



## **Hungry for Finland Competition 2023**

### **– Insights on Finnish food tourism**

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## Abstract

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<p>Hungry for Finland has commissioned this thesis to research the products and services of the National Food Tourism Competition 2023. The competition encourages local networks related to food and tourism to develop food tourism offerings - based on responsibility and locality. Also, the competition aims to strengthen the productization of experiential food tourism in Finland, search for top food tourism products, and enhance local cooperation.</p> <p>This paper seeks to answer key questions regarding the portrayal of Finnish food tourism through professional participation in the National Food Tourism Competition 2023. The main research question of this paper is: How does Finnish food tourism appear through the participants of the National Food Tourism Competition 2023? The sub-questions are: How are locality and sustainability involved in the products? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Finnish food tourism?</p> <p>Food tourism is a driving factor for travelling locally and internationally. Sustainability in this context is visible through local producers, seasonality and innovation found in the products. Locality is the sense of place in food tourism from experiencing what each region offers through culinary experiences. The theory of this paper is based on food tourism, which means exploring the role of food in the tourism experience. Another applied theory is the "authenticity theory," which is based on the importance of an authentic food tourism experience reflecting local food culture and heritage.</p> <p>The theory extends to "memorable tourism" arguing how multisensory experiences create memorable experiences - when food tourism is exposed through meaningful and immersive products or services. To frame the idea of the theories in this paper, the author connects the experience economy model, which examines the value of luxury in food tourism in this context. The data was gathered by the commissioner between 01.5.2023 and 31.7.2023. This thesis was carried out from 23.8.2023 to 17.11.2023. This research is based on 46 products, and the main results were found to be "locality" and "storytelling" as the product's strengths. Further suggestions refer to continuing a content analysis based on mixed-method research for all the products and their pricing, marketing channels, and service quality tools - which were excluded in this paper.</p> <p>The results show that Finnish food tourism offers a multisensory experience for travelers to Finland while remaining sustainable and redefining luxury in food tourism. The findings of this research highlight a focus on quality over quantity in food tourism products, targeting a niche audience in Finnish food tourism. Despite the rise in global crises, Finland remains a safe, adventurous, and authentic destination with compelling storytelling. Finally, the author suggests development points for the commissioner to build social media strategies and consult food tourism businesses to improve their storytelling and marketing plans.</p>

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## 1 Introduction

Diverse experiences in food tourism in which guests interact, actively or passively that reflects locality of a place, culture, heritage, through gastronomy it can be considered 'food tourism'. (OCTA & Skift 2015.) Another terminology describing food tourism, according to World Food Travel Organization (2012) is "Food tourism is the goal of joy through unique and memorable, food and beverages experiences, regardless of the distance of a destination". Hall and Mitchell (2001) relate motivational factors for tourism stems through experiencing locality and taste of place; food producers, festivals, restaurants, or anything where food is a tangible experience. (UNWTO 2012.)

This research-based thesis aims to explore the competing products and services of Hungry for Finland Food Tourism Competition 2023 and their relation to the image of Finnish food tourism. Finland's unique culinary traditions, coupled with its pristine natural landscapes and a growing food scene, making the country an attractive destination for international and local food tourism visitors. Also, this study evaluates the involvement of locality and sustainability in the products and services. Finally, this paper aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Finnish food tourism.

Therefore the main research question of this study is: How does Finnish food tourism appear through the participants of the food tourism competition 2023? Moreover, the complementary sub-questions are: How locality and sustainability are involved in the products? What are the strengths and weaknesses in Finnish food tourism?

By addressing the research questions, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on Finnish food tourism. In addition, the study provides suggestions for policymakers and tourism authorities – in developing and promoting, sustainable food tourism experiences. Further justifications will be presented from the results, through content analysis, based on the replies from the application form. (Appendix 1.) Which was sourced from Webropol database and used to carry the analysis. Finally, the objective of this research paper is to provide development suggestions to Hungry for Finland, on how Finnish food tourism products would need to be evolved.

To reach the results and future recommendations 46 products from the national Food Tourism Competition 2023 and its professional category were studied. Data's reliability for this research follows the steps of online information from different stakeholders such as Visit Finland, Business Finland, and World Food Travel Association. Further sources include research papers from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Science's library (HH Finna) and other academic platforms such as Elsevier.

## 1.1 Hungry for Finland Food Tourism Competition 2023

Not all visitors to Finland embark on sightseeing tours, snowshoe safaris, or husky rides, but every visitor eats. Food aids in the creation of memories with all the senses and strengthens cognitive, emotional, and physical memories. The experience of eating when travelling can be the most memorable. (Hungry for Finland 2020.) According to World Food Travel Association (WFTA 2022) travelers are actively seeking out, culinary experiences and visitors desire to be immersed, in the local environment, culture, and way of life.

Food tourism in Finland promises its guests – cleanness, safety, authenticity, storytelling, and user-friendliness. When done right, a culinary tourism product is an educational, entertaining, and escapist experience that welcomes all visitors. (Garam 2021.) Hungry for Finland and Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, operate as a research and development forerunners with a goal to grow the Finnish food tourism at a national level. Hungry for Finland is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in collaboration with Visit Finland. The funding project has been running since 2012 with multidisciplinary actions and results in the national food tourism. Visit Finland as part of Business Finland organization is responsible for the international growth of Finnish tourism.

The vision of Hungry for Finland is to transform Finnish food into experiential experience and bring responsible growth to Finnish tourism. “The more the cooks, the tastier the soup” (Hungry for Finland 2017) refers to the mission of establishing collaborations in all the annual seasons. Hungry for Finland Food Tourism Competition is a biannual event as part of the Finnish food tourism strategy 2020-2028. (Havas 2021.) Its mission is to identify and classify food tourism products and/or services to increase local and global awareness of Finnish Food Tourism. Up to year 2023 which marks the fifth competition of national food tourism, there have been in total four food tourism competitions in the years; 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021.

On first basis, the competition includes a new category for students to participate and network while developing new skills – through product creation. This year (2023) the funding members include Visit Finland, Lomaidun Ry, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences with the lead by The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. November 30th, 2023, marks the winning award ceremony at Haaga-Helia’s UAS campus. The national food tourism competition by Hungry for Finland 2023, plays a role in showcasing Finnish culinary culture and promoting relevant gastronomic offerings.

Hungry for Finland is actively working with entrepreneurs to develop their products and promote the national food tourism industry. The funding project also coordinates the development of the country's national food tourism infrastructure. As part of this project, the organization is developing a set of criteria that will be used to determine the products that will be marketed in international markets. (Havas & Adamsson 2013, 49.)

Moreover, the competition offers a platform for chefs, food producers, culinary and tourism professionals, or enthusiasts to demonstrate their skills and creativity. While in addition, highlighting the diverse range and importance of locality and authenticity in Finnish food tourism. In addition to the professional category, the competition includes for the first-time student participation. However, the student's category will not be processed in this study.

## **1.2 Finnish food tourism**

According to Havas and Adamsson (2020), food tourism has grown into a major part in tourism resulting to a broader reach of interest. As food tourism builds value, it is important for organizations to apply strategies for competitive advantage. Visit Finland's Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028 aims to develop Finnish food tourism with high quality products and food tourism routes. Moreover, to promote the competitiveness of tourism and food industries, support raising quality standards, improve the awareness of Finnish food culture and build an active national food tourism network. (Hungry for Finland 2020.)

Finland's food is regarded as one of the cleanest in Europe. (Visit Finland 2019.) The country's cultural beat is one of the marketing themes that supports the local tourism industry. Marketing the cleanest food in Europe, connects the local culture and cuisine to the people of Finland. This helps build a stronger profile for the destination and attract more visitors. (Havas & Adamsson 2013, 8.) The goal of the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy is to create a sustainable framework for food tourism development in Finland. It involves the creation of multiple combined products and routes for the different regions of Finland, such as the Archipelago, Lakeland, Lapland and the Uusimaa region.

The strategy for the development of the country's food tourism industry is divided into three main objectives:

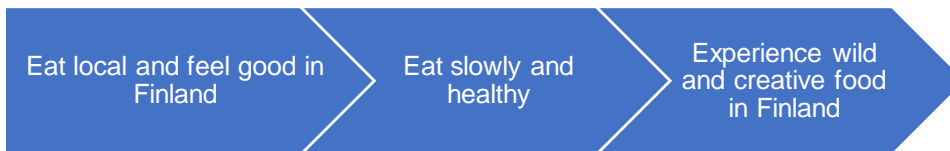


Figure 1. Development points of Finnish Food Tourism (Visit Finland)

Figure 1. refers to the idea of eating local food and feeling Finland. Eat local refers to the regional food culture, “Finnishness” and the way Finnish culture can be experience through taste. Secondly, it supports guests to eat healthily and slowly. According to YALE Environment Performance Index (EPI); Finland is considered the greenest and cleanest – globally scaled, country. While the third idea is about experiencing the food in a cool and creative way. (Havas & Adamsson 2013, 16.) Finns dare to continuously be innovative of Finland’s short yet biodiverse seasons. United Nations has awarded Finland for six times in a row the world’s happiest country. Diet and way of living are associated with local produce, cooking, nature, and experiences.

Finns can exploit these traits for new, easygoing, and creative food tourism products. Although this research-based thesis puts emphases on the products and concepts which compete at the national Food Tourism Competition 2023, inspecting how Finnish touristic districts and destinations are divided geographically is important for the broader audience. Finland has four major tourism regions which are distinctive even on a global scale: Uusimaa region, Lapland, Finnish lake district, and the Coast and Archipelago. These major areas create the foundation for the vital provision of travel services and products and the building of attractive sub-brands. (Business Finland 2019.)

## 2 Food culture

Food culture in food tourism refers to the distinctive culinary traditions, practices, beliefs, and rituals that are integral to a particular destination or community. It encompasses not only the types of foods consumed but also the way they are prepared, shared, and celebrated. Food culture is a pivotal component of the overall guest experience, as it offers a profound insight into the local way of life, history, and identity. (Merriman 2015.)

In the realm of food tourism, food culture plays a central role in attracting and engaging tourists. The authenticity and richness of a destination's food culture can significantly influence the decision of travelers to explore its culinary offerings. (Hook 2022.) Understanding the local food culture is crucial for both tourists and the providers of food tourism experiences, as it shapes the entire gastronomic journey. (Hall 2013.)

In the context of food tourism, food culture is not limited to the cuisine itself but extends to the cultural, social, and historical context in which, it is embedded. It includes the stories behind traditional recipes, the significance of specific dishes in local celebrations and the rituals associated with food, preparation, and consumption. Travelers are often drawn to food tourism to partake in these cultural experiences and gain a deeper appreciation of the destination's identity. (Ellis, Park, Kim & Yeoman 2018, 68, 250–263.)

