaviors, and related identity (Boniface, 2003). As producers work together

to offer guests the best gastronomic activities and experiences possible, some form of co-creation takes place since interactions are stressed between different producers as well as producers and consumers (Binkhorst and Den Dekker, 2009). The interactions are then related to the building of relationships and exchange of knowledge with the purpose of generating valuable products, services, and experiences. In a food tourism context, producers are using food as the means through which this interaction and communication takes place.

Since food is common to every culture around the globe, regardless of how diverse each culture's culinary practices are, it still acts as a cornerstone of human social life and interaction (Long, 2004). This is due to the fact that food provides people with a foundation from which to embark adventures where one can experience the differences of cultures through one common medium – food. As stated by Long (2004: 121), “food is a system of communication and signifies the culture of those who consume it.” Thus, tourism activities with a focus on gastronomy act as a medium for cultural expression of the host society. Food tourism brings like-minded producers together to better serve the community by combining individual skills and knowledge (Bessièrè, 1998). As a collective, these producers work together to offer quality gastronomic activities where they can proudly display their culture, character, and passion to guests (Einarsen and Mykletun, 2009). Often times, the gastronomic identity or profile of a place that is presented to tourists through food tourism is not only related to the food of the place but to the setting, behaviors and lifestyles seen and experienced there as well. Because cooking and eating in tourism are public performances, they frequently transform social and cultural boundaries between home and away (Pérez and Abarca, 2007). By consuming the local food in a destination, tourists are stepping over these boundaries to become a part of the social world within which the local producers construct their profiles.

1.2. Reason for Research and Demarcation

As Haukeland and Jacobsen (2001) confirm, there has been little research on the topic of food and gastronomy in regards to tourism and the construction of identities and profiles. However, the research that has been done has mostly focused on the consumer perspective since tourists are the ones consuming the gastronomy, culture, and profile of a destination. Additionally, Binkhorst *et al.* (2009: 315) argue that the co-creation process within the realm of tourism “lags behind, both in applications as well as in fundamental research.” Because gastronomy and food tourism are still relatively new to the tourism industry as well, the complexities and challenges of them offer a great deal of exploration, especially from the

producer's perspective. Therefore, in order to help fill this gap in tourism research, it is important to investigate the local producer's viewpoint on the topic of co-creation within a food tourism context and how it differs from that of the consumer. Thus, the focus will be on the co-creation and communication of a gastronomic profile from the producer's side rather than the consumption of it from the consumer's side.

Through the qualitative analysis of this study, my hope is to contribute knowledge to the academic perspective of social sciences, most specifically on the producer's side of co-creation in food tourism. The results of my study will not be generalizable to all other food tours and gastronomic profiles conveyed through food-related activities. However, since this study was conducted in San Diego, California, USA, the findings may enhance the understanding of co-creation through gastronomy in large, urban American cities with a diverse background of culture and culinary influences. It is possible that these places can also use food tours in a similar way to display their own gastronomic profile. Nonetheless, the information from studying food tourism may be of assistance to future destinations and local producers searching for ways to share their culture, character, and passion with the world.

Before presenting my research aim and questions, it is necessary to define the boundaries within which my research will take place. Throughout this paper, the term 'locals' will refer to the producers living and working in San Diego within the service industry, more specifically, food tourism. The term 'locals' will also be interchangeable with 'participants' and 'local producers' who, in this case, include the tour companies, food tour guides, restaurant owners, and chefs living and working in San Diego, California, USA. Throughout previous scholarly research on identity and culinary practices, the terms 'identity', and 'gastronomic identity' more specifically, have not been clearly defined as they are social constructions that are always evolving (Anderson, 2005; Bessièrè, 1998; Long, 2004). Even though gastronomic profiles are rather unheard of in the literature, the terms "gastronomic identity" and "gastronomic profile" are closely related. However, a gastronomic profile is only comprised of qualities that producers agreed upon and deemed important enough to intentionally present to consumers through gastronomic activities. Due to this, rather than focus on "gastronomic identity", my efforts will concentrate on "gastronomic profile", which I will later expand upon in my theory chapter. Nonetheless, I will briefly mention that I refer to a gastronomic profile as the character or personality of the food and its related behaviors in a place as presented from the eyes of the producers. Lastly, though several terms have been utilized to describe tourism in the gastronomic sector, the terms "culinary tourism" and "food tourism" may be used in a reciprocal manner to depict tourism motivated by and associated

with food and drink experiences incorporating the senses of taste and smell (Harrington and Ottenbacher, 2010).

1.3. Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this paper is to generate knowledge of co-creation between producers within food tourism. The study will be conducted from the producer's perspective in order to answer the following research questions:

- *Why do food tour companies and local food businesses participate in food tours?*
- *How do food tour companies and local food businesses co-create a gastronomic profile through food tours within a destination?*

In order to answer these questions, my research will be comprised of a theoretical literature review as well as a study of local food tours in San Diego, California.

1.4. Outline of the Paper

Throughout this first chapter I have introduced my research topic, presented my research questions as well as provided reasoning for this study. The second chapter is a theoretical literature review of concepts and ideas that have previously been studied in relation to my topic. The third chapter will present the food tours I employed as a means for answering my research questions. The fourth chapter concerns the methodology that I utilized for collecting my data. The analysis and discussion are reported in chapter five where I break down the results of my data and relate it to the information obtained from the theoretical literature in chapter two. The conclusion in chapter six will include a reflection as well as recommended suggestions for further research. It should also be noted that all references and appendices can be found at the end of this report.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW – Previous Theoretical Research

Based on previous theoretical literature, this chapter will attempt to clarify the concepts of food tourism and gastronomic profile. Other influential concepts related to my aim will include co-creation and multisensory experiences. In order to fully understand why all of the presented concepts are relevant, there will be a summary at the end of this section that will explain how all of these ideas are related to each other.

2.1. Using Food to Share Who You Are

According to Richards (2002: 3), not only is “food central to the tourist experience, but [...] gastronomy has become a significant source of identity formation in postmodern societies.” Because food is a basic need that we consume everyday in varying measures, it is no surprise “that it is also one of the most widespread markers of identity” (Richards, 2002: 4). While food is consumed in all cultures around the globe, we can use this common consumption to explore the differences between our normal habits and those of others. Being able to associate food and drink with a new destination or different culture allows tourists to grasp a better understanding of that place’s profile. As Hall *et al.* (2003: 6) confirm, “the very fact that food is expressive of a region and its culture has meant that it can be used as a means of differentiation for a destination in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.” As a result, and because a region’s gastronomic profile is based on qualities of the area’s gastronomic identity, it can be confirmed that food is becoming an important element of a destination’s profile (Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Long, 2004). In order to differentiate one destination from the next, it is imperative to incorporate the concept of gastronomy since everyone must eat, and because food is common to all cultures around the world yet still remains one of the most significant points of cultural differences (Delamont, 1995).

As stated by Fox (2007: 555), “throughout history, trade, travel, transport and technology have been affecting the gastronomic identities of regions and countries, continually changing what is generally perceived as customary.” Thus, gastronomic identities are always evolving. There are simply countless factors that play into the construction of this profile due to the effects of globalization, and because it is extremely complex, one may find other factors affecting it besides solely cuisine (Fox, 2007). Looking through past theoretical literature, scholars have discussed many influencing factors of gastronomic identity, but there has yet to be an agreed upon list of distinguishing characteristics that are necessary for its construction. Therefore, one may find gastronomic identity to be comprised of characteristics

such as culture, society lifestyles, economy, agriculture, etc. (Bessièrè, 1998; Fox, 2007). With many factors shaping food related behavior it is no wonder that it is so subjective in nature. The notion of an identity is such a dynamic social construction that it would be impossible to define a person(s) or place in one manner because there are numerous ways in which groups or individuals understand themselves in relation to others or their location (Long, 2004).

As indicated by Bessièrè (1998: 23), food is a profile marker with “which the inhabitants of a given area recognize themselves.” Members of the same community often share the same food culture; and therefore, similar eating habits strengthen their collective profile (Lupton, 1996). In line with Khare (1980), food is a social and cultural artifact for demonstrating the logic and principles behind the lifestyle and behavior within a community. Additionally, “food [is] a set of nutriments representing the overlapping work of ecological, biological, and cultural systems in human societies” (Khare: 1980: 525). Eating habits and cooking styles represent the dedication, hard work, and preparation of those locals living in a specific community. By ingesting food of a given region or place, the eater is becoming part of that social group through its gastronomic system (Lupton, 1996).

According to Lupton (1996: 25), throughout history, food practices have distinguished between social classes, the town and country and between nations and regions.” Due to factors of geography, agriculture, availability, price, and cultural significance, food has become known as a boundary marker of a local place (Lupton, 1996). The use of local produce is important in the construction and distribution of a gastronomic profile because it gives eaters an idea of the climate, agriculture, people, collective values, and taste preferences of the area. Thus, each region has special cuisine or certain eating habits “by which it identities itself and is identified by others” (Lupton, 1996: 25). As one can see, food and the production of it can be a strong local marker for a region when it is based on the memories and knowledge of those living there. Thus, the gastronomic profile of one locality may be completely different from the next (Lupton, 1996).

As children, no one wants to be different or stand out from the crowd because it brings with it a negative connotation. However, as adults, the concept of being different is embraced because it proves that you are a unique individual or place with special features that no one else may have. Food preferences and habits can be thought of in the same manner. Food related behavior that appears different or strange to one culture may be perfectly normal in another culture. Therefore, these differences distinguish oneself or a place from others (Lupton, 1996). However, Lupton (1996: 126) also explains that “human cultures

are not static”, and thus, food consumption and related behavior in any region tend to change on a continual basis. There is a constant reinterpretation and reshaping of gastronomic habits due to the search for new taste sensations, eating experiences, status orientation, and emotional meanings of food (Lupton, 1996). No longer is food recognized as a simple commodity to satisfy hunger. It has now left the realm of being a chore and moved into the world of leisure activities where eating habits add value to the search for diversity.

Lastly, food tourism has become the arena in which gastronomic identity can be presented to visitors (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Fox, 2007). Due to the complexities of gastronomic identity, however, producers are likely unable to properly communicate all qualities of it. Thus, it is arguable that they can really ever display their full gastronomic identity; what they are actually presenting is a profile – a particular part of the identity. Therefore, producers are left with choices to be made regarding which aspects of their gastronomic identity they want to portray to guests. What do they want their gastronomic profile to say about their place?

Because one will hear a different description of a place’s gastronomic identity from everyone he/she asks, it might be more beneficial for tourism providers within a network to present a gastronomic profile of which they more or less agree upon a few outstanding qualities that they make sure adequately represent the region’s food personality. Tourism, then, plays on the sustenance of a region’s perceived gastronomic image where local producers consider their guests’ expectations while choosing which flavors and food-related behaviors to highlight (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000). In this sense, the co-created gastronomic profile (by the network of producers) has been slightly narrowed down by certain qualities to avoid some of the complexities surrounding gastronomic identity since “identity” is such a dynamic and fluid term with which countless factors influence.

Even though food and a region’s eating habits have not yet been thoroughly studied in relation to the their own food image of a place, Hjalager and Corigliano (2000) dance around these notions as they study the ways in which food plays a role in the construction of a region’s overall image. However, they do not actually define a “food image” or “food profile.” Therefore, I have decided to speak of this concept as a gastronomic profile, which refers to the character or personality related to the food and gastronomic behaviors within a place or destination as depicted by the producers. Thus, the gastronomic profile constructed and communicated to visitors is based on the gastronomic identity of the place except that certain qualities of it are portrayed in a manner as perceived only by the tourism producers to fit some expectations of the consumers. The producers are intentionally choosing aspects of

their gastronomic identity that will portray a certain profile or part of the area's culinary scene. As a result, the gastronomic profile that is presented to tourists consists of the region's food traditions, local flavors, natural and climatic resources as well as any other culinary behaviors as seen through the eyes of the producers who are in charge of creating this profile (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000).

2.2. Food Tours – Bringing Locals Together

Bessièrè (1998) points out that food tourism brings local producers together who share a general interest in quality and who wish to better serve the community by combining their individual skills. Some local networks in a place have learned to “create their own tourism function and provide increased economic and social benefits” for the society (Novelli, Schmitz, and Spencer, 2006: 1142). Gastronomic activities, such as food tours, that bring multiple producers together present a range of opportunities since they often require the use of regional and local resources. According to Meyer-Czech (2003: 156), these food tours “can help to [...] create a feeling of togetherness” among the local inhabitants. Interacting with other local inhabitants, or producers, brings about community involvement within society (Lemmettyinen and Go, 2009).

Because tourists' travel behaviors are starting to shift towards more gastronomic activities (Everett, 2008; Kivela *et al.*, 1996), many new doors are opening for local producers to cooperate and build stronger local relationships. It is often that the cooperation of multiple local producers with similar interests and desires leads to the implementation of successful gastronomic activities. Furthermore, gastronomic activities, food tours for instance, can be a driving force of entrepreneurial networks, which open the flow of various resources, support, and knowledge within the community (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, Fox (2007: 547) confirms that the producers involved in the local culinary scene can be perceived as a “network working towards a set of common goals: extending, maintaining and exchanging the community's gastronomic knowledge.” When the network of producers share common interests and values, then the quality of the relationships are enhanced, which in turn strengthens their collective gastronomic profile.

Most tour companies have established a set of quality standards that they look for in restaurants or specialty food shops that they are considering partnerships with for the food tours (Meyer-Czech, 2003). This is because they want to be sure that their values, work ethics, and goals are in line with their own. This in turn will allow them to construct and

convey the same gastronomic profile. Many cooperative ventures, including those in food tourism, begin at the level of friendships and good acquaintances between like-minded individuals or organizations. Meyer-Czech (2003: 155) further explains that “the personal relationships underlying the organization of food [activities] are a crucial factor” for its success or failure. In order to deliver quality service and convey a certain meaning to their guests, all producers in the food tours should have the same desires and similar characteristics necessary to achieve this. Not only will the guests find benefits from this, but the producers will as well since it will strengthen their sense of togetherness. Food tours, and other gastronomic activities similar to them, stimulate bonding when the producers in the network think alike, which also arises pride for their collective profile (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009).

According to Meyer-Czech (2003), producers should not only find financial benefits from participating in the food tours, but social and emotional ones as well. Participants can find benefits from cooperating with other local producers who share similar interests. By highlighting their unique collective characteristics the producers differentiate themselves from other establishments. For instance, Moran (1993) explains that small local producers who only use other local suppliers from within their region can enhance their reputations with quality products and personal attention given to their food. These traits of quality and care will distinguish them from the large impersonal corporations and chain establishments. Through the gastronomic profile displayed through the food tours and network of local restaurants and specialty food shops, producers can promote the region as a food haven while building relationships within the community (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009; Lemmetyinen *et al.*, 2009).