Food culture besides, extends to the relationships between people and their food. It encompasses the roles of farmers, fishermen, chefs, and food artisans – who are concierges of culinary traditions and the knowledge that is passed down through generations. Food tourism provides a platform for these individuals to share their expertise and preserve their cultural heritage. (Merriman 2015.) Another study according to Ellis et al. (2018) food culture in food tourism is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the culinary traditions, customs, and practices of a destination. It is an essential aspect of the food tourism experience, offering a window into the heart and soul of a place through its unique and cherished foodways. (Ellis & al. 2018.)



## 2.1 Locality and sustainability in food culture

Based on the Annual Report 2023 by the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) the main six key practice areas for food tourism are Wellness and Health (1), Wine and Beverages (2), Sustainability (3), Culinary Culture (4), Technology (5), and finally; Agriculture and Rural (6). As Wolf (2022) describes; culture and food, go hand in hand. Every community's social fabric is woven together in part by its ideas, attitudes, and practices surrounding the production and use of food.

The manner food and drinks are served and the recipes and diets that have been passed down through the generations have cultural significance. To an extent from the annual report in 2022 by WFTA; "hospitality becomes culinary tourism when guests are invited into these customs." Sharing culinary traditions can enhance already-existing tourist attractions, while preserving local heritage. A visitor's experience becomes memorable and well-rounded when taste is involved with locally produced fare, in addition to sightseeing and participating in a destination's activities.

Culinary culture exposes visitors to new and diverse ways of life. This is noteworthy on a global scale because it encourages sociopolitical awareness. (WFTA 2023.) Local food tourism is an emerging trend within the broader field of culinary tourism, emphasizing the consumption of locally sourced and produced food and beverages. (LAB8 2019.)

Sustainability plays an important role in food tourism, as it addresses environmental, social, and economic aspects of food production and consumption. Locality in food tourism involves the promotion and consumption of food products sourced from nearby regions or communities. Research by Hall et al. (2018) emphasizes the importance of local sourcing in reducing food miles and associated carbon emissions. This aligns with sustainability goals by reducing the environmental impact of transportation and fostering a closer connection, between visitors with the products and services of a destination. (Business Finland 2022.)

Sustainability goes beyond sourcing and encompasses sustainable farming practices, ethical treatment of animals, and fair labor conditions. In a study by Gössling et al. (2019) it was found that tourists, increasingly value restaurants and food providers who prioritize sustainable practices. Supporting local producers who employ sustainable farming methods, enhances the sustainability quotient of food tourism. Local food tourism also contributes to the preservation of culinary traditions and cultural heritage. (LAB8 2019.) Research by Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2017) highlights the role of locality in preserving food-related traditions, which can bolster the cultural sustainability of a destination.

## 2.2 Memorable food tourism

In recent years, the significance of food in the context of tourism has gathered increased attention among researchers. (Beltrán, Guzmán & Cruz 2016.) This shift is mirrored by the growing importance of food and drink experiences to travelers. Everett (2016) argues that food and beverage tourism, also known as culinary tourism or food tourism, has evolved into a distinct sector within tourism thus, no longer viewed as a mere holiday necessity.

Stone and Migacz (2016) observed that leisure travelers, actively engage in a wide range of food and drink experiences. Indicating that this type of travel is more than just a niche activity. The importance of food experiences extends to tourism destinations as well. Memorable food tourism refers to experiences that leave a lasting and impactful impression on tourists, through their engagement with local cuisines, culinary traditions, and food-related activities. These experiences often go beyond tasting local dishes; they immerse tourists in the cultural and gastronomic essence of a destination.

Memorable food and beverage experiences have been linked to increased travel satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. (Stone & Migacz 2016.) Moreover, food expenditures can account for a substantial portion, ranging from 25% to 35% of overall travel expenses, thereby generating a significant economic impact on destinations. (Correia 2008.) Another indication on total travel expenses from Paulsson (2014) is that about 20% - 30% of travelling budget allots mainly to restaurants in any destination.

Food and drink experiences also take role in shaping a destination's image. (Harrington & Ottenbacher 2013.) Consequently, the study of food tourism holds both practical and theoretical impact for the tourism industry. From a theoretical perspective, Lashley, Morrison and Randall (2003) suggest that the emotional and symbolic aspects of meals can be heightened during travelling, thus influencing the clarity of memories associated with the experience. However, the specific attributes connecting food tourism and memory have yet to be clearly defined or fully understood. (Lashley & al. 2003.)

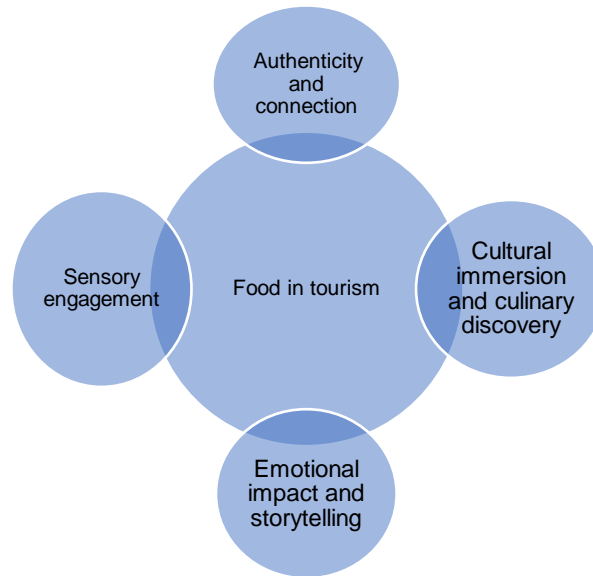


Figure 2. Matrix of memorable food tourism (Yeoman & McMahon 2016)

Referring to Figure 2, memorable food tourism involves the guests immersing in the local culture and culinary traditions of a destination. (Yeoman & McMahon 2016.) For example, in their study, Long & Cai (2017) found that tourists often seek authentic and culturally immersive food experiences that allows the guest to learn about the history and heritage of a place through its cuisine.

It fosters a personal connection between guests and the local food scene. Guests value authenticity in their culinary experiences, as noted by Hall et al. (2019). When guests engage with local food producers and chefs, it provides insight into the authenticity of the food and its production.

Moreover, on Figure 1, the multisensory engagement with food, including taste, smell, sight, and touch, plays a pivotal role in creating memorable food tourism experiences. The sensory aspects of food contribute to guest's overall satisfaction and memory. (Krystallis & al. 2021.) A memorable food tourism experience is one that elicits emotional responses and storytelling opportunities for guests. Visitors are more likely to remember and share their experiences when they create a connection with the food and the people who prepare it. (Lenglet & al. 2019.)

Culinary events and food festivals are prime practical examples of memorable food tourism experiences. These events often bring together local food vendors, chefs, and visitors, creating an atmosphere of celebration and exploration. (Gössling et al. 2020.) Ideally, memorable food tourism transcends the act of eating and involves a holistic and immersive engagement with the local culinary culture. These experiences leave a lasting impression on guests, encouraging to savor and share encounters with local cuisines, traditions, and storytelling. (Stone & al. 2017.)

### 2.3 The experience matrix in food tourism

This chapter introduces Pine and Gilmore's experience economy and its relation as a hypothesis regarding this paper and food tourism in context. Pine and Gilmore's concept of the "experience economy" represents a paradigm shift in the field of business and tourism, emphasizing the evolution of economic value from the mere provision of goods and services to the creation and staging of memorable experiences. (Pine & Gilmore 1999.) This transformation in economic thinking suggests that in an increasingly competitive marketplace, businesses and industries can differentiate themselves and thrive by orchestrating and delivering experiences that engage all the senses and resonate with consumers, on an emotional level.

(Figure 3.)

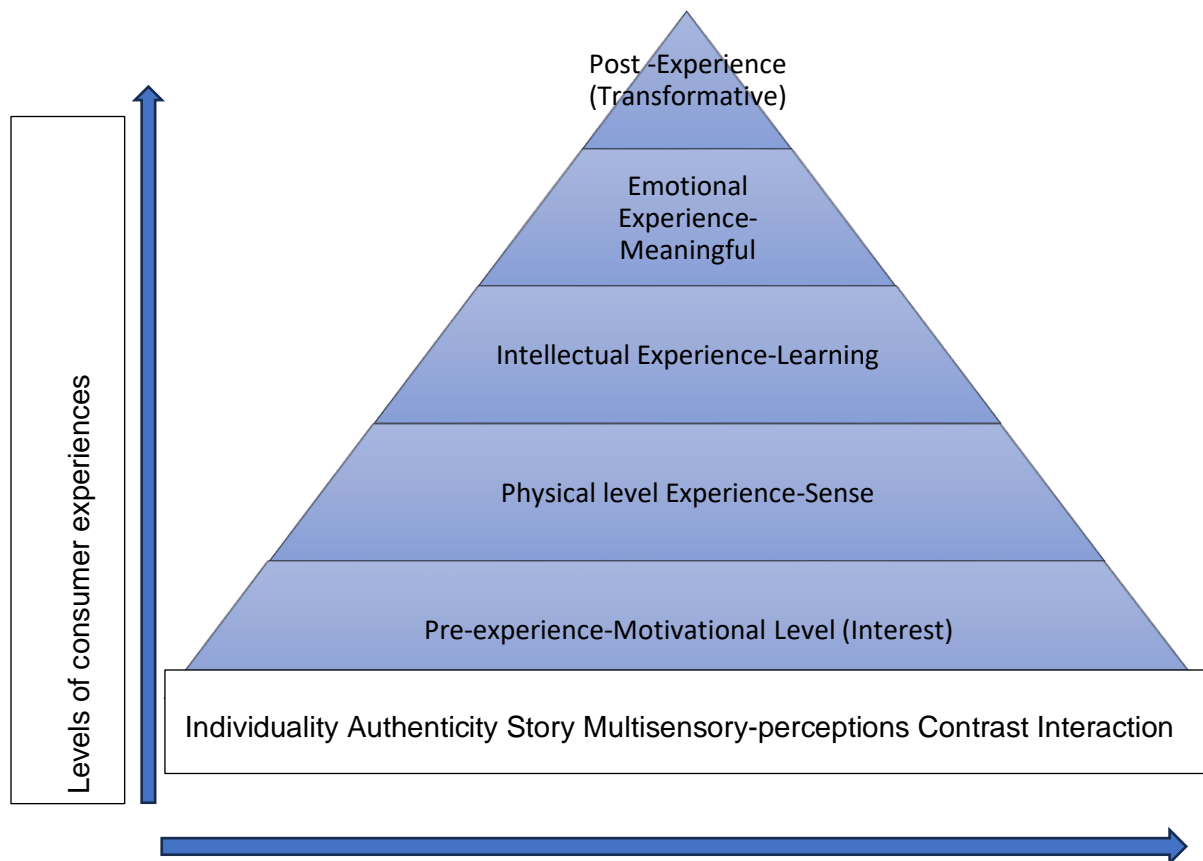


Figure 3. The experience pyramid (Pine & Gilmore 1999)

Pine and Gilmore's concept, outlined in their seminal work "The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage," proposes that businesses can ascend a progression of economic value, which includes four distinct realms: commodities, goods, services, and experiences.

(Pine & Gilmore 2011.) At the heart of this theory lies the belief that experiences have the potential to create lasting memories, foster customer loyalty, and command premium pricing.

As the experience economy gains prominence, it has become increasingly relevant to various sectors, including tourism and hospitality. The tourism industry has witnessed a shift from traditional destination marketing to experience marketing, where destinations seek to offer unique and immersive experiences that capture the imagination of travelers. This transformation is aligned with Pine and Gilmore's vision of the experience economy, where businesses are encouraged to stage experiences that are not only immersive and engaging but also authentically connected to the essence and identity of the destination. (Pine & Gilmore 2011.)

By understanding and embracing the principles of the experience economy, tourism stakeholders can create distinctive and memorable encounters that resonate with modern travelers, who increasingly seek meaningful and transformative experiences when traveling. Pine and Gilmore's concept of the "experience economy" has meaningful relevance to food in tourism experiences, particularly in the context of culinary or gastronomic tourism. The experience economy framework can be applied to understand how food is not merely a functional component of travel but a central element in creating memorable and meaningful tourism experiences.

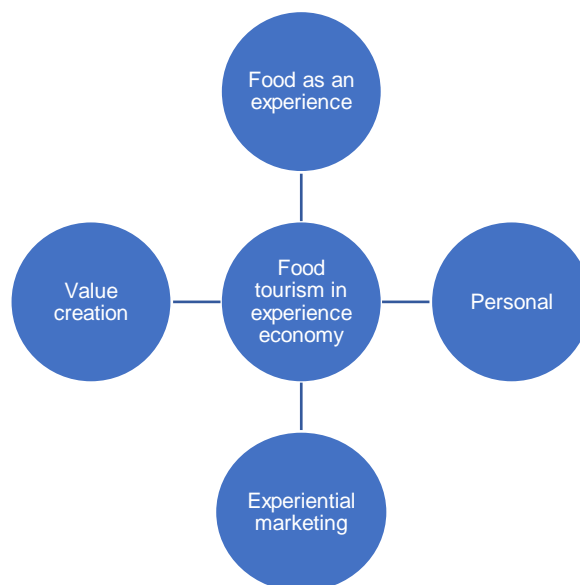


Figure 4. The four hypothetical aspects of food tourism in experience economy (Pine & Gilmore 2011)

Figure 4. aims to reflect the four realms of experience economy (Pine & Gilmore 2011) within the context of food tourism. In the experience economy, food is not just sustenance; it is an experience. Travelers seek more than just a meal; they desire culinary experiences that engage their senses and emotions. This can involve not only the taste of the food but also the ambiance, presentation, and cultural context in which it is served. Restaurants, food tours, and food-related events are designed to provide unique and memorable experiences that go beyond traditional dining. (Hjalager 2010.)

Pine and Gilmore's concept emphasizes the importance of customization and personalization. In food tourism, this means tailoring culinary experiences to the preferences and dietary requirements of individual tourists. Whether it is a personalized tasting menu or a cooking class that caters to specific interests, customization enhances the overall food tourism experience. (Hall 2003.). The experience economy underscores the importance of emotional engagement. Food is a powerful tool for evoking emotions and creating lasting memories. The aroma, taste, and presentation of dishes can trigger emotional responses and make the food tourism experience more memorable. (Stone & al. 2017.)

Moreover, the experience model, stresses the value of authenticity and storytelling in creating experiences. Food tourism often revolves around authentic, local, and traditional cuisines. The story behind a dish, its cultural significance, and the local ingredients used all contribute to a more authentic and engaging food experience for tourists. (Long 2004.)

Pine and Gilmore argue that businesses need to engage customers in a multisensory and participatory way. In food tourism, this translates into immersive experiences such as food and wine tastings, culinary workshops, farm-to-table dining, and food festivals. These experiences allow tourists to actively participate in the food culture of a destination. In addition, the experience economy emphasizes the creation of value by staging experiences that customers are willing to pay a premium price for experiences. (Pine & Gilmore 2011.) In the context of food in tourism, exclusive and memorable culinary experiences can justify higher prices, and tourists are often willing to pay more for exceptional food encounters. (Hjalager 2010.)

Lastly, Pine and Gilmore's theory of the experience economy, underscores the transformation of food in tourism from a functional necessity – to a central component in the creation of memorable and valuable travel experiences. Food plays a role in engaging the senses, evoking emotions, and connecting tourists with the culture and authenticity of a destination, making it a key driver of modern tourism experiences.

### 3 Food in tourism

Understanding the concept of food tourism is an essential step in comprehending the research of this paper. What exactly is food tourism? According to Ellis et al. (2018) “food tourism or culinary tourism is the most popularly adopted term to describe a form of tourism that significantly emphasizes a relationship between the insider and outsider, created via food as culture”. In other words, food tourism is a communication tool between different cultures and facilitates cultural learning.

Another definition of food tourism is food-related activities, where individuals gain a deeper understanding of the destination and its people. (Hornig & Tsai 2010.) According to Hall and Sharples (2003), when visitors are involved with the locality and sustainability of a region with its food festivals and/or food experiences, it proves to be a motivating factor in food travelling. Figure 5. (WFTA 2022) presents the totality of stakeholders that create and maintain food tourism industry.



Figure 5. Food Tourism Industry Cluster (World Food Travel Association 2022)

Food as a travelling goal can be described as a travelling approach where the visitor travels to explore locality and the originality of the destination. (Hook 2021.) The activities related to food are a major decisive factor of a destination for food travelers. Therefore, could the products or services of Hungry for Finland 2023 food tourism competition, add value in the local food tourism scene?

Based on the sustainability guide 2021 from Visit Finland, food tourism products are as described as products served in all types of restaurants, including street food, guided wild tours (foraging, fishing, hiking), interactive cooking at or outside of nature with a cultural inclination as well as gastrotourism itineraries facilitating interactive experiences. As Hook (2023) describes, that food influences heavily the decisions of food travelers whether to return at any travel destination, based on their food tourism experience.

### **3.1 Sustainability in food tourism**

Food tourism encompasses the exploration of local culinary traditions, flavors, and experiences. As travelers seek authentic encounters and meaningful connections with local cultures, the importance of sustainability in food tourism has become paramount. This part explores the integration of sustainability principles into food tourism, aiming to enhance the overall tourism experience, while safeguarding the cultural and environmental resources in Finland. Sustainability in food tourism involves the consideration of social, economic, and environmental aspects to ensure that both the visitor and the destination, benefit in the long term. (Hall 2003; Holden 2016.) It encompasses practices that support local communities, preserve culinary heritage, minimize carbon footprint, and reduce waste.

Culinary tourism, a burgeoning sector within the broader tourism industry, involves the exploration of local gastronomic traditions, flavors, and experiences. As discerning travelers increasingly seek meaningful connections with local cultures, the imperative to incorporate sustainability into culinary tourism has gained prominence. The concept of sustainability within culinary tourism encompasses social, economic, and environmental considerations that ensure mutual benefits for tourists and destinations. (Hall 2008; Telfer & Wall 2012.) Empowering local economies; prioritizing local food producers, farmers, and markets can invigorate economies within communities. (Gursoy & al. 2016.)

Encouraging tourists to engage with regional producers fosters income distribution and enhances community cohesion. (Buckley 2009.) Safeguarding culinary heritage preserves traditional food practices – which is crucial for upholding cultural identity and heritage. (Long 2004.) Culinary traditions can be woven into tourism experiences, through interactive cooking sessions, food festivals, and heritage trails, fostering their continuity. (Henderson 2017.) Mitigating ecological



footprint to reduce carbon emissions stemming from transportation, forms a core tenet of sustainable culinary tourism.

Promoting seasonal, locally sourced ingredients curtails the environmental toll of food transport. (UNWTO 2013.) Farm-to-table initiatives play a pivotal role in minimizing the carbon footprint of food supply chains. (Slocum 2010.) Combatting food waste, to address the issue of food waste bears global significance, contributing to both economic and ecological challenges. Encouraging portion control, responsible consumption, and composting can improve waste generation (Halloran & al. 2014.) Incorporating sustainable practices into culinary tourism, not only enhances the overall tourist experience – but also serves as a bastion for safeguarding the cultural and environmental richness of destinations.

### **3.2 Impact on locality**

By strengthening local economies, preserving culinary heritage, lessening ecological impacts, and addressing food waste – sustainable culinary tourism, aligns seamlessly with responsible travel principles. (Ellis & al. 2018.) While ensuring that destinations can perpetually offer, authentic and immersive gastronomic encounters. Locality in food tourism entails a focus on the indigenous culinary offerings of a region, emphasizing the use of locally sourced ingredients and traditional cooking techniques. (Hall & Sharples 2003; Kim & Eves 2012.)

This approach highlights the symbiotic relationship between the food, the community, and the environment. Next is described, why locality is important in food tourism. Locality showcases culinary heritage, celebrates local food heritage through food tourism and allows destinations to share their unique cultural narratives. (Richards 2016.). Indigenous ingredients, preparation methods, and recipes offer tourists an authentic connection to the history and identity of a place. Strengthening community bonds to incorporate local food producers and artisans fosters economic growth within communities. (Hall & al. 2000.) Tourists engaging with local vendors contribute directly to the local economy and empower the residents. (Hjalager 2010.)

Minimizing environmental impact to promote the use of locally sourced, seasonal ingredients reduces the carbon footprint associated with food transportation. (Sharpley & Stone 2009.) This approach aligns with sustainable practices, reducing the environmental strain of long-distance supply chains. Enhancing authenticity by immersing guests in local food experiences to gain an authentic understanding of a destination's culture. (Hjalager 2010.). Local cuisine serves as a

gateway to exploring the unique traditions and way of life of the community.

The integration of locality into food tourism provides an avenue for travelers to connect deeply with the essence of a destination. Showcasing culinary heritage, supports local communities, minimizes environmental impact, and enhances authenticity which are key aspects when prioritizing locality. By embracing locality in food tourism, travelers can engage in enriching experiences while preserving cultural diversity and fostering sustainable development. (Wolf 2023.)

### **3.3 Strengths and weaknesses of Finnish food tourism**

Food tourism offers travelers a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of a destination, through its cuisine, fostering cultural exploration. It provides vital economic support to local communities by promoting local restaurants and food producers. The trend towards sustainability aligns with food tourism as many travelers seek out, eco-friendly and locally sourced food options. Additionally, food tourism encourages social engagement and interaction, and it offers memorable and distinctive experiences, such as trying regional specialties and participating in cooking classes. (Rachão, Breda, Fernades & Joukes 2019.)