In line with Novelli *et al.* (2006), the purpose of these food tourism networks is to highlight the local flavors and eating habits of the destination by bringing producers together that may normally work in isolation as opposed to cooperate with others in order to build a successful tourism product within the locality. Examples of this are local restaurants that are within mere meters of each other because they normally compete for the guests’ business in the area. However, when working in the same food tour network, they are supporting other local community businesses as well as each have an opportunity to highlight their signature dishes to win over the guests. The food tours guarantee that customers will be stopping in at both of their restaurants a few times a week, if not each day (Magid, 2009). Thus, instead of competing against each other for these customers, both establishments receive the same guaranteed business.

2.2.1. Co-Creating a Gastronomic Profile

The majority of past research on co-creation has been conducted in a variety of industries; however, tourism has been slightly neglected. As one of the few to discuss co-creation in tourism, Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) refer to it as the process by which consumers and producers interact to generate valuable experiences. The basis for a co-created experience is the unique value presented to each individual through personalized interaction (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy; 2004). Due to globalization and producers' scramble to differentiate themselves from competitors, co-creation is quickly becoming a means for constructing meaningful, personalized experiences that are unique to each human being. As maintained by Gentile *et al.* (2007), co-creation is a holistic process involving a person, or human being, rather than a consumer because it allows the focus to be on the person's needs and desires rather than the actual products and services the company offers. The concept of co-creation is not about selling products or experiences, but to enable the person to live in each moment of their relationship with their host company, which ends up yielding personal meaning as well as innovative experiences (LaSalle and Britton, 2003 in Gentile *et al.*, 2007).

Even though the past theoretical literature on producer-producer co-creation is scarce, there are a few authors who have gently touched upon it. For example, Binkhorst *et al.* (2009: 317) state that "a glimpse of co-creation, not only among consumers but also between different suppliers or between suppliers and consumers, can as well be observed." From their example of Lonely Planet and Playstation, they argue that these companies jointly launched a completely interactive and convenient city guide which consumers can use on the move. This co-creation process between the different suppliers/producers facilitates valuable experiences that take place in a tourism context. Therefore, co-creation between suppliers in food tourism that yields just as much value for those involved could be the development of gastronomic profiles.

Additionally, according to Binkhorst *et al.* (2009), some companies have begun perceiving their customers as partners in the personalized experience-creation process rather than mere product or experience purchasers. In my eyes, just as consumers are partners in co-creating their own experiences, I see local food businesses (i.e. food tour companies, restaurants and specialty food shops) as partners in co-creating their gastronomic profile. As the literature does not refer much to co-creation between producers, I have taken it upon myself to explain the process of co-creation between producers in the food tourism industry.

Co-created experiences normally refer to an interaction between hosts and guests in a specific place, at a certain time, and within a given context (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). Therefore, co-created gastronomic profiles are also restricted to the place and context in which they were constructed by those involved. Additionally, as stated by Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009), an experience co-creation network is comprised of the people and things required to provide the experience environment. The experience environment is the space in which interaction and dialogue takes place between producers and consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Thus, from my own deductions, a gastronomic profile co-creation network contains the producers and culinary habits essential for comprising the gastronomic environment, which in the context of this study, is the food tour.

As the food tours are the setting for the tour companies and other local producers in which to co-create their gastronomic profile, it should also be noted that the main source of fuel for the co-creation process is hidden within each individual or restaurant – their character - and their interaction within the environment (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). All producers in the food tours may not participate in the co-creation of the gastronomic profile to the same extent. However, in accordance with Binkhorst *et al.* (2009), these stakeholders are still connected in the same holistic food tourism network regardless of the way they operate in different time-spatial contexts.

Just as companies provide the artifacts and contexts conducive of co-creating an experience with the consumer (Carù and Cova, 2003), the food tour companies provide the context within which the producers co-create and convey their gastronomic profile. As the host, it is important to provide the basic platform within which the desired gastronomic profile can emerge. However, since this co-creation is between two parties of producers (the tour companies and other establishments), the restaurants and specialty food shops should also contribute flavors, eating habits, and cooking styles that can be used in the co-creation of the gastronomic profile. Since the gastronomic profile of a place is intertwined with the various people residing in the area as well as other local influences (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009), the notion of co-creation stresses the interaction of producers to realize the aspect of value. Even though the food tour network serves a difficult task of contributing towards the co-creation of a gastronomic profile as well as the expression of it, value is best seen through these producer interactions.

2.3. What Is So Special About Food Tourism?

The basis of tourism, whether food related or not, is the idea of experiencing something different from the usual (Long, 2004). Such perception is quite subjective and “can differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture, and it can include other times, belief systems, lifestyles, and ways of being, not only other places” (Long, 2004: 1). In this sense, food tourism is no different. Because food consumption varies across every region on earth, people grow up with different understandings of what food is commonplace and what is exotic. People’s motivations for eating certain foods are just as diverse. As a result, gastronomic practices must allow for that subjectivity. Because food tourism can be seen from different perspectives and given various meanings, it can also be emphasized as a social construction that allows for “an aesthetic response to food as part of that [individual] experience” (Long, 2004: 21). Due to cultural differences, personal preferences, and desire for culinary adventure, the meanings assigned to food can vary depending on who the taster is (whether a producer or consumer), where they come from, and how they were brought up. Embracing these differences are also signs of sophistication and distinction because trying new foods or assigning personal meaning to cuisine shows a willingness to be innovative (Lupton, 1996).

As seen from the producer’s side, food tourism is the “preparation, and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style” (Long, 2004: 21). The emphasis here is on the individual or host society that actively participates in the construction of meaning through gastronomy allowing the consumer to have a valuable experience. According to Long (2004), food tourism is about locals using food to “sell” their traditions and to create marketable multisensory activities to satisfy tourists’ curiosity. Likewise, Bendix (1989: 144) describes tourism as “merely one component contributing to the types of actions and choices made by locals.” Food tourism, therefore, is the intentional decision of host societies to develop social, cultural and economic benefits through the marketing of their gastronomic behaviors. Additionally, the act of cooking and eating has been seen as an artistic activity that satisfies the aesthetic, nutritional, social, and cultural needs of producers and consumers (Long, 2004).

The act of cooking is also a transformation process by which natural, raw produce is changed into cultural artifacts, or meals (Pérez and Abarca, 2007). The knowledge and skills utilized by the chef to conduct this transformation will often be ingested by the eater as they become embedded in the food during the cooking process. In turn, the food becomes a

communication tool. Thus, throughout food tourism, gastronomy is used by producers as a medium of social and cultural expression (Pérez and Abarca, 2007).

Furthermore, food tourism can be seen as a quest for sociability focused around a food component where the guests gain a better understanding of another social world different from their own. Food can be seen as bridge between two worlds: outside and inside. Those on the outside (consumers) look towards a destination with various gastronomic activities as an alluring place of adventure while those on the inside (producers) view food tourism as a source of income and tool for local development (Bessièrè, 1998). The consumer can escape the outside world to experience the food and eating habits of the inside world. By exploring the eating habits of another culture and social universe, “the eater becomes part of [that] culture” because both food and cooking represent a foundation for personalities and lifestyles (Bessièrè, 1998: 24). The act of eating in a new place functions as an integrative means for becoming part of the unknown society (Lupton, 1996). Sharing food with visitors implies an open invitation for the newcomer to partake in the local community.

2.3.1. Using Food to Get Closer to the Consumer

Lupton (1996: 37) repeatedly expresses that “the sharing of food is a vital part of kinship and friendship networks in all societies.” Inviting an individual to share food with you is a sign of how close you perceive that person to be. Food is often engaged as a tool for social interactions and for building or maintaining intimate relationships. Debatably, the closer relationship one has with an individual the more likely they are to share a meal together rather than simply a drink. The type of food that is shared between people and the frequency with which they gather over meals is strongly related to the level of intimacy between them; and thus, also directly connected to the construction of the relationship (Lupton, 1996). Being able to engage in communication over food often allows people to share their interests and taste preferences with others. Having similar things in common (even if it is only the love of food and drink) enriches a social experience and strengthens the relationship or sense of togetherness.

Building an intimate relationship is a way of building trust and closeness (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010). This trust can be between consumers (friends, family, etc.) dining over a meal, or it can be between a producer and consumer engaging in an exchange of value. Consumers should be able to trust their producers about the quality of products that they are purchasing and consuming. In fact, as Bessièrè (1998: 25) points out, “the consumer demands

a closer relationship with the producer of his food.” There are generally two ways in which to maintain a certain guarantee about the food one is consuming: adequate labeling (if purchasing food in a store) or speaking with the staff members at a restaurant (when dining out). By reading the label or speaking with the producers about the source and preparation of their food, the consumer will most likely be more comfortable “about the history, identity, and nature of the product” (Bessière, 1998: 25).

In fact, while traveling, dynamic relationships can be built between a destination, the host society (local producers), and the tourists through food-related activities. These vibrant interactions fuel the universal human impulse of curiosity, renew interest in local culture, and increase appreciation for local products (Long, 2004). From these interactions, the producers gain both financial and social benefits. The social interactions allow them to share their stories, passion, and gastronomic knowledge with customers. Alternately, consumers learn more about their food and where it came from, which hopefully provides a basis for strengthening the level of trust in the relationship. Furthermore, when the social relationships between the producers and consumers are strengthened, then value is most likely generated for the producers in terms of economic means (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci, 2007). This is because customers will be more willing to return for repeat business or even spread their satisfaction by word-of-mouth, which will also generate additional business (Buttle, 1998). Thus, the intimate social interaction creates a better, more personal and beneficial experience for the guests and the producers alike.

2.3.2. The Value of the Five Senses

It is suggested that food is more than a form of nutritional substance; it is a social and cultural medium for multisensory experiences that link a place and its identity (Boniface, 2003; Everett, 2008; Long, 2004; Sims, 2008). When visiting a new place or destination, tourists may engage in sightseeing to explore the differences in cultures through architecture, symbols, art, or entertainment. Visiting a city in this manner will usually only engage the visual and auditory senses, which does not allow for much immersion into the new destination. Arguably, the whole point of exploring a new place is to feed one’s curiosity and learn more about the area and people who live there (Long, 2004). If this is in fact the case, and one wants to explore a world that is out of the ordinary from their own, then food tourism is ideal; it utilizes all five senses to engage “one’s physical being, not simply as an observer, but as a participant as well” (Long, 2004: 21).

Additionally, Everett (2008: 338) also agrees that food tourism can be utilized as a “conceptual vehicle” for solving some of the issues tourism studies have with only engaging the visual senses. The most prominent author on this subject of visual perception of a destination is John Urry and his theory of ‘the tourist gaze.’ As Urry (1990) suggests, tourism is mainly experienced through the ‘visual gaze’ since people exercise their eyes the most frequently when absorbing a new environment or culture. In comparison to the other four methods of perception, Urry (1990) claims that the visual sense is the most distinguishing and consistent sensual agent for understanding the complexities of a destination. Even though one’s sense of sight is extremely useful when interpreting a new environment, many scholars would disagree that it provides the best insight into a new culture (e.g. Everett, 2008; Long, 2004). For example, Everett (2008) believes that our increasingly globalized world is producing ever-more complex tourism experiences that are multi-dimensional and further embodied. I agree that space is not two-dimensional; therefore, only using or studying the visual sense to interpret a place may limit one’s ability to fully grasp its meaning because the other multiple levels are not explored. Food tourism, though, has the power to engage all five senses, and allows for a complete examination of a place (Bessièrè, 1998; Everett, 2008; Gentile *et al.*, 2007). When consuming food and drink, one is sensually and bodily immersed in the culture as “waves of smells, sounds, taste, and touch” wash over them (Everett, 2008). Because you cannot turn off these other four senses, one might as well embrace them and use them to their greatest advantage for acquiring as much knowledge, meaning, and value about a place as possible.

Food tourism allows this participation in multisensory consumption of a destination, which permits “the tourist social and cultural integration in the local group by absorbing and reproducing” their habits and lifestyle (Bessièrè, 1998: 26). Bessièrè (1998) also notes that when trying to remember and preserve the character of a given community, social and sensory memories are quite important. One’s subjectivity, their social interactions, and five senses all directly relate to the memory that is created while taking part in a new experience. Some scholars argue that engaging all of the five senses increases the chances of remembering an event or activity (e.g. Long, 2004; Lupton, 1996). In fact, Lupton (1996: 32) explains that there is a link between memory and food because memory is an embodied construction that is “often recalled via the sensations of taste and smell.” Activities that require the actions of all five senses: smell, touch, taste, hear, and see, often evoke emotional responses on both the conscious and unconscious levels (Lupton, 1996).

Because emotions are closely tied to memory, when food triggers certain emotions in people, it most likely induces memory recall as well. Memories are inscribed within the body when one tastes or smells something. Therefore, the effects of these experiences tend to stir up emotions regarding sensual properties of the food in addition to social meanings that were created during the time of consumption (Lupton, 1996). The pleasures gained from gastronomic experiences are often remembered as the high point of one's day because of the sensory-recall factor. Preparing a meal can either stir up memories of past events, but it can also create anticipation of upcoming emotional social interactions (Lupton, 1996). Each food related experience may not be as memorable as the last; however, the chances of creating an emotionally significant memory increase when more senses are utilized during the event.

Gentile *et al.* (2007) conducted research regarding customer experiences and found that the sensory component is one of the most important aspects of an experience. Thus, producers should aim to provide outstanding multisensory experiences that incorporate "sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell so as to arouse aesthetical pleasure, excitement, satisfaction, [and] sense of beauty" (Gentile *et al.*, 2007). Gastronomic activities, such as food tours, offer an extensive variety of indulgent multisensory experiences because producers are incorporating sensory components with which to communicate meaning. The visual approach to tourism may physically show how certain tourist sites and profiles are culturally and socially created; although, it does little to explain the meaning and value of the place in its non-representable form (Crouch, Aronsson, and Wahlstrom, 2001; Everett, 2008). For that reason, the more sensory components are provided in a tourist activity, the more avenues of communication producers have for demonstrating their knowledge, character, and value of the place. In turn, this will help create a better experience for the consumer because they will be completely engaged in the activity and more likely to build a long-lasting memory.