A primary challenge is the cost associated with dining and culinary experiences, which may limit accessibility for budget-conscious travelers. Language barriers can hinder tourist's ability to fully engage in food experiences in areas - where the local language is not widely spoken. Health and safety concerns, such as foodborne illnesses, can be a drawback in destinations with inadequate food safety regulations. Over-tourism in popular food destinations can lead to overcrowded and less authentic dining experiences. Furthermore, while some aspects of food tourism promote sustainability, the environmental impact, particularly related to transportation can be a concern.

Additionally, the risk of cultural appropriation in the commercialization of local cuisines can affect the authenticity of food experiences. (Rachão & al. 2019.) Food tourism in Finland, like in other nations, has advantages and disadvantages. These variables have an impact on both Finland's desirability as a food tourism destination and the difficulty it includes when promoting culinary experiences to international and local visitors. In Table 1. the author briefly presents a SWOT analysis, following the results based on a qualitative data report. (Hungry for Finland – towards the future of food tourism 8 September 2023.)

Table 1. SWOT analysis of Finnish food tourism (Karlsson, Pekkarinen &amp; Tirola 2023)

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Reliable and sustainable food production	Limitations in food marketing and communication	Culinary innovation	Global competition
Rich culinary traditions	Short seasons	Cultural exchange	Economic uncertainty
Wild and local ingredients Making food tourism accessible and effortless due to user friendly services	High costs due to inflation and rise of interest rates	Marketing and promotion Developing a food tourism strategy	Climate change Major chain companies impacting locality and small producers.
Culinary events and festivals	Lack of sustainable entrepreneurship	Food education	Political and regulatory changes
Scenic settings and storytelling	Limited supply of local products	Diversity from constrains	Health and safety concerns

To reflect on the SWOT analysis (Table 1) most weaknesses and threats are due to the global crises since year 2020. The 'lack of sustainable entrepreneurship' refers to the lack of skilled staff in the hospitality industry which drives small business owners to overwork. Extended working hours tend to become a barrier for other important tasks in business operations such as marketing and communications. (Karlsson & al. 2023.) Even though locality in Finland is growing, small entrepreneurs are faced with challenges to attract and retain, not only skilled staff but also local customers.

Another concern according to the report mentioned by Karlsson et al. (2023) regarding this SWOT analysis is the dependency of food travel industry, on the holiday seasons. And big corporations taking over locality and small-scale businesses which are important for local food culture. On strengths and opportunities Finland's biggest competitive advantage is the growing food culture and diversity of landscapes as a tourism destination. Finnish food culture can be contemporary, traditional, and innovative which gives an edge to compete globally by showcasing the pure ingredients and craftsmanship. (Karlsson & al. 2023.) Even though, global competition is mentioned

as a 'threat' it can be an opportunity for food culture collaboration with the rest of the Nordic countries.

### 3.4 Memorable food tourism in Finland

In Figure 6. is shown the focus of this paper that follows on memorable food tourism, locality, and sustainability, found as values among the products of Hungry for Finland Food Tourism Competition 2023. Food sustainability in Finland comes as a default. In other words, many ingredients in Finnish restaurants are wildly or locally sourced. Adamsson and Havas (2020) suggest doing the basics well, such as using local food, organic when possible, eliminating food waste, cooking with seasonality, employee training and storytelling for the guests – can take restaurants far. What is food tourism without sustainable restaurants after all?

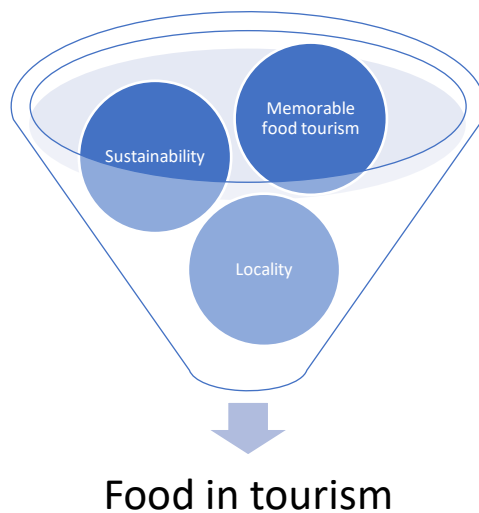


Figure 6. The values in food tourism and main aspects of this paper

Visitors in Finland can experience locality through the increased storytelling, either passive or active in food tourism experiences. Further on in the results chapter is a presentation of what type of food tourism experiences can be found in Finland. The food tourism products in Hungry for Finland 2023 national competition, reflect a potential for memorable food tourism. According to Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick (2010) it is essential for a business to practice the development of memorable experiences. High service standards in food tourism experiences, add to the competitive advantage of a tourism destination. (Chandralal, Rindfleish & Valenzuela 2015.)

Customer orientation allows businesses to adapt to these trends by staying attuned to changing customer preferences and demands. A focus on customer satisfaction and loyalty promotes the long-term sustainability of food tourism businesses. (Hungry for Finland 2019.) Satisfied customers are more likely to become returning visitors, contributing to the stability and growth of the industry. Food tourism is fundamentally about providing guests with exceptional culinary experiences.

A customer-oriented approach ensures that guests' needs and preferences are central to the design of food tourism products and services. (Kim & al. 2020.) This approach leads to more enjoyable and satisfying experiences for visitors. Food tourism is subject to evolving trends, including dietary preferences, health considerations, and sustainability concerns. (Munar & Jacobsen 2014.)

### 3.5 Finland's main travel group

According to Visit Finland 2023 report study on the potential of Finnish tourism there has been identified four segments of travelling groups. (Figure 7.) Nature and Discovery with Nature lover and Lifestyle traveller as the main group. Culture and Learning include several such as Culture traveller, Foodie, Group traveller, and LGBTQ+ travelers. Entertainment and Wellbeing has City life enthusiast, Sun & beach lover, and Wellbeing seeker. Sports and Activities includes two types of travellers, Outdoor explorer and Active hobbyist.

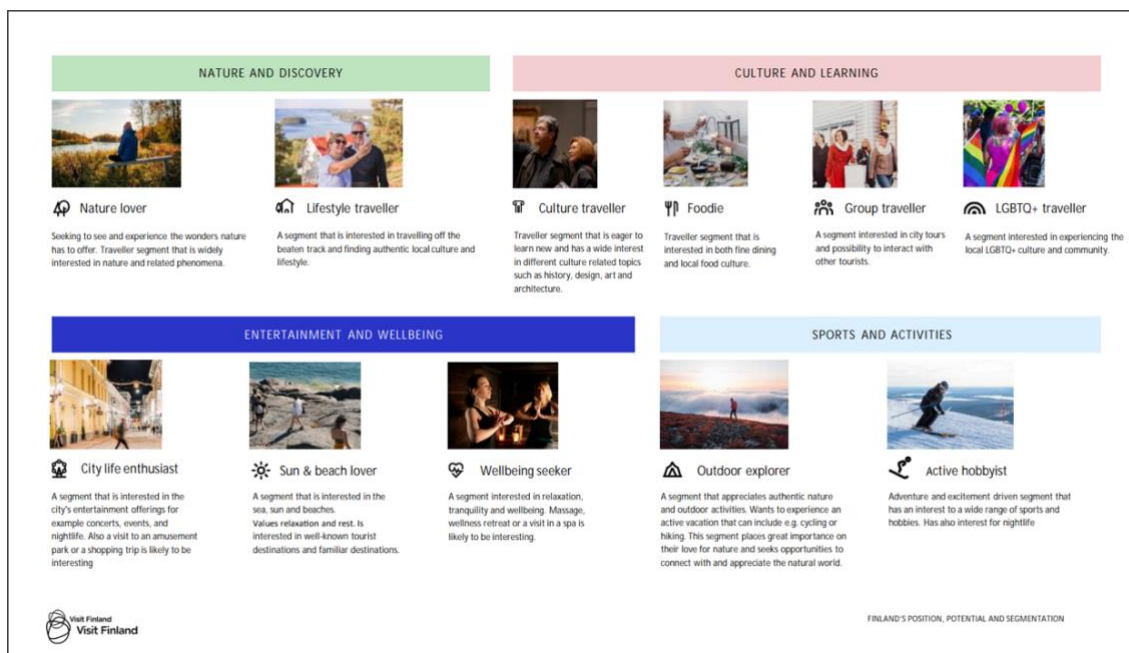


Figure 7. Travelers to Finland into thematic segments (Visit Finland 2023)

The segments in Culture and Learning, Entertainment and Wellbeing based on the report proved to have the lowest scores to attraction to Finland. However, the growth potential in each division can be achieved with consistent development in the local food tourism. Developing a competitive service and effective marketing strategies can lead to any success of the mentioned groups. It is apparent that segments such as Sun and Beach or Foodie present more challenges than others. Moreover, the reports argue that increasing awareness and providing a relevant offering for each travel group lies the key to growth. Finland with innovative and niche food tourism products can

achieve a strong appeal to attract more of the group types holding least interest according to the research report. (Visit Finland 2023.)

## 4 Research methods

The methodology section provides a description of the research design and the step-by-step approach used to carry out the study. Data collection and the timeframe of this thesis will be briefly described. This chapter continues by outlining the data gathering method employed, which involves the use of a digital form (Appendix 1) created by Hungry for Finland in Webropol. Webropol is a survey and reporting tool based on real time input. The commissioner utilized the Webropol platform to collect the data for this research.

The data was given to the author for analysis as part of the commissioned task to write this thesis. Due to limited time and the focus points of this research the data was not analyzed thoroughly. Also, to accurately translate the data from Finnish language to English was time consuming for the author. The author decided to find common patterns of the 46 products and through that to focus on the finalists who have the highest quality of products in order to reach better results on how Finnish food tourism looks through high quality products.

Even though the application form includes 25 questions for the applicants, this research paper addresses the following questions: question 2. (Location of product), question 3. (Product type), question 6. (Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028), question 7. (Customer's experience), question 8. (Product's strength) and emphasizing on question 9. (Product card). Also, questions 10. (Product's sustainability) and 11. (Target group) were part of the research data. Among the multiple questions in Appendix 1. the content analysis of this thesis, added emphasis on question 9. to explore similarities and differences between the competitors. The product card in question 9. was answered by 44 out of 46 participants where patterns were identified to synthesize the content for conclusion and further recommendations in Chapter 6.



Figure 8. Timeframe on data process

Applicants were able to fill and participate the competition via a digital form (Appendix 1) on [Hungry for Finland's website](#) or through direct access of the project's media channels from LinkedIn, Facebook on Instagram. The competition was marketed actively on the digital channels such as, Instagram, LinkedIn including personal and professional social media profiles of the project's committee. Also, the projects funders have been doing marketing in their channels during Summer 2023. The timeframe used to carry out this research is presented in Figure 8. To specify the timeframe of this paper, the theoretical framework supporting this thesis was written by the author during 1.5.2023 - 31.7-2023. On parallel timeframe the commissioner (Hungry for Finland) had launched the national Food Tourism Competition 2023.

#### **4.1 Questionnaire form as data collection method**

In Appendix 1. the form of the national Food Tourism Competition 2023 is presented. The survey form has 25 questions of which 10 parts are open questions style. The applicants were required to add businesses' personal information, product's location, price, target group, language, social media profile, website, product's price and questions related to the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028. Also, a majority of the survey's content relates to Visit Finland's food tourism product recommendations 2020. The answers hold full confidentiality. The information collected through the help of the Webropol form has been used anonymously for research and development purposes - such as for this thesis. In total 46 products being in sale were answered. Moreover, Appendix 1. served as a questionnaire, supporting the data collection of this research by the use of open ended questions.

The aim of this research is to explore the competing products and services of Hungry for Finland Food Tourism Competition 2023 participants and the relation to the image of Finnish Food Tourism. Also, by assessing the involvement of locality and sustainability in the products/services and to identify the product's strengths from the collected data. Based on Beltrán et al. (2016) food tourism has gained reputation in both qualitative and quantitative research fields. For this paper a mixed method has being used to carry the answers for the research questions. (Chapter 1.) According to Luo (2023) mixed method research (quantitative and qualitative), supports content analysis. Also based on Chegg (2021) Figure 9. illustrates the parts of mixed methods, as the methodology used for this research.



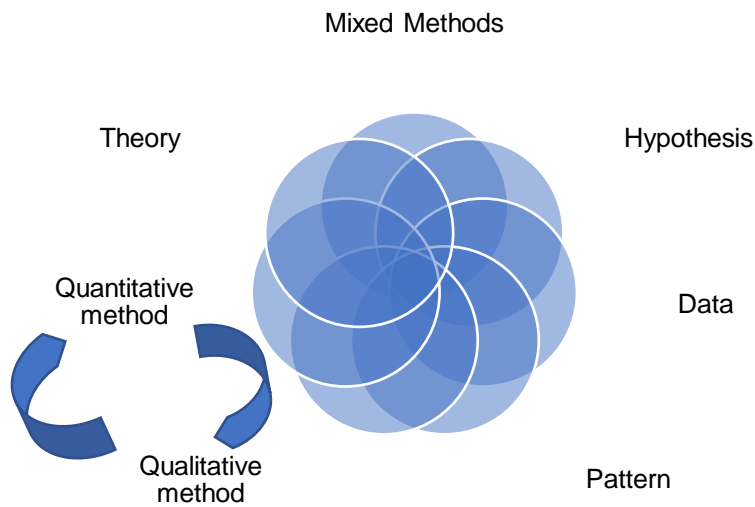


Figure 9. Parts of mixed method in research (Mixed methods research Chegg Writing 2021)

The reasoning for applying mixed method is due to the type of data collection and the participant number being below 100. The Webropol form includes approaches - such as qualitative and open-ended questions. However, this research inclines towards qualitative method with the support of quantitative, due to the numeric measures from the Webropol form. Since the data has been gathered from Hungry for Finland, the data collection method can also be described as secondary data collection.

Qualitative research is focused on exploring and understanding, non-numerical aspects of a phenomenon, often through in-depth interviews and observations. It provides insights into the "why" and "how" of a topic. (Bhandari 2023.) Quantitative research, on the other hand, involves collecting numerical data to answer specific research questions and make statistical inferences for example on a population. However, in this research due to the number of responses mentioned earlier in this chapter are not statistical. Quantitative data is useful for testing hypotheses and providing data that can be generalized to larger groups. (George 2023.) The choice between qualitative and quantitative research - depends on the research objectives, the nature of the research question, and the data needed to address.

## 4.2 Content analysis as data analyzing method

Subsequently, the section elaborates on the data analyzing method used, which combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with a focus on content analysis. Next the process of content analysis is explained, detailing how the data has been coded and categorized to derive relevant insights and trends of Finnish Food Tourism based on the competition's products. Hungry for Finland committee is the data source of this paper therefore the data was not collected by the author of this thesis.

Content analysis was used to process the collected data. Since there is a wide amount of data in text form, content analysis proved to be suitable for the purposes of this research. More follows on why content analysis was chosen for this paper by describing what is content analysis. Content analysis is applied by methodically collected data based on text either written, oral or visual. This thesis content analysis was carried out in textual information.

Researchers using mixed method analysis, categorize the content into codes themes or even concepts deprived from the text to analyze the results. (Luo 2023.) According to Sarajärvi and Tuomi (2018) content analysis filters - relevant information and excludes unrelated data. The methodology was carried by collecting all applicant's answers of the national Food Tourism Competition 2023, product's card on question 9. (Appendix 1.) The Webropol answers were transferred on a word file in order to find patterns through text mining.

In other words, the author searched what were the most common words in relation to the criteria of the competition and the research questions of this paper. To justify the author's choice, most relevant information for the purpose of this paper was found in the answers from question 9. (Appendix 1.) And to align with the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028. The rest of the questions mentioned in the first part of this chapter have been addressed through the use of Webropol and Office 365 tools.

Table 2. Author's focus themes based on the competition's application form (Appendix 1)

<b>Local region</b>
<b>Product category</b>
<b>Target group</b>
<b>Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028</b>
<b>Sustainable Travel Finland</b>
<b>Product's strengths</b>
<b>Sustainable aspects of products</b>

Table 2. presents the focus areas of this paper based on the participant's form, chosen in association with the commissioner and the author. Which sets the basis of the results chapter, further in this research. The rationale for choosing the data gathering tool is explained also in Chapter 5 highlighting the suitability in capturing a range of responses from 46 participants of the national Food Tourism Competition 2023. Additionally, the chosen themes are aligned with the main research question of this study presented previously (Chapter 1). Subsequently, the following chapter elaborates on the data results based on quantitative and qualitative approaches, with a focus on content analysis.

## 5 Research results

This chapter presents the results of this research not to the fullest potential. The angle of this paper focuses on sustainability, locality, strengths, and type of the products. Categorization based on keywords of the results will be mentioned, as well as the regions of the products participated in the competition. The result's main target is to identify the insights of the products and services of the national Food Tourism Competition 2023 in relation to Finnish food tourism values. Based on the national Food Tourism Competition 2023 a total of 46 products participated and were studied - on how Finnish Food Tourism is viewed through the products. Justifications on delimitations have been mentioned in Chapter 4 and will continue in the final chapter of this research.

### 5.1 Products per region

According to the data collected from the answers in Appendix 1. the product's strengths, showcased a focus on locality and authenticity, flavor profile and storytelling. (Appendix 2.) Most concepts emphasized on multisensory food tourism experiences such as boat cruise - sauna and dining, outdoor food tourism experiences and inevitably, dining at restaurants. Based on content analysis from the gathered qualitative data, the most common concept was identified as 'food in tourism experience.' The main differences were found in type of products, sustainability, seasonality, and participants per region in Finland. (Figure 10.)

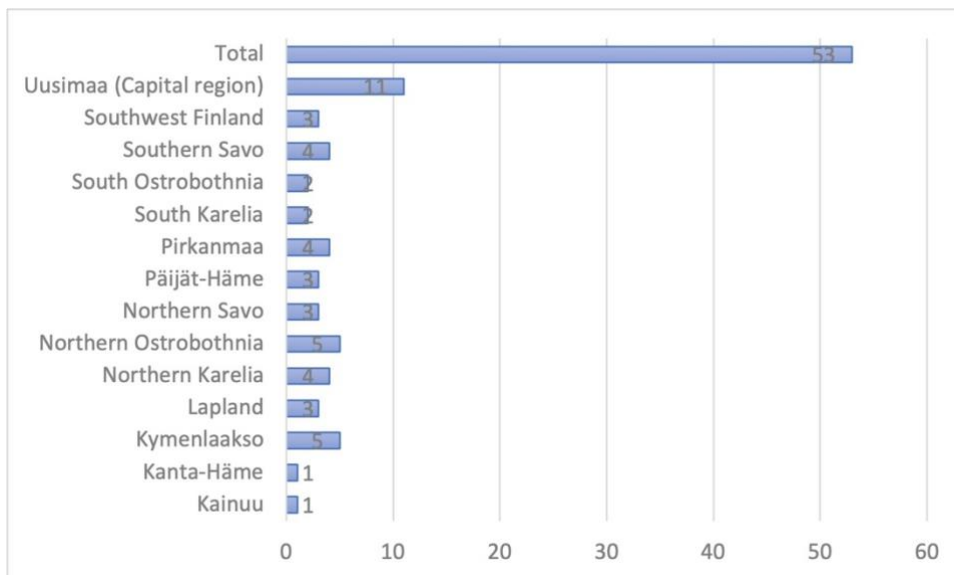


Figure 10. Finnish regions where the products can be experienced

Most of the of the food tourism products are located in the Finnish capital region (11) and participants from all over Finland have participated in the national Food Tourism Competition 2023. Lapland, the Finnish Northern region, participated with five products as well as the North Savo region with five products. The rest of the regions in Figure 10. participated with products, ranging from one to four different concepts.

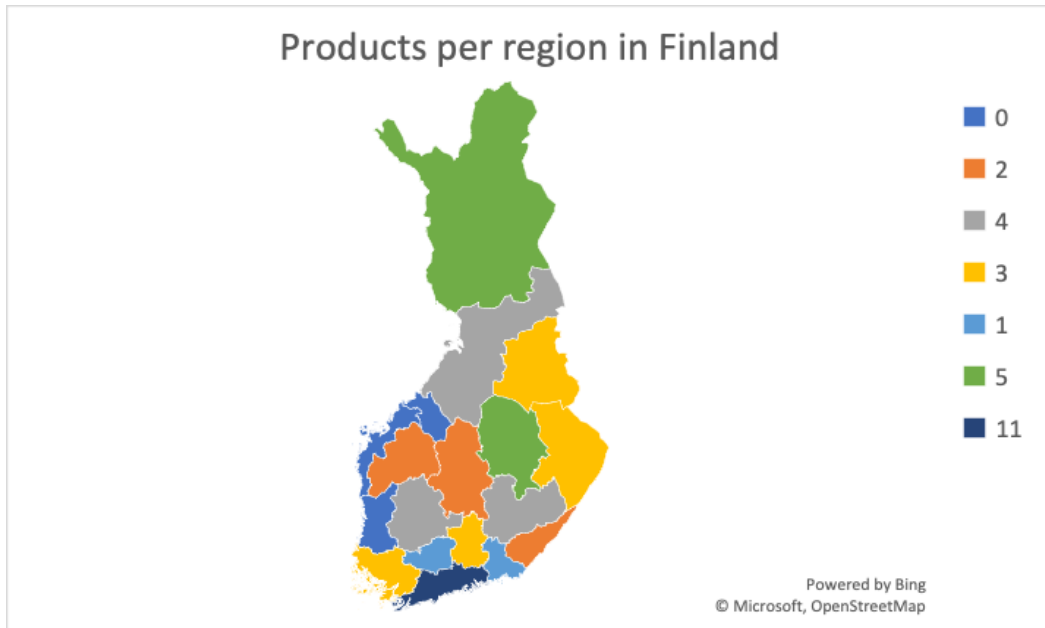


Figure 11. Division of Finnish regions per number of products

Figure 11. brings together the Finnish regions to show geographically where most of the competing products can be located. (Appendix 2.) Most participants are from both spectrums of Southern and Northern parts of Finland.