Many destinations rely on word-of-mouth to reach a greater span of potential visitors (Buttle, 2009); therefore, local producers will often do everything in their power to create a memorable experience for their guests in order to gain repeat customers and/or for those guests to refer their family and friends. This is why food plays a large part in tourism; the five senses are all engaged to help the guests create flavorful memories that they can take back home and share with friends and family. Thus, the more easily it is to recall a positive experience, the more likely the guest will be to spread the word and tell others about their memorable time spent in a destination or restaurant. This, in turn, will hopefully generate more business to the destination.

2.4. Summary – Connecting the Phenomena

Bessière (1998) explains that food tourism engages all five senses to permit the tourist full immersion into the social and cultural world within which the locals reside. Additionally, Everett and Aitchison (2008: 151) describe food tourism as “the conscious acknowledgement by tourists that food is more than a sustenance; it is a cultural artifact with a myriad of facets that can be enjoyed in many locations and through many activities.” Food tours, in turn, are one of those gastronomic activities which promote the culture of a place as well as those living there.

As described by Magid (2009: 7), the food tours offer tastings of various culinary treats while visiting a set number of “different specialty food shops and neighborhood restaurants.” The idea behind these gastronomic-based tours is to introduce people to new local food and restaurants. The restaurants and specialty food shops participating in the tours understand that it is a “win-win proposition” for both the consumers as well as the producers (Magid, 2009: 7). Producers give consumers the opportunity to quench their gastronomic curiosity by exploring new foods as well as new cultures and ways of life. In other words, the producers can use food as a means for demonstrating their knowledge, skills, passion, personalities and behaviors (Long, 2004). In addition, the producers have an opportunity to build relationships, or networks, with other producers in the community. Einarsen *et al.* (2009: 246) also confirm that the conceptualizations of gastronomic activities “strengthen the emphasis on networks” as well as strengthen the formation and communication of gastronomic profile.

Binkhorst *et al.* (2009: 322) argue that tourism is an “experience network in which various stakeholders co-create as to engage in tourism experiences.” In a food tourism context rather than the experience context, the local producers in the food tour network (i.e. food tour companies, restaurants, and specialty food shops) come together to co-create their gastronomic profile. Being able to co-create between producers offers the challenge to stop thinking about the consumer for once and instead focus on the needs and desires of the hosts. These producers are also part of the food tour experience and seek to gain benefits from it just as consumers do, except, from a different standpoint. The co-creation and expansion of gastronomic profiles are the future for creating multisensory experiences and conveying a place’s food and culture. The ability to co-create knowledge and a gastronomic profile in a way that “facilitates high-level learning [...] could be regarded as one of the critical success

factors in coordinating cooperation in an effective and efficient way” (Lemmetyinen *et al.*, 2009: 39).

The common gastronomic profile among producers in a network enhances knowledge and promotes the value of co-creation. Gastronomic profiles also portray a sense of place in which the locals, who are connected via community networks, use multisensory activities to “share a common goal that renders them distinct from the others” (Lemmetyinen *et al.*, 2009). By providing experiences that incorporate the senses of sight, hear, taste, touch, and smell, producers can better convey the meaning of their place and create a lasting impression for the guest (Everett, 2008; Lupton, 1996). By using these sensory components and working together to emphasize unique qualities of their food tour network, the producers can distinguish themselves from the large, commercial competitors in order to generate social and economic benefits (Bessièrè, 1998).

As stated above, advantages of the food tour networks “include knowledge transfer, preservation of community values and lifestyles’ improvement” (Novelli *et al.*, 2006). Hall (2005) also confirms some of the benefits that result from the cooperation of producers in a place: strengthening alliances and local marketing networks, emphasizing gastronomic profile, and creating a better opportunity to further build relationships (both with other producers as well as with consumers). The intimate relationships built between the host society and the tourist through gastronomic activities, fuels the universal human impulse of curiosity, renews interest in local culture and increases appreciation for local producers (Long, 2004). Sharing food in tourism not only generates “friendship networks in all societies” (Lupton, 1996: 36), but also provides a multisensory setting within which factors of the locality, such as eating habits and lifestyles, are highlighted.

3. FOOD TOURS IN SAN DIEGO

In order to investigate why and how local producers work together in food tours, I must first explain the details of these gastronomic activities within which the study takes place. I have chosen to focus on two food tours in San Diego, California to study these phenomena. Though San Diego may not traditionally be known for its gastronomy, it is recognized as being the eighth largest city in the U.S. as well as nick named “America’s Finest City” due to its hospitality, attractive scenery, and ideal climate (www.atasteof-sandiego.com). For this reason I was hoping to find strong social, cultural, and environmental influences on its food consumption; and therefore, indirectly on its food tourism.

There are two main tour companies in San Diego who provide food tours: *A Taste of San Diego* and *So Diego Tours*. *So Diego Tours* refer to their food tours as “Restaurant Hops”, but for the purpose of my research I will remain calling them food tours so as to no confusion when relating them to other similar tours where a variety of cuisine is also sampled. Both companies are very young and have only been in business since 2009, which also shows how relatively new the concept of food tourism is. *A Taste of San Diego* specializes only in food tours, and currently offers four tours: two driving tours and two walking tours. *So Diego Tours* offers a variety of sightseeing/city tours, bike tours, boat tours, wine tours, food tours, and bar crawls, and currently offers three different walking food tours. I participated in two food tours during my holiday visit to San Diego, California – one tour from each company. This study will mainly focus on these two walking food tours, which are both similar in location, duration, and in the number of specialty food shops and/or restaurants that guests stop at during the tours. All tastings are done in the restaurants during the walking tours. As downtown San Diego is a fairly popular tourist spot within the city, I thought the food tours in this area would be the best tours to observe.

The observation included the two food tours (one from each company): “A Taste of Downtown” and “Brothels, Bites, and Booze: A Culinary Tour of SD’s Questionable Past.” “A Taste of Downtown” is *A Taste of San Diego’s* food tour that covers about 1.4 miles (2.25 kilometers) of downtown San Diego where guests walk for approximately 2.5 – 3 hours and visit six different restaurants or specialty food shops. Throughout the tour guests are able to sample a variety of food ranging from fresh baked Artisan bread and pastries, seafood, Vietnamese, Chinese, Mexican, Mediterranean, a variety of cheese and wine, and of course, dessert (www.atasteof-sandiego.com). *So Diego’s* food tour is called “Brothels, Bites, and

Booze: A Culinary Tour of SD's Questionable Past," which covers 1.25 miles (2.01 kilometers) of downtown San Diego and lasts a duration of 2.5 hours. On this tour guests "learn about the architecture of the historic buildings, listen to stories about the scandals of the Stingaree District, and taste ethnic foods from 5-7 restaurants" (www.sodiegotours.com). I should note that the Stingaree District is a small area within downtown San Diego. Throughout this tour guests can sample an assortment of food ranging from Italian, Indian, and Mexican as well as local crafted beer.

In addition, this study also included personal, semi-structured interviews with producers from the tour companies and restaurants/specialty food shops as well as a content analysis of the websites of the two food tour companies and select participating establishments.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will begin by explaining the scientific approach and reasoning behind my qualitative study. Thereafter, I will introduce the three methods I employed for conducting my research as well as the process I utilized for analyzing my data.

4.1. Scientific Approach – Utilizing Multiple Methods

In order to choose the proper scientific approach for conducting my study, it is important to take my research aim and questions into consideration. As a reminder, my two research questions are as follows:

- *Why do food tour companies and local food businesses participate in food tours?*
- *How do food tour companies and local food businesses co-create a gastronomic profile through food tours within a destination?*

The idea behind a destination's gastronomic profile can properly be described by the local residents themselves as they are the ones to create and present this profile. Because it is these local producers who highlight their gastronomic profile for visitors, it is imperative to conduct this study from the producer's point of view. The focus of this study is on the understanding of why producers participate in food tours as well as how producers co-create a region's gastronomic profile through these gastronomic activities. Thus, in my opinion, the most practical way of collecting data from the local producers is through a qualitative method that renders affluent detailed descriptions.

Qualitative research is usually known to emphasize words and the interpretation of individuals' social worlds through methods such as observation, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis, all of which I will utilize in this study (Bryman, 2001; Pryke, Rose and Whatmore, 2003). In contrast to qualitative methods, quantitative methods focus on numbers and statistics, which may be helpful in other social science research (Booth, Colomb and Williams, 2008). However, Bryman (2001: 366) argues that the focus of qualitative research is to understand "the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants". This means that each person I interview or each website I analyze may give me a slightly different account of reality because the respondents will use their own words to describe their thoughts and experiences. It is then up to me to interpret their subjective responses. In an attempt to avoid everyday assumptions and preset academic

categories, I tried to see what terms these local producers personally use in their everyday life to describe the social world they live in (Silverman, 2007).

Because I do not have much experience studying gastronomic profiles in relation to food tourism, nor co-creation between different producers, I find that these three methods (observation, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis) prove most useful when trying to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena. Since I know little about the topics of this study and wish to explore them as much as possible, Smith (2010) argues using methods such as these because they offer rich descriptions, which will be more informative for exploration of new phenomena rather than statistics and numbers from a quantitative study.

I choose to use observation as my first method because I wanted a chance to see how a food tour actually operates since I had never been on one before. This part of my study acted as a gentle introduction to my phenomena because I was able to make observations on my own terms and the information gathered was more genuine (Bryman, 2001). My second method, the semi-structured interview, was chosen because it allowed me to directly ask producers certain questions that I was interested in, but also left room for spontaneous discussion of the topics at hand (Bryman, 2001). My first question, regarding *why* producers participate in food tours, would have been restricted had I used closed-ended questions such as those in a questionnaire because respondents would have had to choose from a set number of specific answers which I provided and were predetermined. A content analysis of the food tour companies' and select establishments' websites from the food tours gave me more words to analyze, and allowed me to see if their interview material matched up with their descriptions online. During the interviews, the interviewees knew ahead of time that I was gathering data for research. However, with the content analysis, the respondents did not know I was conducting research on their websites. Having two different methods for gathering respondents' words left more room for genuine and extensive data collection (Bryman, 2001).

By using a multiple-methods approach it not only raised the chances of observing patterns, but also increased the number of detailed accounts available for analysis (Inwood, Moore, Sharp, and Stinner, 2009). Researchers who employ observation methods frequently conduct qualitative interviews as well because they further reveal information about behavior, meaning behind that behavior, and understanding of social backgrounds that may have been seen in the observation (Bryman, 2001). In addition, collecting and analyzing texts or documents in conjunction with other qualitative methods allows for a considerable variability of data, which permits higher chances of deriving theoretical relationships (Bryman, 2001).

As confirmed by Veal (1997: 36), peoples' opinions and behavior are subject to change over time, and although some actions can be taken to acquire a certain level of generalizability, "any research findings relate only to the subjects involved, at the time and place the research was carried out." Smith (2010) further agrees that the findings cannot be generalized beyond the specific context of which the research took place because the respondents are merely giving the researcher a subjective account of their own social world. Thus, the results of this study represent my interpretation of the data in the given time and place limits, and cannot be generalized to be the same for all food tour companies, restaurants, and gastronomic profiles conveyed through food tourism. Therefore, if these same phenomena were to be observed by a different researcher regarding a different food tour company and participating restaurants, whether it be in the same location or not, the conclusions would most likely turn out differently.

4.2. Observation

Observational research entails the direct observation of an individual or group while focusing on their behavior in a certain social setting (Silverman, 2004; Veal, 1997). As explained by Baszanger and Dodier (2004), when conducting observations, the researcher should remain open and objective in order to discover the elements and tools people use in their interactions with others and with their surrounding environment. I have chosen to use an unstructured observational approach in conjunction with non-participant observation. My observations were unstructured in that they did "not entail the use of an observation schedule for the recording of behavior" (Bryman, 2001: 257). Instead of having preset categories I was searching for, I attempted to be as open as possible while recording the behavior of my participants in order to develop an idea of how a food tour actually operates since I had never been on one previously. This approach was also considered a non-participant observation because while I was part of the social setting in which I was observing, I was not participating from the eyes of my research subjects – the producers (Bryman, 2001). I merely partook in the food tour as a guest.

As suggested by Bryman (2001), unstructured observation can be useful for gathering initial data that can aid in the construction of later observation or interview schedules. I used this as a form of piloting so that I could later draw up an interview guide to address specific topics and themes that I thought of during the observation. I was able to observe the physical environment of the food tour as well as a small handful of local producers. The aim of the

observation was purely to gain a general understanding of the construction of the food tours and to study the local producers' actions.

Unfortunately, during the two food tours, I was unable to meet a staff member at each location. However, during the four occasions when staff members were present at the restaurant or specialty food shop, I took part in the food tour and tastings as a regular guest and did not inform the staff members of my presence or observational intentions. Some scholars argue, however, that the people observed should ethically be given notice that their activities will be examined (Bryman, 2001). Other academics disagree with this and believe that any type of planning or notice is harmful to data collection because it will weaken the opportunity for uncertainties to arise in the field (Baszanger and Dodier, 2004). In this case, by giving the study subjects notice of my presence or a certain guide for behavior then I, as the researcher, may influence my subjects' actions in a manner that they become unnatural, which is not what I wanted to do. This is why I chose to stand back during most of the tour and observe the producer's behavior and interactions with the other producers and guests.

Following the 20 minute or so tastings, when the rest of the tour group was leaving each restaurant, I approached the staff member (owner, manager, chef, etc.) who had come out and spoken to the group. First I introduced myself, and then explained the research I was conducting for my master's thesis. I then asked for their email address so that I may contact them to set up a phone interview in the near future.

4.3. Interviews

Some scholars believe that the primary issue of an interview "is to generate data which give an authentic insight into people's experiences" (Silverman, 2001: 87). Miller and Glassner (2004) also agree that an interactive interview between the interviewer and the respondent using semi-structured, open-ended questions can and does elicit fairly authentic accounts of one's subjective experience. Reflecting on the open-ended questions, the interview subject must construct his or her own narrative of the world along with their experiences and thoughts. It is then up to the interviewer to interpret and determine whether these accounts and narratives are representative of the truth.

By interviewing local producers who participate in food tours I was hoping to gain insight into their perspective of co-creation through food tourism in San Diego. Because my research is focused on the producer perspective, I utilized purposive sampling to interview people with insider status (such as restaurants and tour companies) because they are the ones

who have access to and understanding of information that I, as the outsider, am interested in (Bryman, 2001).

After partaking in the two food tours - “A Taste of Downtown” and “Brothels, Bites, and Booze: A Culinary Tour of SD’s Questionable Past”- as a guest, I was able to make a handful of personal contacts with some of the producers involved in the food tour. These producers included the tour guide of each tour (one of which happened to be the owner of the company – *A Taste of San Diego*), chefs/cooks/bakers, a cheese connoisseur, a brew master, and restaurant managers. Because of time and location constraints, I conducted these interviews over the phone once I returned to Sweden rather than in person. As I already had some of their contact information, which I gathered during the tours, I began the interview process by first sending the potential participants emails to explain the reason for my research as well as to set up a time and date that would be convenient for the interview. I also utilized a snowball sampling method whereby initial interview subjects are asked to provide the names of other people, known as referrals, which hopefully lead to additional interview subjects (Smith, 2010). After receiving the contact information of the owner of *So Diego Tours* from my tour guide, I then asked both tour company owners (of *So Diego Tours* and *A Taste of San Diego*) for further referrals since I knew that they would have the best insight into whom of their other participating restaurants might be interested in assisting me in my research.

Out of twenty-three potential participants of whom I sent emails and requested interviews with, I received fourteen responses back from people who I was actually able to interview. To maintain confidentiality, I chose to keep the respondents’ names anonymous; however, you will find a list of their job positions at the end of this report in Appendix C. After I set up a date and time for each participant’s phone interview, I then asked for their permission to record the interview to ensure complete data collection and allow for transcription. All fourteen respondents agreed to be recorded, and interviews took place over the phone with the use of an online communication service, Skype, on my computer (www.Skype.com). Interviews lasted between 15 to 45 minutes, which depended on how much time the respondents had available as well as how involved they were in the interview and how much they had to say. Conducting the interview over the phone means that the level of rapport between me and the interviewee will most likely already be lower due to the lack of face-to-face contact, which normally helps build trust between the respondent and the interviewer (Smith, 2010). Given this, it was essential to be open and honest with my

interview subjects to ensure confidentiality, establish trust, and not come off as judgmental (Miller *et al.*, 2004).

As advised by Bryman (2001), I used an audio recording device while conducting the interviews so that I could carry out a more thorough examination of responses since the interviewee's exact words were recorded rather than having to rely on my memory to take notes. Bryman (2001: 453) suggests transcribing interviews as they are conducted rather than waiting a long time because if you transcribe the interviews as you go then it allows you to "be more aware of emerging themes that [you] may want to ask about in a more direct way in later interviews". I found this to be very helpful. Because I was reminded of certain concepts while transcribing, this triggered my memory and allowed me to make notes of additional questions that I wanted to ask in following interviews.

By having an interview guide with a base of questions it allowed me to inquire about similar details of each respondent's life so that I could look for patterns in the data. However, by keeping the interview semi-structured (rather than completely structured) it allowed me a range of motion to ask further unique questions that may only pertain to a particular respondent and arise only during the time of the interview. I tried to use language that was comprehensible to the interviewees and would not confuse them or persuade their answers in any way (Bryman, 2001). You may find a full copy of the interview guides in Appendices A and B. I must also note that I had two interview guides due to the fact that questions needed to be worded slightly differently depending on who they were directed towards.

While conducting the interviews I used the interview guide as a means of determining what was important to each respondent in relation to my phenomenon. Additionally, when respondents seemed excited about one area of discussion that was not originally a focus on my interview guide, I would often ask further questions relating to that idea, which only came to my mind as the interview was occurring. In this sense, Bryman (2001) points out that, as a researcher, you want concepts and ideas to come up in the interviews as naturally as possible, so trying not to lead the interviewees is an important and difficult task. As the researcher, I must remain objective and not allow my personal opinions to interfere with the retelling of my respondents' subjective stories as told to me (Miller *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, throughout the interviews, I attempted to clarify the meanings of the respondents' statements without imposing meaning on them (Bryman, 2001). I also tried to keep a balance of how much I talked in the interviews so that each interviewee felt comfortable, especially with the questions, and that they knew their responses held some value.

Another limitation from this research study had to do with the choice of interviewees. Because my study only focused on the view points from producers collaborating with two tour companies there was not a very large selection of interview subjects. Even though I tried to contact as many producers as possible, there are just some potential subjects who refused to take part in the study, which is their own right. However, I believe the validity and reliability would have been higher if I could have been in touch with more interview subjects. Nevertheless, I did begin finding repetitions in the data after a certain number of interviews.

4.3.1. Conducting the Analysis – Examples of Coding

By conducting this research with a qualitative approach I hoped for the emergence of categories and themes while collecting and analyzing the data so that I could uncover results that overlapped with other theoretical literature. Therefore, in my opinion, one of the best ways to search for categories and themes is through coding. From the interview transcripts, the emerging data was examined using two general phases of coding data. Smith (2010) breaks down the steps of coding data into ‘open coding’ and ‘axial coding.’ The first step, referred to as open coding, involves reviewing the data line-by-line and identifying themes or ideas throughout the text (Smith, 2010). After I coded each interview once, I then performed axial coding by going back and re-reviewing all of the themes in order to search for even bigger or deeper themes that may encompass more than one initial idea (Smith, 2010). After coding the data and developing larger themes with which to categorize smaller, emerging concepts, I connected my empirical results to the theoretical framework.

As argued by Smith (2010: 118), the process of open coding helps the researcher maintain an objective distance from the interview subject’s feelings and narratives because it forces the researcher to “look at their comments in more analytical terms.” By looking at my respondents’ words as a literary text rather than a transcript of conversation I was better able to approach the text with an objective eye and find hidden themes. Some scholars believe that the researcher should not tackle the transcripts with any preconceived notions about what themes they expect to uncover because then it could possibly influence the findings and forced phenomenon may be discovered (Glaser, 1992 in Smith, 2010). In contrast, Smith argues that the researcher “should be well versed in the phenomenon being studied, searching the literature for sensitizing concepts or hypotheses that might suggest patterns of interpretations in the transcript” (2010: 118). I agree with Smith in that it is extremely difficult for a researcher to approach an interview transcript or any other document without a slight preconceived idea of what themes may or may not emerge.

4.4. Content Analysis

In addition to observations and personal interviews, I used content analysis to further explore how a gastronomic profile is co-created through food tourism. Although content analysis is usually known to be a useful method of quantitative studies as it seeks to objectively quantify predetermined words and themes, content analysis can also be utilized in qualitative studies as well (Bryman, 2001). When the aim of the research is to analyze documents with “an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding meaning in the context” then it is called *qualitative content analysis* (Bryman, 2001: 276), which is the method I will be applying here. Most content analysis usually takes place in a literary setting, so to speak, by looking at written documents, such as journal articles, letters, diaries, or brochures (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004), but as Veal (1997: 141) explains, “virtually any cultural product can, in jargon, be *read as text*”. Because many people and organizations represent themselves in various ways, and in order to better understand our contemporary society, it is imperative for social scientists to study written and electronic records. In today’s fast pace, technology-savvy world, electronic and digital resources are used more often than not by organizations to publicize themselves and create their own version of reality (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004; Veal, 1997).

Given that content analysis can be employed to explore various people and themes across a wide range of academics, Smith (2010) notes that it can even be used to examine how local producers or other tourism service providers position themselves in the market via advertisements and websites. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I only conducted a content analysis of internet websites. The main focus was on the websites of *A Taste of San Diego* and *So Diego Tours*, but I also included a few websites of the other establishments who also participate in the food tours. I did this so that I could compare their written descriptions online to their spoken descriptions from the interviews regarding why they participate in the food tours and in what ways do they use food to co-create and convey their gastronomic profile.

It should also be mentioned that reading any form of text is considered an activity rather than “the passive receipt of information” (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004: 72). The person reading the text will always bring his or her cultural knowledge and background to the interpretation of the document whether they intended to or not. When interpreting meaningful

phrases, words, or images, the conclusions drawn about the themes and patterns are a result of our own subjective mental processes (Smith, 2010). I mention this because I attempted to be as objective as possible while analyzing the content on the websites; however, I am not under any false pretenses that my personal opinions and previous knowledge of the subject did not influence the results.

Arguably, the meaning of certain documents and records can be defined by the language used to construct it. As explained by Atkinson and Coffey (2004: 59), some records “are often marked by quite distinctive uses of linguistic registers: that is, the specialized use of language associated with some particular domain of everyday life”. Additionally, these authors mention that certain expressions or terms “are not necessarily part of everyday talk [...] but they will be familiar” to those in the same field (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004: 65). Because I carried out and transcribed the interviews previous to conducting the content analysis of this study, I already had a list of distinctive vocabulary in mind when reviewing the websites of *A Taste of San Diego* and *So Diego Tours*. By having a base understanding of the language used by the local producers in the food tourism industry, I had an easier time analyzing the websites and searching for meaning. While analyzing the websites of these local producers, I looked for signs of repeated themes, concepts, and motives that match up with the data collected in the observation and interviews. Even though I already had an idea of some key words or themes that had surfaced from my analysis of the interviews, I did not want to limit myself by only specifying certain coding categories of which to look for prior to my content analysis. Thus, I also wanted to keep my options open to identify new categories or themes that might not have been present in the interviews but still may be relevant to my research questions.

I reviewed these websites in hopes to learn valuable things about the local producers in the food tours by analyzing the text they have produced online. According to Smith (2010: 202), “these records are, of course, not the people or organizations themselves, but artifacts people have produced that may provide insight into their views, values, experiences and perceptions”. An advantage of collecting data through content analysis is that it is not influenced by any interaction between the researcher and subject. As stated by Smith (2010), the creator of the text is aware of what information is being publicized, but he/she does not know the records are being studied for research. Therefore, it is more likely that the text or images represent the creator’s true feelings and opinions. As compared to possible ‘artificial’ responses collected during an interview, content analysis can often provide more natural

types of data because the subject is not involved in the process of gathering the data (Smith, 2010).

Because some websites and other forms of documentation are often constructed by an organization to represent its own intentions, routines, work processes, and professional breakdown, it is important to remember that not all records alone are true proof of how an organization operates. It is very easy for people or organizations to omit or bend information so that the reader only sees what the creator or author wants them to see. Therefore, no matter how ‘official’ a record seems, it is imperative to cross-check the document with other forms of information (Smith, 2010). It is for this reason that I analyzed the interview transcriptions as well as the content on the company websites. However, even though it seemed like the information from the interviews matched up with that found online, there will always be instances where we (as researchers) cannot guarantee that the information is truly 100% valid. As stated by Harrington *et al.* (2010: 29):

“though the qualitative approach allowed rich descriptions by the participants, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The small number of informants limits its generalizability and creates potential threats to validity.”

Thus, rather than determine if the data is completely valid, Atkinson and Coffey (2004: 73) advise researchers to ask questions “about the form and function of texts themselves”. This is why when I analyzed the websites I tried to see how useful something was in relation to my phenomena instead of simply trying to determine whether or not it was true. However, the text on each one of the companies’ websites, in relation to the transcriptions, testifies to the uniqueness of San Diego’s greater gastronomic profile as co-created by the producers.

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing why food tour companies and local food businesses collaborate in food tours and how they work together to co-create a gastronomic profile of a region through these tourist offerings, I will begin by presenting the concept of food tours as seen from the producers' perspective since that is main setting within which everything unfolds. Thereafter I will discuss the importance of the five senses in food tourism, and more specifically, in the context of this study. Lastly, this section will conclude with two discussions: the reasons producers participate in food tours and how these producers co-create their gastronomic profile through the food tours.

5.1. Food Tours – A Producers' Representation of Food Tourism

Because the food tours are the overall means through which producers co-create a gastronomic profile, it is useful to point out the producers' outlook on these gastronomic activities in order to see their perception of the concept as a whole. I thought it was interesting to hear the respondents' own explanations of these gastronomic activities since they are the ones using the food tours as a communication tool to express their passion and gastronomic profile to consumers. It should be clarified that these descriptions only include the producers' representation of food tours. As the respondents mentioned, by visiting a handful of local restaurants and specialty food shops, guests get to sample a variety of food and beverages while socializing with other like-minded consumers and producers. Hopefully, the establishments on the food tours and the cuisine the guests have an opportunity to sample will mostly be new, unique and out of the ordinary so as to best display a sense of their place and its people (Everett, 2008), as well as how San Diego's gastronomic profile differs from others.

Food tours allow consumers to engage in a multisensory experience that fosters learning about the local cuisine and culture (Kivela *et al.*, 2006). These experiences can be exciting because it breaks guests out of their shell in order to explore different characteristics of other people, places or things. According to the producers, the whole concept of the food tours is to satisfy the consumer craving to engage in the culture, see some areas of the city, and try local food. A majority of the respondents emphasized that these food tours are the best way for “*visitors to become part of San Diego in a day*” (Respondent 4). Additionally, another respondent mentioned:

“When you would have a food tour you’re really highlighting sort of the local flavors of the local city. So you get to really feel like you know the place versus just being a brief visitor” (Respondent 3).

By eating the local cuisine in a new place guests become integrated into the unknown society to an extent because food represents a foundation for cultures and lifestyles (Bessière, 1998; Lupton, 1996). Two other respondents agreed: *“For people that really want to experience a culture, experience their food; see what they’re doing”* (Respondent 10). *“I just think that a city’s food is one of those best ways to learn about its people, and is a direct route to the city”* (Respondent 6). It is clear that these producers perceive food tourism (and food tours more specifically) as a great way to explore the society and culture by building intimate relationships between food, people, and a place (Everett and Aitchison, 2008). By eating homemade local food you get a better sense of the place’s gastronomic profile because you are immersed in the local culture through all five senses (Everett, 2008). In fact, many guests of San Diego are *“always looking for hometown places to go”* (Respondent 1) because they are not always interested in going to the trendy, crowded, or overly-priced, impersonal tourist restaurants. In line with Kivela *et al.* (2006), these food tours focus on staying away from fancy, touristy establishments and focusing on local, unique restaurants where one can get a feel for the local lifestyle and see how San Diego residents live every day. What’s more, the website of *A Taste of San Diego* even confirms the responses of the producers by stating that:

“On our food tours, you will be introduced to some of San Diego’s oldest, authentic, hole in the wall, family owned and neighborhood favorites that only most locals may know about. This is not “designer food” but True San Diego “hometown cooking”. Let us introduce you to some of San Diego’s hidden treasures in different communities.” (<http://www.atasteof-sandiego.com>)

When visiting the chain restaurants, the locality is rarely showed because there is no individualism displayed. These types of places are manufactured to be the same in all locations so there is no distinguishing personality to set one restaurant apart from the next (Kivela *et al.*, 2006). By giving them a taste of these hole-in-the-wall places, the tour companies emphasize the enjoyment of experiencing places where special consumer-producer interactions are created that are not typical of the ordinary dining experience (Everett, 2008). *“I think that’s the emphasis – kinda giving them the backdoor VIP treatment. [...] It’s very intimate and informative”* (Respondent 4). During normal operating hours, customers in restaurants do not usually interact with upper management or the chefs who are preparing their food. Guests on the food tours, however, can meet with these staff members in

an open, social atmosphere where they build a more intimate producer-consumer relationship and exchange knowledge. Additionally, Lupton (1996) confirms that food is often engaged as a tool for social interactions and for building or maintaining intimate friendships and relationships. A majority of the producers explained that the interaction between themselves and the consumers is “*an intimate affair*” (Respondent 10) because people are eating and socializing at the same time. The most interesting of responses I heard was from one chef who explained so eloquently: “*Music is the universal language, like math, but I say that food is the universal diplomat. It brings everybody together*” (Respondent 10). According to Lupton (1996), food is a medium for communication, and the social interactions that take place over culinary consumption often lead to close, personal, and intimate relationships more so than when food is not present.