## 5.2 Type of products

This section focuses on the categorization of food tourism products and services. The numerical values represent the quantity of products or services within each category. Although the participated food tourism products on this research are 46, there is diversity among the findings – indicating availability of high-quality experiences, throughout Finland. In question 3. (Appendix 1) the applicants are asked to set their product in one of the nine categories. (Figure 11.) Concepts such as a farmer’s market in Päijät-Häme region showcase a diversity in food tourism experiences in the Finnish countryside.

Moreover, food tourism experiences evolved nature-related guided tours, distillery tasting visits, cooking with wild food, and dining at a hut in the region of Lapland. Other sources of products included fine dining and luxury stay experiences. The type of products (Figure 12) ranged from sauna and dinner in archipelago – right in the Finnish capital, picnics in apple orchard and taste of a broader archipelago in Naantali area outside of the capital, following with prestigious restaurants throughout Finland.



Figure 12. Category of food tourism products

Products on food related excursions are 11, showcasing an interest in curated culinary experiences. The category of food events is also represented by 11 products. Six instances of food trails highlighted a focus on exploring regional food tourism offerings through designated food trails. Farmer's markets are also six products. Four Cafés and Restaurants are registered, showcasing the importance of generally food establishments in food tourism experiences. Minority in numbers are Market Halls resulting in two participants. Also, two products participated as guided cooking class on Finnish cuisine. Two products relate to local breweries and distilleries which shows a slow growth in the craft beverage sector. One product fall into the category of 'other food related experiences' which adds diversity beyond the defined categories. One product did not report to any of the categories.

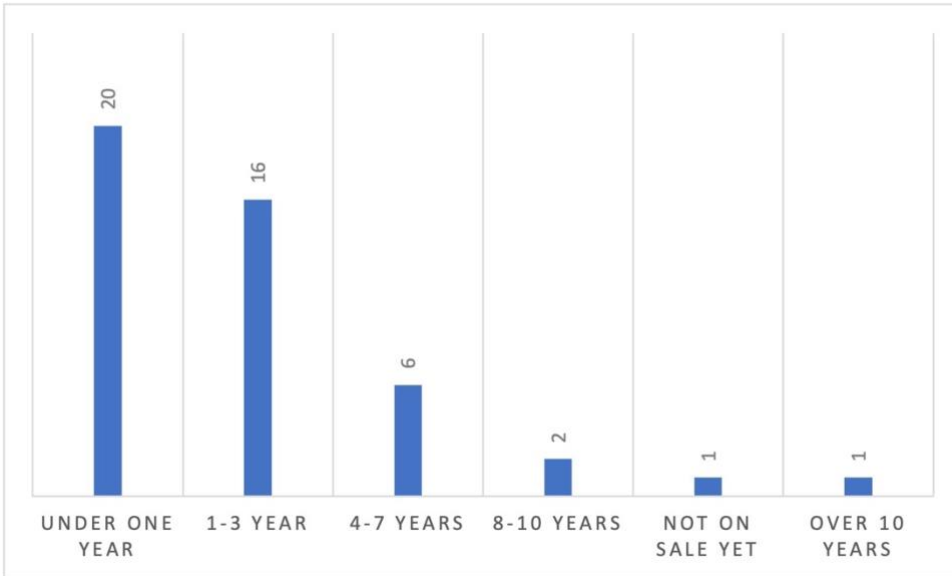


Figure 13. Product’s operational lifespan

**5.3 Time in business**

This part and Figure 13. shows the results of the replies on how long each food tourism product exist in the market. The numbers stand for timeframes in business operations. Under one year were mentioned 20 times. One to three years of operations are 16 products. Four to seven years reported six products and smaller, yet resilient times was found in two products being in business eight to ten years. One product registered yet to show in the market.

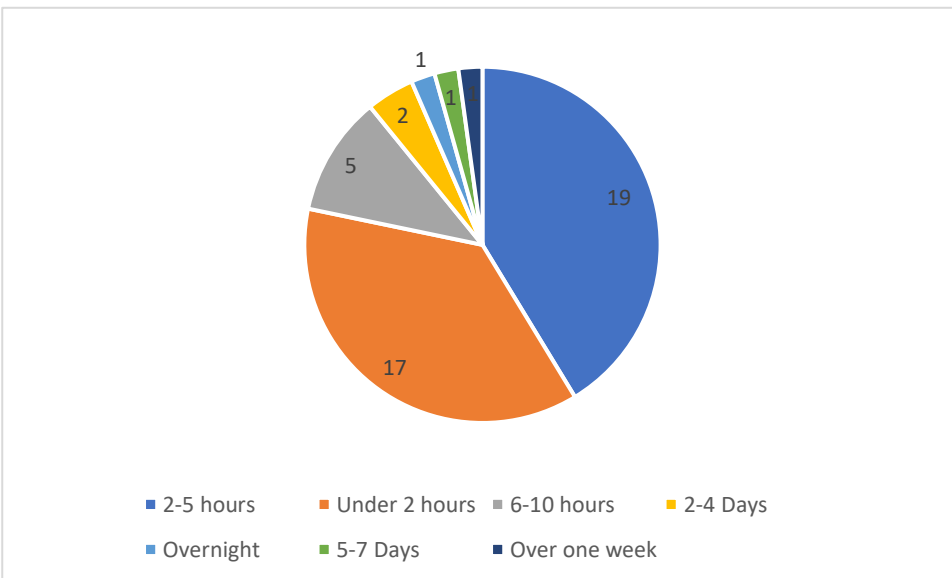


Figure 14. Duration of food tourism experiences

Results in Figure 14. present the duration of food tourism experiences - illustrating the distribution across different timeframes. Lasting two to five hours, indicating a preference for shorter and immersive culinary experiences, were found in 19 products. Under two hours were found in 17 products which equal to impactful culinary activities. Five products range from six to ten hours, offering a more immersive culinary exploration.

Two products provide a multi-day food tourism experience lasting two to four days. One product offers an overnight experience. Another product was found for visitors who seek five to seven days of food tourism. Finally, one more product offers a food tourism experience lasting over one week, representing a rare but extensive culinary journey. The distribution across different durations reflects the adaptability of food tourism products and services to varying consumer needs, from brief encounters to more prolonged and immersive culinary explorations.

#### 5.4 Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020–2028

Figure 15. refers to question 8. (Appendix 1) in which the applicants were asked about the alignment of the competing product regarding the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028. Taste of Place – Eat local and Cense Finland related products were 35, following with Cool & Creative - Eat Wild and Happy in Finland with eight products, Pure & Natural - Eat Slow and Healthy in Finland only two, while one product reported non-relevant to any of the core messages in Figure 15.

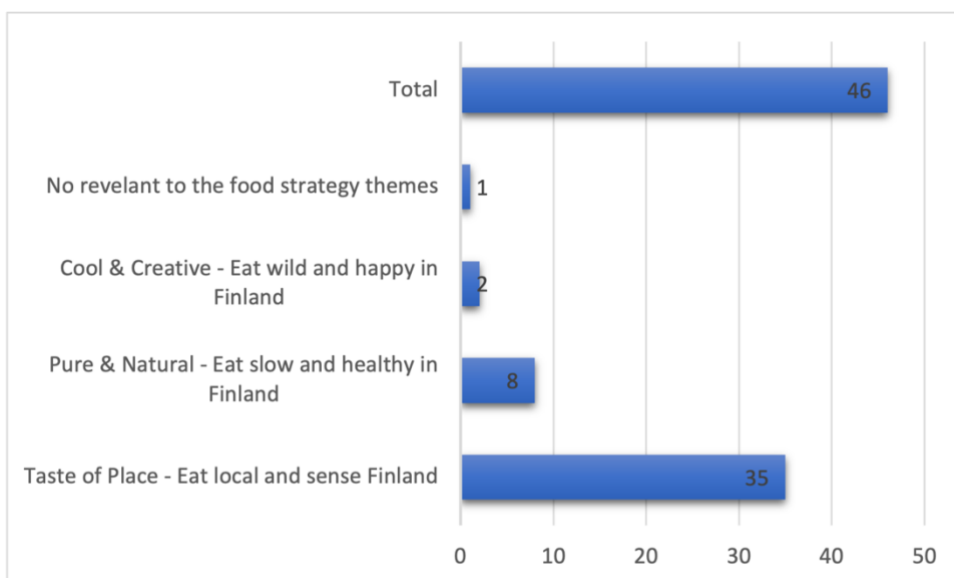


Figure 15. Number of products according to the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028 core messages and product





As seen in Figure 16. In overall each product displayed a common pattern in having 'locality' and 'seasonality' as primary business values. Secondary in value was 'professionalism' to carry high quality guest experience by skillfully preparing the offered products or services in the national food tourism. Storytelling was presented in the results through the concepts such as dining in a hut, cruising, foraging, distilling tours and similar food tourism experiences - where the story depends on the location of the product. In this research the 'red thread' was "locality" and "seasonality" of ingredients. Figure 16. is translated from Finnish, due to being the language used in the questionnaire form - which therefore was used for the text mining during content analysis in Webropol and in Word file.

## 5.6 Sustainability in products

In Figure 17. the numeric values mean frequency with selected sustainability related factors due to majority of mentions in the results. Preventing food waste is mentioned 37 times reflecting emphasis on minimizing food waste. The origin of raw materials is highlighted 32 times underscoring the role of locally sourcing ingredients. Dietary needs mentioned 26 times indicating a focus on catering to diverse needs of visitors. The integration of Finnish food culture and heritage into products referenced 24 times, proving commitment to preserving and showcasing local culinary traditions. What illustrated important emphasis of sustainability and locally sourcing of materials in food tourism products was the mention of wild foods 23 times among the 46 products, even though 40 reported clearly on sustainability.

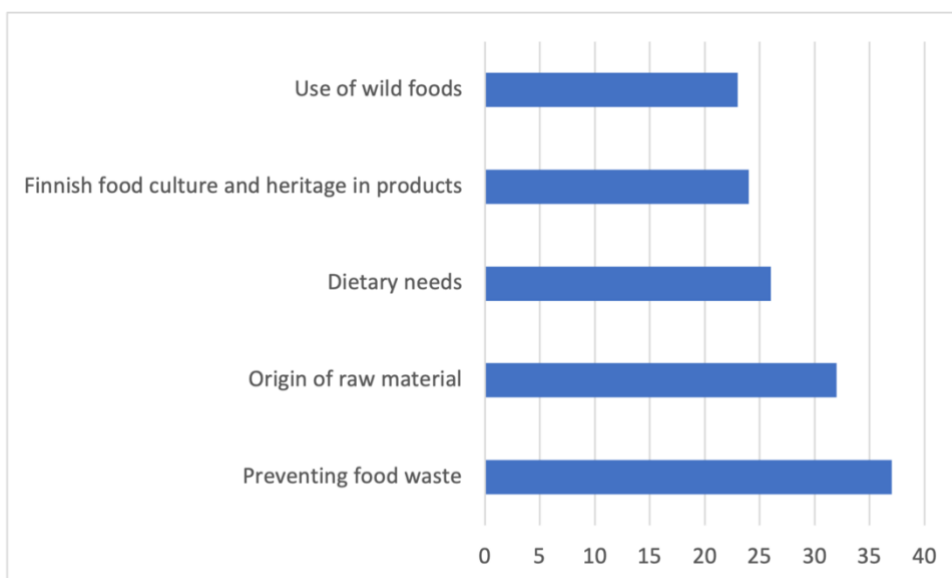


Figure 17. Sustainability parts in products of national food tourism competition 2023

Figure 17. presents the main sustainability factors in the products found in Webropol's quantitative part of data. Sustainability showed mainly in terms of produce sourcing and use. Up to 40 products have mentioned to be using local or wild produce. Cultural sustainability was found in the concepts of the food tourism products, for example storytelling of place. Dietary needs impact the reliability and reassurance for guests which reflects on returning customers or shared ownership – meaning when guests are pleased to have needs fulfilled it creates a positive word of mouth.

## 5.7 Local stakeholders

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse stakeholders contributing to the realm of food tourism products and services. The numerical representation underscores the collaborations, highlighting the intricate network of entities involved in shaping and delivering these experiences. In total 170 collaborations attribute to the development and feasibility of food tourism products and services.

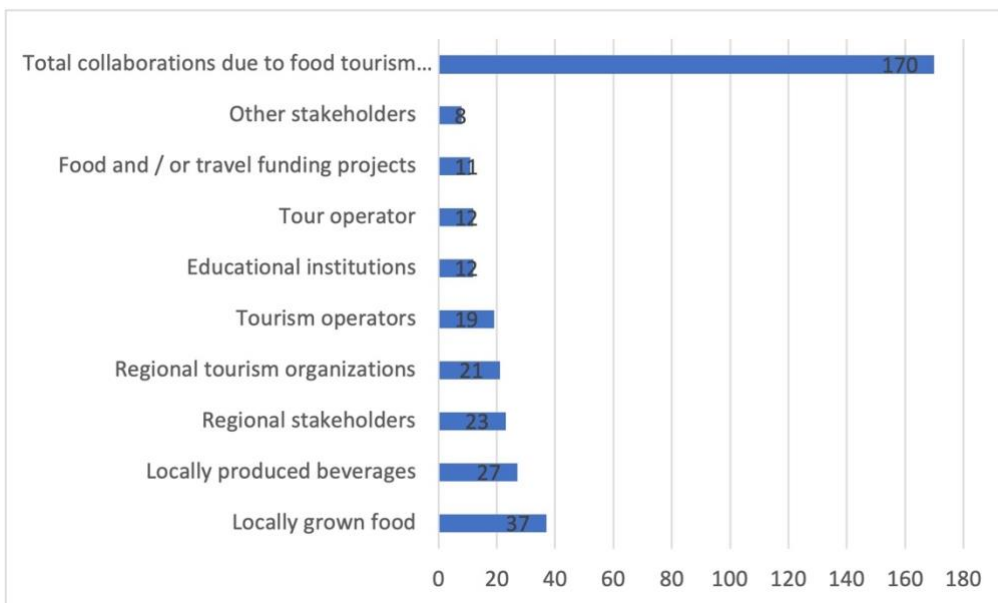


Figure 18. Local collaborations due to food tourism products

Figure 18. shows the involvement of stakeholders in the national Food Tourism Competition 2023 where the numerical values represent quantity of products related to local stakeholders and their type. Producers who locally grow food are associated to 37 products. Local beverage producers are 27. At a regional level 23 products engage with other regional stakeholders. The participation of regional tourism organizations is linked with 21 products. Collaborations with tourism operators involve 19 products and 12 educational centers are also participants.

Non specified tour operators were reported from 12 products. Food and / or travel projects fundings are linked to 11 products while 8 products partake to other stakeholders not categorized in the results or due to anonymity are not mentioned in this paper. Table 3 presents the chosen finalists (n=15) of the professional's category. Next follows brief examples of the type of restaurants competing in the national Food Tourism Competition, while the second part refers to other experiences related to food in tourism. The author studied the finalist based on the products cards.

Table 3. National Food Tourism 2023 finalists (n=15)

Hungry for Finland 2023 Food Tourism Competition, finalists	Region/City
<a href="#">The Glowing Ember – dinner experience in a hut</a>	Rovaniemi, Lapland region
<a href="#">The Iitin Maatilatori Oy</a>	Kausala, Päijät-Häme region
<a href="#">The Dinner Cruise to Loistokari island</a>	Turku, Southwest Finland
<a href="#">The Nature Oriented Lunch buffet</a>	Suomussalmi, Kainuu region
<a href="#">The International Food Calendar, Visit Lahti</a>	Päijät-Häme region
<a href="#">The Karelian Taste</a>	Joensuu, Northern Karelia
<a href="#">The Kymenlaakson Food Identity</a>	Kymenlaakso, Kotka, Hamina regions
<a href="#">The Mushroom Hunting, Taiga Time</a>	Kanta-Häme and Uusimaa region
<a href="#">The Picnic under the Apple Orchard and Taste of Archipelago</a>	Naantali, Southwest Finland
<a href="#">The Restaurant Vår</a>	Porvoo, Uusimaa region
<a href="#">The Restaurant Solitary</a>	Rantasalmi, Southern Savo
<a href="#">The Sauna and Dining at Lonna Island</a>	Helsinki, Uusimaa region
<a href="#">The Sicapelle and Hotel Onni Experience</a>	Porvoo, Uusimaa region

<a href="#">The of Taste the Traditional Flavors and Aromas of four different Provinces</a>	Kainuu region, Northern Karelia, Northern Pohjanmaa, Northern-Savo
<a href="#">The Distillery Tour &amp; Tasting</a>	Kuopio, Northern Savo

Example of results of restaurants: Glowing Ember's in Lapland, Rovaniemi, core idea is to bring premium-grade restaurant experience to unique hut atmosphere using Finnish ingredients, proudly served as high quality products should be served. The restaurant practice new techniques, while having reliability on preserving and traditional cooking methods. Foraging is a habit of the staff, and the goal is to create memorable dining experience as a totality of the ambiance, service, and food.

Restaurant Vår in Uusimaa, Porvoo, thrives on tradition and aims to show appreciation while presenting Vår's vision of modern Finnish cuisine. The fundamentals of the menu are based on wild fish, local vegetables, high quality Finnish grains and non-conventional dairy products. As the restaurant philosophy of "quality over quantity" it holds a recent Michelin Star. It was mentioned that beverages also follow seasonality. Restaurant Solitary in Saimaa region is a successful example of a locality and fine dining in Finland. The menu is dynamic meaning the content depends on what the local stakeholders (farmers, foragers, fishermen etc.) have to offer.

Example of results on experiences around food products: Farmers market - Iitin Maatilatori in Päijät-Häme, Kausala is a traditional spot for Finnish seasonal products. While focusing on guest's experience, the farm also brings together other local producers, bakers, hunters, throughout the year and it is a destination for authentic lifestyle seekers. Sauna and dining experience at Lonna Island, Uusimaa, Helsinki where international and local visitors can experience the urban culture in the Finnish capital by taking a short ferry boat trip.

## 5.8 Target group and availability of products

In the exploration of target groups for food tourism products and services, the following numeric distribution is observed according to the participant's replies on Webropol. In Figure 19. is a distribution by season, national and / or international travelers and two globally common travel types. For local and international visitors, 11 products informed to target both groups while seven were mainly for Finns and three particularly for international visitors.

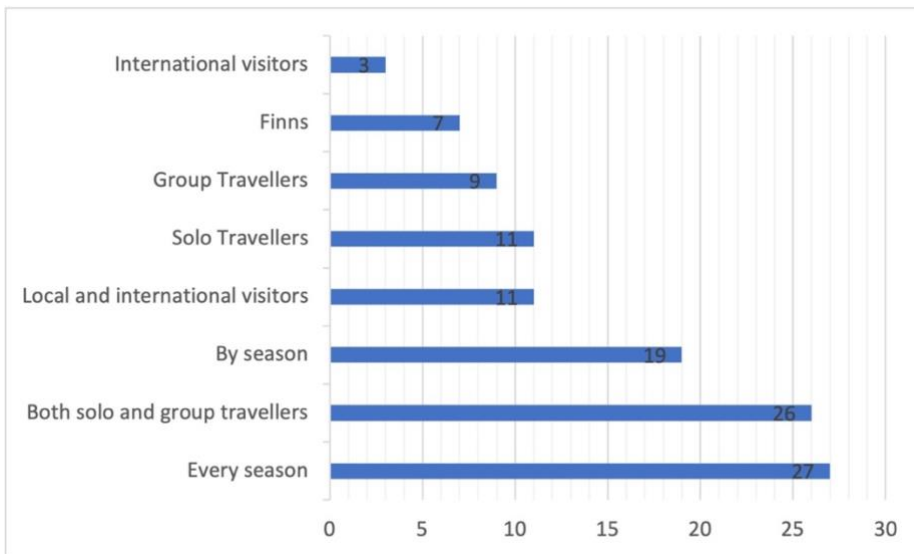


Figure 19. Seasonal availability and target groups of food tourism products

Every season caters 27 food tourism products for consumers seeking food tourism experiences throughout the year. For those who seek seasonal offerings 19 products reported to be seasonal. For both solo and group travelers 26 products are tailored to serve. For those preferring solo travelers, there was 11 products reported while 9 products specifically targeted group experiences.