The whole idea of the tour is to show off the hidden gems and local community so visitors get a chance to see “*the other side of San Diego*” (Respondent 1) and see how much more personal it is than the touristy part. Through these multisensory experiences, guests will find that “*food tells a story in every bite*” (Respondent 14). In a nutshell, when speaking of the food tours, a tour guide described these gastronomic experiences in the simplest way: “*there’s a goal for all of them - to be a cultural window*” (Respondent 6) into San Diego’s culinary scene. By identifying and offering local food, the restaurants on the tour not only entice guests to consume the gastronomic profile of San Diego, but they also educate them about the qualities that define the profile of the food as well (Everett and Aitchison, 2008). Guests find value in tasting a variety of local food and beverages because they are also learning about where these items came from and maybe even how they were made. This educational and social experience with other like-minded people over cultural artifacts, such as food, tends to increase the intimacy in the relationship between individuals (Lupton, 1996).

5.2. The Importance of Utilizing the Five Senses

Because the act of eating food is deeply rooted in a culture, the limitations of the visual gaze prohibit one’s ability to fully experience a place because it focuses on the sense of sight rather than engaging all of your senses (Everett, 2008). Responses clearly indicated the importance of providing an experience that engages the five senses especially that of taste, so guests can consume San Diego’s gastronomic profile rather than simply hearing it or seeing it. There is even a simple reference to the engagement of the five senses on one restaurant’s website: “*Studio Diner is fun for the senses*” (www.studiodiner.com). Also, more specifically, one producer directly mentions how more senses are engaged when participating

in a food tour as opposed to a regular sightseeing tour. Instead of focusing their energy on the sense of sight when taking a city tour, guests actually engage their other senses as well when on a food tour. Producers provide an opportunity for guests to speak and listen, while smelling and tasting the delicious food the restaurants have to offer.

According to Everett (2008), food tourism is a multisensual and embodied experience through which people understand places by consuming local food. In line with this concept, the research indicates that food is a mediator of knowledge about a place because producers offer multisensory activities that allow for the ingestion of social and cultural meaning through visual and non-visual manners. When I asked one respondent if she could explain the differences between food tours and regular sightseeing tours she immediately explained how important the multisensory component is to tourism:

“When you’re on a sightseeing tour and using your sight, using your ears, and maybe your sense of smell, but you’re not using your sense of touch and you’re not using your sense of taste. And so [...] when you’re on a food tour, you’re using all of those things – all of your five senses” (Respondent 6).

According to Boniface, incorporating food and drink in a guest’s holiday experience serves “as the basis for offering *education* to the tourist and to render to them qualities of *sensuality*” (2003: 37 – emphasis in original). Therefore, she emphasizes that a multisensory experience “delivers benefits at the cerebral level and the sensory level” (Boniface, 2003: 37). Due to this, I thought it was also interesting to hear this producer explain how engaging more of your senses also influences memory recollection:

“I think there’s a lot to be said about taste memory or palate memory [...] and by experiencing a city, not only through your eyes and ears, but also through your palate, you’re really getting a better feel for [...] the whole culture there”
(Respondent 6).

As stated by Anderson (2005), the sense of taste and smell go hand in hand since one’s nasal passages are connected from the mouth to the nose. Thus, this producer’s response of “*taste memory*” goes in line with Anderson’s research of how smell affects memory processing. He explains that the olfactory center is located in the lower part of your brain and is strongly connected to the limbic system, which is a key component in memory processing (Anderson, 2005). It is for this reason that multisensory experiences in tourism are important; the more one engages their senses then more likely he/she will be to remember their experiences.

5.3. Discussion 1 – Reasons Producers Participate in Food Tours

Now that I have presented an introduction to the producers' representation of the food tours as well as introduced the importance of utilizing the five senses in tourism, I will now discuss the reasons why producers take part in food tours. I find it useful to see the motivations for producers to participate in food tours first because once I present *why* they work together then I can discuss *how* they work together. Therefore, this section will answer the following research question:

➤ *Why do food tour companies and local food businesses participate in food tours?*

Presented here are the most common reasons the producers had for partaking in the food tours. I have categorized these motivations into five parts: exposure, community support, supporting a unique tour concept that promotes education, intimacy, passion and enjoyment. These motivations were the most emergent from the data; however, it is not to assume that these are the only motivations the producers have for participating in the food tours. These reasons may only represent my interpretation of the interviewees' responses.

5.3.1. Exposure

The term "exposure" came up quite frequently throughout the interviews, but referred to it in two different manners. One was in the monetary sense where gaining exposure meant a way in which to market the establishments in order to generate more business. The other meaning of exposure the producers used signified a way in which the establishments could introduce guests to the colorful culinary options in San Diego that are outside of the normal commercialized restaurants. One tour guide confirms both of these meanings of 'exposure': "*The whole idea is showing off local food. [...] I like the idea of putting in the local family owned businesses and trying to get them some notice*" (Respondent 1).

Speaking of exposure in terms of marketing shows that producers are aware of the economic benefits that food tours have. The local establishments are aware of which marketing methods are more advantageous than others. They understand that word-of-mouth can often be more influential on purchasing behavior than any other means of advertising (Buttle, 1998); customers are always looking for references from other customers who have had first-hand dining experience at a restaurant. In fact, a few respondents confirm: "*...word of mouth is more significant than something that is on TV, or like, a guide book*" (Respondent 4). "*If someone comes in and really likes what we do here they will talk about it to other people, then it just goes on from there even if they don't come back*" (Respondent 5).

“It lets people know what we’re doing. It’s word of mouth advertising. You could do direct marketing, you can do email, you can be on Google, which we are. Um, all of those medias, but the one thing that we know works best is word of mouth”

(Respondent 10).

As perceived by the majority of respondents, the main economic benefit from participating in the food tours is that the food tour companies guarantee business for the restaurants and specialty food shops at least once (during each tour), which not other forms of marketing do. The food tours bring “groups of hungry foodies to them each day, allowing new people to try their food” (Magid, 2009). This exposure is basically about building future business. As one respondent explains, one reason they participate in the food tours is because of “*the marketing effort to, um, do what I do best, which is to show people the quality and value of a little place that they may not have heard of*” (Respondent 3). As Long (2004) explains, tourism is based on experiencing something different from the usual. The respondents also agreed in that food tourism and food tours more specifically, is based on offering a unique gastronomic experience for the guests that differs from their everyday culinary experiences. Additionally, another respondent at a coffee roastery said:

“Essentially it’s an advertising base [...]; we get to directly sample potential customers on our product. So...I think it gives us some exposure we wouldn’t have otherwise. It ends up being a treat for us as well!” (Respondent 4).

This exposure also allows them to introduce their exclusively organic coffee and tea to people because “*it’s probably a little bit different than any other coffee they’ve had before*” (Respondent 4). The producers like that they can highlight their signature dishes and introduce guests to quality local flavors that may be completely new to them (Long, 2004; Novelli *et al.*, 2006). “*Any chance I get to be in touch with others who will bring people into my brewery to try my beer I will definitely take advantage of that*” (Respondent 5). Furthermore, one tour guide describes the producers’ motives for participation quite nicely: “*I think to me they are very proud of what they do, and they, you know, want to introduce it to anybody they can; just like I do*” (Respondent 1). As Hall (2005) confirms, this is a way for the producers to emphasize their gastronomic profile because the food tours give the establishments opportunities to showcase their food and character. Additionally, any opportunity like this should not be missed; just as one interviewee explained: “*we just [...] wanna try and get our names out there, and if anyone can try our food then we don’t want them to miss the opportunity*” (Respondent 13).

Not only do the restaurants get the exposure, but San Diego as a whole and its smaller communities gets exposure also when guests go on these food tours. One respondent loves that these tours “bring more people to San Diego” (Respondent 5).

“It helps promote the general area, which is East Village, and the more people there are in general- those locals and tourists –that know about our area the better the odds that I’ll have for repeat traffic” (Respondent 3). Note: the East Village is another area of downtown San Diego.

The owner of one of the tour companies also gives her opinion of why the restaurants participate in the food tours: *“They think it’s great what we’re doing and they’re really excited about having a tour guide or the tour introducing people to the Gaslamp Quarter”* (Respondent 9). In the end, the producers really like that the food tours are *“uniquely different than any other advertising venue”* (Respondent 11). One of the tour guides also confirms and summarizes that the restaurants enjoy the exposure from the food tours:

“They like the opportunity to showcase their food and their space to people that otherwise wouldn’t come in on their own. And hopefully they end up getting return business out of it, so it’s not just a one-time thing for them; it’s a little thing that continues to grow” (Respondent 6).

5.3.2. Community Support

The majority of the respondents also mentioned that the food tours bring local food businesses together who share a general interest in quality and who wish to better serve the community by combining their individual skills (Bessière, 1998). Supporting local businesses also builds relationships within the community that allow producers to develop a sense of togetherness because local producers are helping other local producers (Meyer-Czech, 2003). When speaking of a reason why they participate in the food tours, one restaurant owner confirms: *“it’s just about supporting another local business”* (Respondent 12). The restaurants and specialty food shops support the tour company and vice versa. Working together in this manner is a driving force for successful entrepreneurial networks, which opens up the flow of various resources, support, and knowledge in the community (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). The producers really believe *“in supporting the local community”* (Respondent 1). Another respondent agreed that *“it helps to build rapport with other companies and other places in San Diego”* (Respondent 5) because the producers share common interests and goals; thus they are “extending, maintaining and exchanging the community’s gastronomic

knowledge” (Fox, 2007: 547). By supporting other producers, these food tours are only making the community stronger.

5.3.3. Supporting a Unique Tour Concept That Promotes Education

Many of the producers emphasized that they thoroughly enjoy and support the unique concept of these food tours. These gastronomic experiences seem to have value for both producers and consumers, which create a win-win factor (Magid, 2009). As one respondent clarifies:

“I think it’s a good way for people from out of town, you know, to get, like, a little sample of everything. We really like the idea that um, they’re offering |...| variety and the people coming get to sample a little bit of our popular dishes, and if they enjoy them then maybe they’ll want to come for dinner, or |...| the next time they’re in San Diego hopefully they’ll come back and try our restaurant if they had a good experience” (Respondent 13).

In addition, not only do these establishments support the food tours because they offer social and economic benefits for both the producers and consumers, but that they also create a unique interaction between the producers and consumers where education takes place. Within this interaction, food becomes the medium of social and cultural expression as well as for communicating knowledge (Pérez and Abarca, 2007). Being able to educate the guests about their restaurant and the food is a large part of what makes the concept of the food tours unique since the producers do not normally have this kind of interaction with guests on a regular basis. In fact, while speaking about the guests on the tour, one respondent enjoys being able *“to engage them in conversation and educate them about coffee and tea in general”* (Respondent 4). The manager at a specialty cheese shop also said: *“I like educating people about cheese”* (Respondent 12). By offering them gastronomic knowledge of the food and processes within their place, producers give guests the opportunity to explore their culture and social world with them (Bessièrè, 1998).

Furthermore, the brew master at the beer brewery enjoys telling people how he makes beer *“because a lot of people don’t get the opportunity to talk to people who make beer on a professional level and that makes it exciting for them”* (Respondent 5). Additionally, one tour guide explains: *“What I love about this industry itself is that there’s all these people from around the world that love food and they just want to learn about it”* (Respondent 6). Guests have an opportunity to experience something new and fun while concurrently learning things

about the gastronomic profile of the places and San Diego as a whole. Then, by sharing their gastronomic experiences with friends and family once they return home, hopefully this word-of-mouth advertising will generate future business for the producers since personal references are often thought of as more trustworthy than commercial advertisements (Buttle, 1998).

5.3.4. Intimacy

According to Everett (2008), it is the tasting experience with certain people in a given place where multisensory engagement provides an intimate encounter where tourists can learn more knowledge of that place. Thus, the food tours provide the perfect environment for producers to build intimate relationships with other producers as well as with customers through food and education. During normal operating hours, customers in restaurants do not usually interact with upper management or the chefs who are preparing their food. Guests on the food tours, however, can actually meet with these staff members in an open, social atmosphere where they build a more intimate producer-consumer relationship and exchange knowledge to satisfy curiosity (Long, 2004). The producers want to break the business-customer barrier because it is too formal; they would rather create a friendship with their guests. Accordingly, Long (2004) expresses that food is a vital means for building friendship networks like these in society. This is another reason why producers participate in the food tours, and as one chef states: *“I wanted to build a more handshake relationship with customers as opposed to having that separation of a line”* (Respondent 2). One manager said he likes:

“interacting with the local people. Obviously, the people who signed up for the food tour are interested in local restaurants, so just asking them what restaurants they’re familiar with and then try to refer them to other restaurants that are like-minded like ourselves that we would go to on one of our days off” (Respondent 7).

Sharing food with people directly relates to the construction of relationships because communication is often higher between people when food is present rather than when it is not (Lupton 1996). Thus, by exchanging stories with those who have similar interests while simultaneously consuming a meal can often enrich the social experience and strengthen the relationship or sense of togetherness (Long, 2004). A few producers explain that information is shared both ways – from producer to consumer as well as from consumer to producer. As food has been known to act as a fundamental social link, communicating in back and forth dialogue increases interaction; and thus, strengthens the relationship between producer and consumer (Lupton, 1996). Engaging the guests in this two-way communication usually

makes the experience a bit more open and comforting for everyone involved. Referring to the opportunity to speak with the guests on the food tour, one producer testifies:

“So whether its myself or my staff we really enjoy engaging with the participants and asking them where they’re from, what they’re experiences are, and getting to meet people from all over the country and sometimes the world” (Respondent 3).

Another respondent who also engages in this back and forth communication with the guests state: *“they want to tell you where they’re from; they want to tell you how they found you”* (Respondent 8). Besides hearing the story of the restaurant, guests also like to engage of some form of storytelling themselves. Additionally, by combining the intimacy of storytelling with the “doing and showing” of the restaurants is a way for the producers to build a better relationship with the consumers (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010). This intensified interaction between both parties is what increases the value of the whole experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

5.3.5. Passion and Enjoyment

I also found that both the food tour companies as well as the local food businesses thoroughly enjoy participating in the food tours because it is fun and they have a chance to share their passion with others. Also, it seems as though the more passionate and excited someone is about something, the harder they will work to do it right and make it better. Quite a number of producers stated that their passion for food and their work is a good driving force for what they do and why they partake in the food tours. The respondents all seemed very enthusiastic about their jobs, and it is easy to see that they love having an opportunity to meet new people and share their passion with them. While producers share their passion with guests, they themselves find the experience satisfying; and thus, the food tours act as a medium to gain their own personal value (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010). From the interview material, it was clear that some respondents’ passion defined who they were as a collective of individuals in the restaurant, which you could see shine through in their gastronomic profile. This notion was confirmed when I visited one restaurant’s website specifically:

“Passion is at the core of Jsix. It shines through in everything from the bustling atmosphere to the warm service to the craft of cooking with the best local ingredients and making many items from scratch.” (www.jsixrestaurant.com)

As one tour guide states: *“Growing up, food’s been a passion of mine! |...| I love interacting with the people! I’m a social person, and so it’s a lot of fun doing the tours!”* (Respondent 1). Additionally, most establishments participate in the food tours *“for pure passion...for the love of food and the love of sharing their recipes with people”* (Respondent 9). These personal values (i.e. the love of food) become “commercial value through social interaction” (Cederholm and Hultman, 2010: 24), which occurs as producers ‘sell’ themselves and the gastronomic profile of their place. Loving food is an identifying characteristic of those working in these establishments, and thus, plays a large part in the construction of their gastronomic profile. Therefore, it is passionate traits like these that help create a place’s gastronomic profile through the food tours. In fact, I also found this concept to be true when I visited the website of one of the tour companies: *“We are passionate about representing San Diego, and we make sure that every one of our tours makes you feel like a local insider”* (www.sodiegotours.com). Not only does this company share this common love of food and people, but they really strive to present San Diego’s profile during the tours.

Another respondent likes that they can share their *“enthusiasm, education, and passion of [their] product”* with others (Respondent 4). Additionally, another interviewee replies: *“it’s fun to meet new people from all over the country”* (Respondent 8). Most respondents just enjoy helping to create a memorable experience for their guests. *“It makes me feel really good!”* (Respondent 6). Another reason one chef likes participating in the food tours is because of the fun, challenge it brings to mix things up a bit from his normal routine at the pizzeria.

“The preparation |...| really gets my creative juices flowing. There are always some people there who are always there, which is the tour guide. So to be able to surprise them with something new is a nice challenge every once in a while” (Respondent 10).

Especially for the producers, preparing food tastings becomes a leisure activity rather than a chore because it is an exciting interest that challenges them to be creative in the kitchen (Lupton, 1996). Moreover, two other producers get pleasure from the intimate nature of the food tours because it allows them to take a break from the usual duties of the restaurant and interact with the guests. *“We enjoy it! It breaks up our day!”* (Respondent 3).

“I like getting out of the brewery and talking to people who like beer. My normal work week is 8am-5pm at the brewery, and I’m by myself making beer, and I don’t really get an opportunity to interact with the people who are drinking the beer as much as I would like to” (Respondent 4).

Just as consumers participate in gastronomic activities as a way to break free from their daily mundane routines (Long, 2004), the producers seem to take part in the food tours for just the same reason.

To conclude, gaining exposure from the tours is a means of marketing themselves while also a way for producers to introduce guests to their culinary offerings. Community support is about collaborating with local businesses to strengthen their relationships within the area. Producers also expressed that they take part in the food tours because they genuinely like and encourage the unique concept of these relatively new gastronomic tours. They get to interact with and educate guests, which they do not normally have the chance to do. The motivation of intimacy refers to the delight producers take in interacting with guests on a closer level than normal customers. Passion and enjoyment is fairly self explanatory as producers gave examples of how much fun they truly have when participating in the food tours and sharing their passion with guests.

5.4. Discussion 2 – Using Multisensory Components to Co-Create a Gastronomic Profile

As I have already presented an understanding of why food tour companies and local food business participate in food tours, I will now explain how the producers work together to co-create and convey the gastronomic profile of San Diego through the food tours. The data offered in this section will answer my second research question:

- *How do food tour companies and local food businesses co-create a gastronomic profile through food tours within a destination?*

When discussing this question, I have divided the results into three different sensory components as they emerged from my research. Through these components producers co-create and convey their gastronomic profile; however, it should be mentioned that these are only the components that I interpreted from the data, but they may not be the only existing ones used in food tours or other gastronomic activities for co-creation. Additionally, it is important to remember that co-creation has restrictions of time and space (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the results generated here represent the co-creation process within the specific food tours of these two companies (*A Taste of San Diego* and *So Diego Tours*) in San Diego, California. This means that if the same study was to be conducted in another city or even

amongst different food tours from other tour companies then the results would most likely be slightly different.

The food tour is the overall tool for co-creating a gastronomic profile, but below you will find the specific components of which it is comprised as interpreted from the research data. Thus, these are ways in which the producers share their culinary personality with guests. The concepts discussed here represent the means by which co-creation takes place. Through these multisensory components of show, tell, and taste, I found culinary-influenced qualities of character (i.e. their gastronomic profile). However, it is important to note that these may not be the only means or sensory components through which a gastronomic profile is co-created. My research also found these visual, auditory, and gustatory components to be the most prevalent because they seemed to be the most agreed upon and reoccurring responses and most direct ways for producers to co-create a gastronomic profile that gives guests a better sense of who they are.

I should also mention that I found the producers to co-create the gastronomic profile of San Diego as a whole, but that each individual restaurant also conveys their own personal gastronomic profile. During the latter case, the food tour companies merely act as a link for bringing customers to the restaurants and specialty food shops in order to show them the establishments' gastronomic profiles. However, once the tour is complete, the guests then have an overview of San Diego's gastronomic profile as a whole. This is because each local restaurant's cooking styles, flavors, and culinary behaviors all come together to form San Diego's overall gastronomic profile. Thus, the foundation for the co-creation process is the individual contributions of the parties involved (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003).

It is not realistic for guests to see San Diego's whole gastronomic profile within each restaurant or specialty food shop because these individual establishments were formed to have unique traits that distinguish them from others. As Binkhorst *et al.* (2009) confirm, producers are now scrambling to differentiate themselves from competitors in today's ever-so globalized world, and in this shuffle, they are turning to co-creation as the solution. Each of the local food businesses cannot do more than show guests their personal gastronomic profile of their own. However, it is the variety from all the different establishments that combine to construct the larger gastronomic profile, which the guests may not understand until the food tour is finished. Combining skills and knowledge in this manner allows producers to become partners in order to co-create their gastronomic profile (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009).

The beauty of this co-creation is that each side contributes their own part (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). Similar to providing an experience environment where tourism

experiences are co-created (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), the food tour companies establish the gastronomic environment (i.e. the food tours as a backdrop) within which the co-creation of a gastronomic profile takes place. After setting up the tours, another responsibility of the food tour companies is to bring guests to the restaurants. At that moment, the local food businesses do their part and present their own gastronomic profile, which may in turn portray some similar qualities of San Diego's overall gastronomic profile. Just as co-created experiences are normally restricted to the interaction of hosts and guests in a certain place at a certain time (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003); co-created gastronomic profiles are also restricted to each specific food tour since that defines the specific time and place of co-creation. Since the food tour companies provide the setting, they are the ones who decide the time and space contexts for which the co-creation takes place (Carù and Cova, 2003). Accordingly, because different tours go to different restaurants, each tour may portray a different part of San Diego's gastronomic identity. Therefore, the chosen restaurants and related qualities of each tour make up the gastronomic profile and represent only a part of the gastronomic identity that the producers want their guests to see at that specific time and clearly, at those specific places. This is how the co-creation of gastronomic profiles is time and space relevant to each food tour.

Below you will find examples of the various ways in which food tour companies and local food businesses use multisensory components to co-create and convey their gastronomic profile. Sometimes one may only see examples of how the local establishments construct their own gastronomic profiles, although it is important to remember that these are only their contributions to the co-creation process and that the tour companies provide the larger, more general aspects.

5.4.1. Show – The Visual Component

Being as how the restaurants on the food tours are “*off the beaten path*” and local establishments that many tourists may not find on their own, the food tours act as a link where co-creation takes place between tour companies and other producers. The food tour companies are in charge of deciding which restaurants to network with and what other establishments to invite to partake in their tour. It should be mentioned that one of the food tour companies does not tell their guests which restaurants or specialty food shops they will be visiting ahead of time. Thus, guests do not see or hear anything about the establishment until they are literally standing outside of it. By physically taking guests to each

establishment these companies are specifically choosing which qualities and characteristics of San Diego's culinary scene to show to guests. Once in the restaurant or specialty food shop, it is then up to the local producers to further show guests their gastronomic profile. Since each participant (the tour company and local establishment) contributes to the "showing off" of the gastronomic profile, this is where the co-creation takes place (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). The cooperating producers construct the profile because they, together as partners, are choosing what qualities to show to guests (Binkhorst *et al*, 2009).

Aspects of the food tour that create a gastronomic profile through physical sight may include such things as the setting and environment. These aspects 'show off' a place or restaurant. Because food tours include walking through downtown San Diego, they are also somewhat of a sightseeing tour. In this manner, guests can take in the sights of the city using their visual sense, which Urry (1990) claims is the most distinguishing and consistent sensual agent for understanding and absorbing the new environment or culture.

A handful of producers explained that other features besides food are important when trying to construct a profile, convey meaning and impress guests. Because downtown San Diego has many historic buildings, I found that the producers who work there are very keen on preserving that history while still introducing their own contemporary flare. This concept of blending the past with the present in relation to the gastronomic profile of San Diego seemed to emerge a handful of times throughout the interviews. There appears to be more local aspects than just food that helps in the construction of a gastronomic profile (Bessièrè, 1998; Fox, 2007). It seems as though maintaining certain historical roots and showing them off is important to the residents in the area. As a community, these producers define themselves relative to their location and local history. Thus, by maintaining these historical roots within the food tourism industry they construct and display their gastronomic profile (Bessièrè, 1998). For example, a historic building in which a restaurant is located, or even the contemporary interior décor are both features that help the producers tell a story of themselves and their place. One tour guide even explained how unique one restaurant was and by looking at the building, layout, and décor guests could get a sense of the place's personality:

"...even the style of, um, interior design [...] kinda meshes contemporary and historical aspects, and they mirrored that into their pizzas as well. So it's very, like, rustic pizza but they have an urban California twist to them. It's in the Keating building so the pizza place is called Krust and they spell it with a 'K'. [...] So it's very San Diego." (Respondent 9).

In this response I also found this restaurant's gastronomic profile to overlap with that of San Diego because it maintains the history of the original building as well as its own spin on the interior design, and their food reflects all of these characteristics as well. Therefore, the place's gastronomic profile is not only being presented through the food, but through its building and architecture as well (Fox, 2007). While looking at the building, guests gain a sense of the place's history and by observing its modern interior and unique pizzas one can gain a sense of its originality. This ability to blend the old with the new helps the restaurant present their gastronomic profile because when the guests see it they are learning about the tradition of the place as well as the influence it has on the innovative food served there. As confirmed by Everett (2008), the site where food tourism takes place bridges the connection between locality and food. Thus, displaying local flavors with a traditional twist it encourages imagination to take place in order to create embodied experiences where producers display their gastronomic profile (Fox, 2007). The physical environment and unique appearance of an establishment are key elements that reflect the personality of the place and its people (Kim, Eves, and Scarles, 2009).

Additionally, there are other things besides architecture that give meaning to a place (Fox, 2007). A restaurant's signs, menu, staff, and costumes may also reflect a restaurant's gastronomic profile and convey meaning. *"It all comes down to the impression that the person first makes"* (Respondent 11). This respondent broke down all of the specific aspects of his restaurant that guests see, which help give them a better sense of the place and its gastronomic profile. He explained that the table cloths, quality of the china and silverware, the carpet, the lighting, and the menu all play a role in showing guests who they are by reflecting their values and gastronomic preferences and behaviors. An additional respondent agrees that all of it *"should set a tone [...] and tell something about the place as well"* (Respondent 2). Another restaurant owner added that the way the food is presented will also express the gastronomic character of the place. He said that the colors, shapes, and accompaniments on the plate will reinforce the qualities of the place and local cuisine as well as the level of care behind its preparation. In fact, Sims (2009: 333) mentions that fresh, local products have a meaning and a story behind them *"that can be related to the place and culture."* This is why seeing the food and the way it is presented will play a role in the construction of the place's gastronomic profile. For example, the president of an artisan bakery nicely affirmed:

“Everything from the presentation of the food |...| and the presentation of the setting should all come together to paint a picture that you’re trying to convey of what your place means” (Respondent 3).

By showing off all of these features together, the restaurant can help guests understand their profile; *“it should tell some sort of story”* (Respondent 2).

Furthermore, there are also occasions when guests can watch food and drink preparations first hand in certain establishments. If an establishment produced something of their own on site, such as coffee or beer, then the producer would lead the guests over to the coffee roasters or brewing tanks to show them where and how the production took place. When speaking of the brewery, the tour guide stated:

“we have the brew master who comes out to show and tell us his technique about making beer and they have the brewery there so he’ll point out different tanks and what each one does” (Respondent 9).

From this response, one can gather that *seeing* the production process is a way to learn culinary techniques and cooking styles of a place, which helps contribute to the co-creation of the gastronomic profile. If these techniques and styles were not important to the producers to show the guests then they would not bother wasting their time. However, watching this preparation or production must provide some part of the gastronomic profile of the place or else the producers would not show it to the guests.

Additionally, being able to see this production first hand enhances the consumer experience because it brings guests closer to the source. Drinking fresh beer or coffee directly in the place where it was produced enhances the experience and better conveys the gastronomic profile because the body is both physically and emotionally present in the space (Everett, 2008). Opportunities such as this provide the guests with more knowledge of the place because the “space is intimately encountered through immersive physical engagement” (Everett, 2008: 345). This in turn, helps them gain a better overall picture of the place’s gastronomic profile.

Even though Urry (1990) claims the visual sense is the best for understanding the complexities of a destination, other authors would disagree. Many scholars argue the importance of the other senses as well in order to fully immerse oneself in a place or culture (e.g. Everett, 2008; Long, 2004). This is why food tourism has gained such power on this topic. Thus, I will now continue this discussion with a presentation of two other sensory

components that emerged from the data as significant for co-creating San Diego's gastronomic profile through the food tours.

5.4.2. Tell – The Auditory Component

As useful as the visual component is for displaying a person(s) or place's identity, 'showing' guests the setting and environment is not enough (Everett, 2008; Long, 2004; Sims, 2009). Producers must also engage the guests with an auditory component in order to elevate their gastronomic profiles to guests. During each of the stops on the tours (at the restaurants/specialty food shops) someone is always there to speak with the guests, whether it is a representative of the restaurant or the tour guide. Co-creation is at its height when representatives from both parties simultaneously speak about their food knowledge of the place (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009).

Because food is "a fundamental social link" it is fairly easy to engage in communication with others while sharing food (Bessièrè, 1998: 23). As one respondent states, the guests are given "*behind the scenes explanations of a little bit of the history or that connection to a place [...] when they have one-on-one with an owner or staff member*" (Respondent 3). When there is no representative of the restaurant available, either due to short-handed staff, time constraints, or language barriers, one tour guide explained: "*I try to find out as much as I can about the restaurant and the food so I can just talk about it in case the restaurant doesn't get involved*" (Respondent 1). This response demonstrates how the tour company contributes their part to the co-creation process of the gastronomic profile through use of the auditory component. By telling guests specific qualities of the place and its food, the producers are constructing and sharing their gastronomic profile.

Seeing as how not all producers participate in the food tours to the same extent, Binkhorst *et al.* (2009) states that these producers are still connected in the same holistic (food) tourism network regardless of the way they operate in different time-spatial contexts. Another tour guide also confirmed that they give the guests some kind of introduction to the establishments when the owners or chefs are unavailable: "*we talk about the family, and like, their recipes and [...] the building and the venue itself*" (Respondent 9). In this manner, the producers are educating the guests about themselves and their city, and as one chef explains it: "*I get to teach them [...] why we do things the way we do*" (Respondent 10). Throughout the tour, guests are given this background information about the establishments as well as information on the food they serve. This form of education seems to be a great way for

producers to engage the guests and share their personality, knowledge and passion with them. In fact, verbally socializing in this manner is a way to satisfy the universal human impulse of curiosity since producers are physically educating guests about their gastronomic behaviors (Long, 2004).

Often times the producers will also use storytelling to get the guests more engaged in the history of the place. For example, the food tours given by *So Diego Tours* are “*very history driven*” so they want to show off the beautiful, historic buildings and “*talk a lot about the [city’s] history*” in order “*to paint the picture of what it used to look like*” (Respondent 9). By listening to historical accounts of the city one requires the use of his/her auditory sense, which allows them to generate invisible knowledge about the people and place(s) in the area (Everett, 2008). In addition, the restaurants often have funny stories for the guests, which make the experience more intimate: “*it’s just random stories, but its little things like that that endear the guests and make them feel more personable rather than it’s just a restaurant*” (Respondent 6). This personal communication is a means for creating intimacy because it allows people to open up and develop a deeper relationship with their producer rather than the usual rigid, business relationship between producers and consumers (Lupton, 1996). By telling stories and explaining the background history of the place and its food, producers are directly conveying their gastronomic profile to guests. If local San Diego residents are on these tours then they get to learn a little bit more about their neighbors and their own hometown. Alternately, if the guests are out-of-town visitors then they get to learn about and experience a new culture. Basically, by going on these food tours and listening to the history and stories of the establishments, guests are engaging in a touristic activity, and thus, seeking out information on people, places, and the local cuisine (Bessièrè, 1998).

Furthermore, speaking of the guests on the tours, another respondent said: “*they like to hear a little back story about the diner*” (Respondent 8). Through these stories, this restaurant tells guests about their history and what makes them special. Thus, they are sharing their profile with them. Accordingly, Morgan and Xu (2009: 232) express that companies require engaging stories in order to fully gain the attention of a guest and to creatively communicate knowledge; “*stories will be the most precious resource*” of a business. The same manager of the diner stated that “*it’s not just the food they’re going for; every single little spot they go to they tell a story of how it came to be*” (Respondent 8). After analyzing the data from this respondent’s transcription, I visited the company’s website and found that they are like an open book just waiting for someone to come read their story: “*Welcome to Studio Diner, located in San Diego as one of the memorable locations. We hope you have a*

moment to get to know us” (www.studiodiner.com). The later part of that quote seems to be an invitation for guests to uncover the restaurant’s gastronomic profile, which could either mean through exploration their website, speaking with the staff members, or indulging in one of their famous American dishes.

5.4.3. Taste – The Gustatory Component

Lastly, the final, and most important component used for co-creating and communicating a gastronomic profile throughout the food tours was ‘taste’. Because food is the highlight of the tour, producers make sure they “*put their best food forward*” (Respondent 4) and offer guests “*something that is just so unique on the menu to introduce people to because [they] want it to kinda be an adventure for the guests*” (Respondent 1). Being creative in the kitchen seems to be an important feature to have when you are in this business of food tourism. Not only does being gastronomically inventive display the place’s character, but it also provides a means through which to differentiate an establishment from others (Hall *et al.*, 2003). Food can act as “a resource for expressing identity, satisfying aesthetic needs, and enacting social roles and relationships” (Long, 2004: 12). Thus, because of this power that food holds, multiple respondents spoke of the food needing to have a “*WOW! factor*” (Respondent 1) to really impress and engage the guests.

Just as Carù and Cova (2003) explain that both the suppliers and consumers contribute skills, knowledge, opinions, and desires for co-creating experiences, different producers within the food tours contribute their thoughts and opinions regarding which flavors or food to offer guests to sample. This interaction and exchange of ideas then determines the gastronomic profile the producers want to convey. For example, one noticeable food tour offered by one of the tour companies that prominently displayed a specific part of San Diego’s overall culinary background was one that focused on traditional American-style diners. The food samples on these tours were described as “*so-called American home cooking*” (Respondent 3) and “*really good comfort food*” (Respondent 1) that makes people feel good on an emotional level. By choosing to focus on these types of food, the tour companies and restaurants are co-creating and presenting an American comfort food theme as their gastronomic profile.

From the interview material, the responses showed that half of the time the restaurants are the ones to choose which of their signature dishes they would like the guests to taste. The other half of the time the tour companies decide what menu items at each of the

establishments they want their guests to taste. However, there are also times when the tour companies and restaurant owners/managers/chefs openly discuss what food they wish to share with guests in order to convey a certain meaning or highlight specific cooking styles and/or flavors. When asked what factors are important when considering which menu items to share with guests on the food tours, one chef responded: *“it’s basically to fill the niche that she needs to fill* (Respondent 2). What this respondent means is that he collaborates with the tour company owner in order to give the guests samples of something that function as a part of the whole story the tour company is trying to convey. The tour company usually has a specific “picture” that they want to paint for the guests through these food tours, and deciding which food for them to taste is essential for co-creating the gastronomic profile.

As stated by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2003), the company provides the stage and raw materials as a basic platform for which the consumer works in and with so as to co-create his/her own experience. In a similar manner, it is also possible that the tour companies provide the overall guidelines for what meaning or gastronomic profile they want to convey with the food on the tours, but then the individual restaurants sometimes have the ultimate decisions about which menu items they wish to serve in order to further the construction and presentation of that profile. Therefore, the food sampled on the tours becomes a medium through which the producers interact as well as a result from their collaborative efforts (Bessièrè, 1998).

Due to globalization, food is considered one of the most significant points of cultural differences among communities and regions (Delamont, 1994). Being different, standing out, and distinguishing oneself from others is what makes that place, producer, or restaurant special. The greater the differences there are between one restaurant’s food and the next, then the more customers will be able to distinguish the value and meaning of each place. In reference to which menu items to share with guests on the tour, one restaurant manager stated: *“what we can put out that represents who we are, and you know, have it seem open and fun”* (Respondent 7). Responses such as this confirm that producers are actively aware of what qualities they use to create and convey their gastronomic profile. In this sense, Lupton (1996) agrees that food is a language with which to communicate notions of people and places. In fact, the process of eating (or tasting) can act as a channel for sharing meaning and a place’s gastronomic profile with others.

Moreover, Lupton (1996) agrees that the inhabitants of a place will often identify themselves, as well as be identified by others, with local flavors and regional cuisine. I found that it is these local, specialty flavors that are unique to the establishments, and

coincidentally, to the area as well, which help display different gastronomic profiles of both the restaurants and San Diego as a whole. Additionally, Everett (2008) also agrees that a destination's local flavors have the power to engage all five senses, which allows for complete consumption of the place and absorption of profiles.

Overall, the goal of these food tours is to show off San Diego, and even though there are many identifying characteristics of this city, one of the main defining features is its cultural diversity: *"The whole thing is that our food shows we are a melting pot"* (Respondent 1). This response confirms that guests may not understand the gastronomic profile that was co-created for them until after the entire tour is over because then they can see the overall picture. It is this variety of different cuisine they taste at each establishment throughout the tour that combines to portray the gastronomic profile of San Diego as a whole. As mentioned earlier, each co-creation process is related to a certain time and place (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009); thus each co-created gastronomic profile is also specific to each food tour. For example, if a food tour company chooses to focus on a large diversity of ethnic cuisine throughout their restaurant participants of one food tour, then it is possible that the gastronomic profile co-created through that food tour represents the "melting pot" part of San Diego's gastronomic identity.

One tour guide confirmed that the food tours in San Diego present a *"cultural diversity of food"* because the restaurants are all unique and offer *"completely different cuisine from a different part of the world altogether"* (Respondent 6). The variety of food on the tour is important because it allows producers to distinguish their flavors from other restaurants. A further benefit of portraying this variety of cuisine on the food tour is that it allows guests to come into contact with the local residents since 'food is culture' (Antonioli, 1995 in Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000). This means that visitors are coming into contact with the local population since the diversity of ethnic cuisine directly mirrors the assortment of cultural backgrounds within the area. Furthermore, one website as well as another tour guide stated that some of the restaurants on their tours present true, *"authentic Mexican food"* (www.atasteof-sandiego.com). Just as one food tour may focus on a variety of ethnic cuisine to portray a specific gastronomic profile, alternately, focusing their efforts on restaurants with genuine authentic Mexican food or other authentic recipes may present a completely different gastronomic profile of San Diego as a whole.

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that co-creation is the foundation for value and the future of innovation. Throughout the data, I found the repetitive concepts of variety, innovation and differentiation to be quite important for producers in order to co-create their

gastronomic profile. This is because dishes with those qualities are the ones that the place is most uniquely known for, and which will hopefully construct and convey their gastronomic profile in the most straightforward way possible. In fact, Bessièrè (1998: 23) confirms that food is an identity marker with “which the inhabitants of a given area recognize themselves”, and thus, distinguish themselves from others. By preparing a meal for someone, the chef or producer treats food as a medium for expressing notions of local nature and culture as well as individual personality and emotions (Lupton, 1996). The more unique the cuisine the more likely it will display a stronger sense of the place’s gastronomic profile. It is for this reason that the producers offer tastes of their signature dishes. *“We want to be different than what the other restaurants are offering”* (Respondent 11).

As indicated by Bessièrè (1998: 23) food is a profile marker by which a group may recognize themselves. This may be why some of the restaurants on the food tours choose to offer guests samples of specific signature dishes that best portray their gastronomic profile. Additionally, it is also essential for the restaurants and specialty food shops to use fresh ingredients and to try to make as many things from scratch as possible instead of using processed or pre-packaged ingredients because it is those homemade qualities that portray a stronger sense of the place’s gastronomic profile also. Sims (2009) also explains, local flavors are better for connecting the guests to a new place because they are allowing the guests to be fully integrated into the local society. As mentioned by the president of a bakery: *“we highlight our special breads, ones with those regional flavors – local flavors”* (Respondent 3). In this case, it is up to the individual bakery to choose which items to share with guests in order to present a gastronomic profile based on the local flavors special to their area.

Furthermore, the chef at the pizzeria explained that his pizzas differ from the competition because by making unique flavors beyond the original, traditional ones (plain cheese, meat, or vegetable) this restaurant can give guests a taste of their adventurous and creative personality. Because food is expressive of people, places, cultures, and lifestyles, using unique flavors and cooking styles will provide differentiation from others (Hall *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, by being different, a restaurant’s inventive gastronomic profile is further elevated from the rest. Now, if all of the restaurants and specialty food shops on a tour invite guests to sample creative items with a “Wow! factor” that are unlike anything else ever tasted, then it is possible that the gastronomic profile that is co-created is based on innovation. However, this may not be something that is noticeable until the guests have completed the tour. This is because while they’re sampling unique dishes at each

establishment that are representative of creativity and innovation, then they cannot be sure if those characteristics are purely descriptive of that restaurant's gastronomic profile, or if they represent the gastronomic profile of the area overall.

Another manager also stated that *"We have a couple of, you know, dishes here...the Sam Son's steak sandwich, which probably no one else in the country makes"* (Respondent 8). Purposefully choosing these unique dishes and flavors help the producers create a gastronomic profile because they are actively deciding to showcase these specific items, which highlight certain characteristics of their gastronomic identity. By making these decisions they are giving their gastronomic profile more definition, which in turn helps the establishment differentiate themselves from competitors because the dishes they choose are bold, creative, and unlike anything else since those are distinguishing factors that break the mold of plain and ordinary (Everett, 2008).

As suggested by Long (2004), even though food is common to all places around the globe it still allows people to experience the diversity of it by providing a base for innovation and adventure. For example, the coffee roastery offers guests an organic and socially responsible coffee that has a fresh baked blueberry muffin aroma and flavor that you really cannot get anywhere else:

"You're not gonna taste blueberry in other coffees. Again, this speaks to the unique characters of our coffee, and it's one that we have a lot of pride in and certification and care that we've taken to produce such a craft and unique product" (Respondent 4).

Besides setting themselves apart from the competition, their unique flavors also display a sense of creativity and innovation, which says a lot about the people who work there in the roastery. Everett (2008) also suggests that food tourism sites inspire creativity by building a connection between locality and food, which encourages the place and its people to be imaginatively and emotively understood through embodied experiences. In addition to creativity, the coffee company only uses organically certified products, which shows how important natural processes and ingredients are to this company. Promoting high-quality, sustainable cuisine is a distinguishing factor that elevates some local producers above the rest because it is best for the environment and displays the 'typical' nature of the destination (Bessière, 1998; Sims, 2009). If all of the restaurants on a food tour maintain similar sustainable qualities, then it is possible that the gastronomic profile the producers are trying to convey is that of environmentally friendly fresh, organic, local products. Also, by mentioning that they make hand roasted coffee this respondent shows how much care and

attention they put into their craft as well. This dedication to quality is an important characteristic for the producers to have because it shows their sincerity and that they are not solely driven by monetary benefits. In addition, Moran (1993) explains that small local producers who only use other local suppliers from within the community can enhance their reputations with quality products and personal attention given to their food. This in turn, can help promote the region as a popular food destination as well as strengthen their gastronomic profile (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009; Lemmetyinen *et al.*, 2009).

In summary, the three main components of the food tours through which producers co-create their gastronomic profile are show, tell, and taste. Through these sensory components, the food tours act as a medium for social and cultural expression (Pérez and Abarca, 2007). By showing off the setting, environment, and presentation of the food; talking about the background histories and stories of the establishments; and offering tastings of local food, producers can co-create their place's gastronomic profile, which the guests consume.

To conclude, the concept of co-creation normally stresses the interaction between hosts and guests (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009). However, the findings of this study showed the importance of interaction between the different producers for co-creating San Diego's gastronomic profile through these sensory components: visual, auditory, and gustatory. Just as multiple authors agree, food tourism offers a deeper look into a culture or destination through multisensory experiences (Boniface, 2003; Everett, 2008; Long, 2004; Sims, 2008).

6. CONCLUSION

This is the final chapter of my report where I will reflect upon the conclusions of my research. It is in this section that I will also report suggestions for further research.

6.1. Reflection – The Last Bite

There is an old English proverb that says “the eyes are the windows to the soul.” In a similar manner, I see food as the doorway to a place or culture. The meanings we construct and assign to people and places are reflected by our sensual experiences of harvesting, preparing, and eating food (Lupton, 1996). Therefore, as we have seen from the interviews and companies’ websites, food seems to be a great way for San Diego and its residents to connect with others and share their gastronomic profile. By providing multisensory activities that utilize all five senses and offering fresh, local products on the food tours, producers can invite consumers to step into their social world and learn about their place and culture (Bessièrè, 1998).

After reading through the theoretical literature and conducting my analysis I have gained a better understanding of co-creation between producers within food tourism. Through my exploration, I have discovered a few reasons why food tour companies and local food businesses take part in gastronomic activities, such as food tours. In addition, I have also discovered how these producers co-create a gastronomic profile of their region through the food tours.

By delving into the minds of the food tour companies and local food businesses, I discovered five reasons for their participation in local food tours. From my interpretation of the data, the producers’ number one reason for taking part in these gastronomic activities is because of the exposure it offers them. This exposure, however, can be broken down into two different meanings. In one sense, it is seen from a marketing standpoint where producers gain exposure from this unique word-of-mouth advertising technique with customers. As the tour companies bring guests into the establishments, it is hoped that this exposure creates a positive impression on the guests; and in turn, generates repeat business of the same customers, and/or new business from customers learning about them from word-of mouth. The other meaning of exposure refers to the ways in which the restaurants and specialty food shops can introduce guests to their exceptional and unique local dishes that guests may not be able to find on their own anywhere else. In this sense, producers are not focused on sharing

their food with guests because of the monetary benefits, but purely because they want the guests to taste their delicious food.

The four other reasons producers mentioned for participating in the food tours were: community support, supporting a unique tour concept that promotes education, intimacy as well as passion and enjoyment. Producers expressed that it is important to support the community and collaborate with other local businesses in order to strengthen relationships within the area and build up the local economy. Additionally, these establishments mentioned that they genuinely like the unique concept of these tours and encourage them because they are relatively new and innovative, and they offer the opportunity for hosts to educate guests about their character, place, and food products. Another reason producers take part in the food tours is because the social benefits yield interaction with the guests on an intimate level that is less formal and more open than the typical producer-consumer relationship and allows for the exchange of similar interests and ideas. Lastly, the local producers truly enjoy taking part in the food tours because it is fun and it allows them to share their passion with guests. Even though these five reasons proved to be the most agreed upon motivations for participating in the food tours amongst the respondents, they still may not be the only reasons producers take part in gastronomic activities.

Once I discovered *why* the producers come together to participate in the gastronomic activities in San Diego, it was then easier to find out *how* they collaborate to co-create their gastronomic profile. Through the local, hand crafted products one can get a better understanding of the region and culture (Long, 2004); and therefore, its gastronomic profile as well. Thus, food tourism and the intimate experiences connected with it remain to be a tool for local producers to construct and share their gastronomic profile with guests. As a relatively new term in scholarly literature, this gastronomic profile refers to the character or personality related to the food and related behaviors within a place or destination as depicted by the producers. The gastronomic profile is closely related to the gastronomic identity of a place or destination in that the gastronomic profile is only comprised of those specific qualities of the gastronomic identity that producers agree upon and deem important enough to intentionally present to consumers through food-related activities. Therefore, the gastronomic profile producers co-create and communicate to guests is only part of the overall gastronomic identity.

Although co-creation has normally been discussed as a process between a company and its consumers for constructing experiences (Binkhorst *et al.*, 2009; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003), I have discovered that it can be used in a similar manner between

different producers when co-creating a gastronomic profile through food tourism. What provides the fuel for this co-creation is the interaction between and the contributions of each producer (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). The food tour companies establish the gastronomic environment (the ‘setting’ or backdrop) within which the co-creation takes place. The tour companies are also responsible for choosing which restaurants to take guests to on the food tour as these decisions will help define the overall gastronomic profile that they wish to convey. After the tour companies bring guests into the different establishments, it is then up to these other local producers (of the restaurants and specialty food shops) to present their own individual gastronomic profile, which might also portray similar qualities of San Diego’s overall gastronomic profile.

Even though each local food business cannot do more than show guests their own personal gastronomic profile, the way they are part of the co-creation process is because it is the variety of profiles from all of the different establishments that combine to form the larger gastronomic profile of the whole area. Just as Binkhorst *et al.* (2009) describe, combining skills and knowledge in this manner allows producers to become partners in this co-creation process. The relationship between a food tour network and the place’s gastronomic profile is quite close because the producers working together in the food tours co-create and convey their gastronomic profile through visual, auditory, and gustatory components as seen from this study. Showing off the local, unique restaurants in the food tours, telling background histories and stories of the place and its staff, and offering samples of fresh, local flavors are all components that come together to tell a story about a restaurant or destination. Because the producers are the ones in charge of ‘telling the story’, they are the ones who get to choose which parts of their culture, place, history, background, and knowledge are presented to guests. This is how the gastronomic profile is co-created. Every part of each establishment (e.g. historic architecture, contemporary interior design, menus, etc.) shows different pieces of the profile and helps to paint a picture of those people who work there. By speaking about their history and giving guests a behind-the-scenes explanation of what they do and why they do it, producers (the tour companies and local food businesses) are directly sharing their city, themselves and their personalities with the guests. Lastly, through the gastronomic samplings, producers offer guests an even better look at the place’s gastronomic profile because food is a way of sharing who you are. The fresh, local ingredients and unique cooking styles or techniques reflect the history and personality of the place.

However, it should be mentioned that these three sensory components may just be a few of the ways in which a gastronomic profile is co-created through food tourism. The

findings represent my personal interpretation of the research data, but that does not mean there are not more ways for producers to co-create a gastronomic profile of a region through food tours. It is also important to note that the co-created gastronomic profile is restricted to each specific food tour since it is those time and space restrictions that create the context for which certain food and identity characteristics are chosen to be presented by the producers. It is for this reason that the findings cannot go beyond the food tour companies and network of related producers that I studied.

This is still just the beginning exploration of how useful gastronomy can be to the social sciences. There is more to food than what meets the eye, the nose, or the palate, and I think it would be interesting to conduct more research to find deeper meanings of what food can say about people and places. From previous research on co-creation in tourism, scholars have found the importance of producer-consumer interactions where experiences are co-created; however, Binkhorst *et al.*, (2009) stress that the co-creation process between businesses in the tourism industry has yet to be thoroughly explored. By conducting this study, my research has led to a better understanding of how co-creation takes place between producers in food tours, more specifically, in San Diego. To reflect on the information gathered from the observations, interviews, and content analysis, this study offers several lessons and insights relevant to the academic community and development of food tourism. My research has also been a contribution to the academic perspective in that it has come closer to helping distinguish some possible reasons why food tour companies and local food businesses take part in gastronomic activities. Even though my research cannot be generalized to all food tours or all other gastronomic activities, I still believe the findings can be a stepping stone towards identifying new ways in which to construct and convey a gastronomic profile.

6.2. Suggestions for Further Research

As social scientists are still developing theories and models for understanding gastronomy, Long (2004: 7) notes that “culinary tourism is one area in which food scholars are theorizing about food as a cultural, social, and communicative phenomena.” The studies of gastronomy in tourism have only begun to break the surface of its wealth of offerings to the social sciences. However, there is much room for exploration in a phenomenon such as food tourism because it strongly links the dimensions and complexity between food, culture, society, and the economy. Additionally, defining gastronomic identity has never been something that was very straightforward in the literature, but if there was more academic

research done on this topic as it is presented from the producers' side or host society, then maybe scholars could come closer to at least developing a definition for gastronomic profile.

I believe that the construction of identity is just as important as the communication of it, which is why further studies should be done on both of these concepts in relation to the producer's perspective. If producers are specifically choosing which characteristics of their identity to present to guests, it might be beneficial to observe the creation and communication of a gastronomic profile since that is the image portrayed to guests in a destination. Normally most academic articles focus on the consumer's reconstruction of their own identity while on holiday by comparing their culture to that of the new one, but consumers are also interested in learning more about the locals who live in the new destination they are visiting as well. Thus, more research should be done on the creation and presentation of gastronomic profiles from the local producer's perspective in food tourism, especially since they are the ones to construct the gastronomic profiles by choosing which qualities or characteristics to share with guests.

We have now seen that food tours are a good means for co-creation between local producers who wish to construct and convey their gastronomic profile. However, it would be beneficial to see more research conducted on producer-producer co-creation in food tourism since current literature is relatively weak. Once the producers in the food tourism industry see more values that activities such as food tours hold, they might be more willing to extend their gastronomic offerings. If any restaurants, specialty food shops, breweries, or other culinary establishments are having difficulties exposing themselves to customers, then they might be interested in knowing how valuable food tours are for them so that they may also propose the idea for their destination.

Also, since there may be other reasons why different producers participate in food tourism, but which did not become emergent in my research, further studies on this topic would be interesting. By exploring other types of gastronomic activities in relation to producer benefits and motivations, future research could be useful for other destinations looking for ways in which to provide an experience that is both valuable to the host society as well as its visitors.

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8. APPENDIX

APPENDIX A.

Interview Guide 1 – Tour Guides and Tour Company Owners

How long have you lived in San Diego?

In your opinion, what makes San Diego special?

Can you please describe your career history?

Can you tell me about how you started working for (or started) this food tour company?

Can you please tell me something about the different food tours you offer?

What characteristics of San Diego do you want to highlight to your guests on the food tours?

What makes your downtown food tour unique?

What factors are important when considering which restaurants to share with visitors?

The restaurants in your tour are not big chain restaurants. Why have you chosen to avoid those and only visit smaller, privately owned restaurants?

Can you tell me what makes the restaurants on your food tours special?

In what ways are the restaurants involved in the food tours? Do they have ways of interacting with the guests?

If the restaurant is not actively involved with the tours, do you take the initiative and tell the guests anything about the restaurant?

Why do you think the restaurants participate in food tours?

What do you like most about being involved with food tours?

From the guest's perspective, how is participating in a food tour different than participating in any other sightseeing tour?

How can food express the character or spirit of a place?

What comes to mind when you hear the word "local"?

How do you think culture influences people's food consumption?

If you went on a food tour in Italy, it would most likely include pasta, pizza, cheese, and wine. But in America it's a little bit more difficult to pin point what food you would eat because the country's such a melting pot.

- In your opinion, what is a taste of San Diego?
(What does San Diego taste like?)

APPENDIX B.

Interview Guide 2 - Restaurant Owners/Managers & Chefs/Cooks

How long have you lived in San Diego?

In your opinion, what makes San Diego special?

Can you please describe your career history? How did you start working for ___ restaurant?

Can you please tell me what makes your restaurant special?

Why does your restaurant participate in San Diego food tours?

What factors are important when considering which menu items to share on the food tour?

What do you want to convey to your guests through the food you serve?

In what ways are you (the restaurant) involved in the food tours? Do you have ways of interacting with the guests?

What do you enjoy most about participating in the food tours?

From the guest's perspective, how is participating in a food tour different than participating in any other sightseeing tour?

How can food express the character or spirit of a place?

What comes to mind when you hear the word "local"?

How do you think culture influences people's food consumption?

If you went on a food tour in Italy, it would most likely include pasta, pizza, cheese, and wine. But in America it's a little bit more difficult to pin point what food you would eat because the country's such a melting pot.

- In your opinion, what is a taste of San Diego?
(What does San Diego taste like?)

APPENDIX C.

Interview Sample: List of Respondents and their Positions

Even though I mentioned some of the restaurants and specialty food shops by their names, I still wanted the respondents to remain anonymous. However, here is a list of the producers I interviewed along with their position within their establishment.

Interviewee	Position
Respondent 1	Tour Company Owner/Tour Guide
Respondent 2	Head Chef
Respondent 3	President (Café/Bakery)
Respondent 4	Coffee Roaster/Sales Representative
Respondent 5	Brew Master (Beer Brewery/Restaurant)
Respondent 6	Partner Relations Associate/Tour Guide
Respondent 7	General Manager (Restaurant)
Respondent 8	General Manager (Restaurant)
Respondent 9	Tour Company Owner/Tour Guide
Respondent 10	Chef
Respondent 11	Restaurant Owner
Respondent 12	Specialty Food Shop Manager
Respondent 13	Marketing/Events Coordinator (Restaurant)
Respondent 14	Restaurant Manager