## 6 Conclusions and discussion

In the final chapter of this research paper, the findings of the results will be discussed by reflecting the main research question plus the two supporting questions. Further recommendations for the commissioner of this thesis will follow depending on the verdict. Lastly, the reliability and validity of this study will be critically addressed. Data results based are based 46 products in the national Food Tourism Competition 2023. Most products emphasized locality, authenticity, and multisensory food tourism experiences. The products varied in type, including cafés, restaurants, food trails, breweries, distilleries, and more. The alignment of products with the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028 mostly falls under the "Taste of Place" category. The diversity of food tourism products indicates a range of high-quality food tourism experiences throughout Finland.

### 6.1 Findings and comparison to previous literature

The results of this research showcased a growing number of concepts in Finnish tourism with potential to attract international and local visitors. Not only refined dining experiences were identified but also, new food trails beyond the Finnish capital - demonstrating growth and added value for food tourism options all over Finland. Most products showed to be aligned with the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028 described in Chapter 1. "Taste of place - Eat local and sense Finland" (Visit Finland) was found as the major category of products being registered to locality.

Locality in products was more visible than sustainability according to the results and the product card in question 8. (Appendix 1) while sustainability supported in equal proportions. Another aspect found was heritage. Even though heritage was not part of the research questions - it is noteworthy to be mentioned as a factor of locality. On a positive note, locality being the leading value in results of the national Food Tourism Competition 2023 may be a sign for tourist attraction for both international and local targets.

According to Ellis et al. (2018) food is fundamentally associated to the place of origin in terms of production and innovation or preparation. Which can be perceived the way locals' express consumption and their practices according to history and place. Ellis et al. (2018) continues to describe food tourism as a cultural meeting point – where food tourists explore experiences on locality and authenticity. Further findings refer to the joint experiences in food tourism products such as sauna and dining, or thematic dinners, such as the hut dinner in Lapland, as well as the Taste of Archipelago and the picnic under the 100 years old apple orchard.

In other words, food tourism in Finland is more than dinners at restaurants. Drawing from, the theoretical part – the concept of memorable food tourism as outlined by Yeoman & McMahon (2016); Long & Cai (2017); and Hall et al. (2019) establishes a backdrop for understanding the dynamic aspects of food tourism. The key role of multisensory engagement, highlighted by Krystallis et al. (2021) emphasizes the role of taste, smell, sight, and touch in creating lasting impressions. According to the results of the data analysis in this thesis, reflecting the theory in memorable tourism, locality, and experience economy – guests traveling to Finland can reach multisensory experiences. While learning about Finnish food culture and its presence with nature, sustainable practices in food travelling and reframing what luxury can be in food tourism.

To answer the research questions of this paper, the results of the products from the professional category of Hungry for Finland Food Tourism Competition 2023 indicate that Finnish food tourism hold high quality over quantity and a niche target group for food tourism. Considering the ongoing global crises since 2020, nevertheless, Finland offers a safe, adventurous, clean, authentic, and flavorful tourism destination with plenty of storytelling.

Pine and Gilmore's (2011) framework of the experience economy serve as a guiding paradigm, asserting that businesses can elevate economic value by orchestrating memorable experiences. The applications of this framework to food tourism underscores a shift from mere sustenance to transformative, engaging and authentic culinary experiences. The definition of food tourism as stated by Ellis et al. (2018); Hong and Tsai (2010) positions food tourism as a tool for cultural communication that fosters relationships between direct and indirect stakeholders. This theoretical part frames the understanding of food tourism as means of cultural exploration.

In the Finnish food tourism context, the experience economy gains prominence steering the transformation of destination marketing into experience marketing. The shift towards offering unique and immersive experiences aligns seamlessly with Pine & Gilmore's (1999a, 2011b) vision, emphasizing the creation of experiences authentically connected to the essence of the destination. The fusion of the experience economy framework with food tourism underscores that culinary experiences in Finland go beyond mainstream food tourism – the experiences are central in creating memorable and meaningful tourism encounters.

Finnish food tourism, as revealed through the national Food Tourism Competition 2023, reflects the principles of the experience economy. The multisensory engagement with food is evident in the diverse array of products, ranging from traditional dining to outdoor experiences. Pine and Gilmore's emphasis on customization and personalization finds resonance in the tailored culinary experiences that cater to diverse preferences and dietary requirements.



Another connection from the findings and the theoretical part - regarding the experience economy model (Pine & Gilmore 2011) is the role of emotional engagement and storytelling intrinsic to Finnish food tourism.

The emphasis on authenticity according to Long (2004) is translated behind gastronomic cultural significance and the use of local ingredients. Immersive experiences such as sauna and dining, culinary workshops, foraging guided tours, align with the participatory nature advocated by the experience economy. The transition of food in tourism from a functional necessity to a key driver of memorable experiences is corroborated by the national competition's focus on sustainability, locality, and storytelling. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis (Karlsson & al. 2023) further underscore the challenges and opportunities in positioning Finland as a desirable food tourism destination.

Sustainability in Finnish food tourism, as underscored by Hall (2003); Telfer and Wall (2012) extends beyond environmental considerations to encompass social and economic aspects. In this research the integration of locality emerges as a key strength, celebrating culinary heritage and fostering economic growth within communities. In examining the strengths and weaknesses of Finnish food tourism, the competition results highlight a reliance on reliable and sustainable food production, rich culinary traditions, and a focus on wild and local ingredients. Challenges such as limitations in marketing, short seasons, and high costs necessitate strategic responses to ensure sustainable entrepreneurship and competitiveness on a global scale.

To conclude the findings of this thesis bring together, theories and real examples based on the national Food Tourism Competition 2023. Showing Finnish food tourism as a lively blend of experiences, sustainability and cultural appreciation. By following the experience economy model (Pine & Gilmore 1999a, 2011b) and sustainability principles (Business Finland 2020-2028) Finland stands out as a place - where food tourism is more than consuming. Finnish food tourism is a transformative experience of creating memorable and immersive food tourism encounters. The strengths and weaknesses (Karlsson & al. 2023) identified the importance of strategic planning in order to create competitive advantage to Finland's food tourism scene and be sustainable on the global scale.

## 6.2 Recommendations to Hungry for Finland

Suggestions regarding further research or repeating this topic are recommended for the parts that were not processes in this thesis and to improve this research. Exclusions refer to parts of the results as pricing of products, marketing channels and quality service tool of the food tourism products. Further recommendations to Hungry for Finland on future national Food Tourism Competitions, are also covered with a focus on locality and product development. Hungry for Finland aims to empower the production of experiential food tourism, to search for top food tourism products and to strengthen genuine cooperation between local producers and hospitality entrepreneurs.

According to the results of 2023 competition and of those from the previous year's, biannually since year 2015, the funding project has been succeeding its long-term goals. Thus, the author has less recommendations than expected. These suggestions aim to enhance the overall quality, authenticity, and success of the national Food Tourism Competitions organized by Hungry for Finland. The suggestions are designed to support the growth of food tourism in Finland and ultimately create memorable experiences for both local and international visitors.

Table 4. Author's suggestions to commissioner

Area of focus	Recommendations
<b>Marketing and Communication Channels</b>	Provide additional support and resources, especially to newcomers in the food tourism industry. Offer guidance on effective marketing strategies, branding, and communication. Establish mentorship or training programs for competition applicants.
<b>Quality Evaluation System</b>	Collaborate with industry experts to set industry standards for quality assurance. Go beyond self-monitoring and hygiene checks; incorporate customer feedback for valuable insights. Advocate for psychological safety in restaurants by educating owners on sustainable working solutions and leadership.
<b>Application Process Transparency</b>	Eliminate the 'other' category in question 3. for a more transparent application process. Provide clearer product categories and definitions for better categorization.
<b>Local Producers in Food Tourism</b>	Introduce a new competition category highlighting the contributions of local producers (farmers, fishermen, guest experience management).

	Recognize their roles to enhance authenticity and promote sustainability in Finnish food tourism.
<b>Food Tourism Storytelling</b>	Expand the competition to include a category dedicated to food tourism storytelling. Encourage participants to weave compelling narratives around their offerings, enriching the overall food tourism experience.
<b>Stay Updated with Tourism Trends</b>	Regularly monitor shifting preferences of tourists and stay adaptable. Conduct market research, collect feedback, and collaborate with local producers to stay informed.
<b>Social Media Strategy</b>	Leverage social media more effectively for broader reach and engagement. Invest in a well-defined social media strategy with regular posts, storytelling, and visuals. Encourage user-generated content and reviews to enhance credibility. Explore emerging social media features for more engaging experiences. Engage with the audience through comments and messages. Incorporate social media analytics tools for tracking and refining the online strategy.

The recommendations in Table 4. aim to empower Hungry for Finland in nurturing experiential food tourism, setting industry standards, and exploring new dimensions in competition categories. The suggested measures may not only benefit the participants but also enhance the overall quality and impact of Finnish food tourism, making it more attractive to local and international visitors. Based on the results from Appendix 1. applicants seemed to have challenge in their marketing and communications channels. Almost half of the products were under a year in business and considering the lack of staff or longer working hours, perhaps this question can be less critical in the future ratifications.

The author's main suggestion to Hungry for Finland is on creating a competition for local producers in food tourism businesses, meaning to switch the roles and highlight farmers, fishermen, guest experience management, even a competition of national food tourism on storytelling. To justify these suggestions, Ellis & al. (2018) argue that heritage, or the destination orientation, cannot be isolated from its authenticity. From a tourism standpoint, food plays numerous roles in a place's relationships and defines its cuisine. In the same way that food embodies customs, tales, and symbols, tourists engage, perform, and create experiences through these means.

By uniting farmers, producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers through a shared event (i.e., food tourism competition) food tourism offers communities and stakeholders an idealized outlook on the future. As political leaders recognize the chance to foster communication through shared interests—such as food and tourism—political capital is generated by formulating visions. These are the parts of the plan and strategy that concentrate on the high-value traveler, who is distinguished by exclusivity and luxury. (Visit Finland 2023.) Food represents identity to the food tourist. (Yeoman & McMahon 2016.) Authenticity and immersive experiences shape this flexible identity.

### **6.3 Reliability and validity in quantitative and qualitative research**

This chapter presents and concludes the reliability and validity of this research for academic reasons. Reliability and validity are fundamental concepts in the academic field. Researchers use these concepts to assess the quality and accuracy of assessments, tests, or data. Reliability concerns the consistency and repeatability of results, while validity stresses whether a measurement, truly assesses the intended concept or construct. Reliability focuses on the extent to which research or measurement results can be reproduced when the same study is conducted under the same conditions. It is evaluated by looking the manner in which results remain, across time among observations or between peer reviews. (Taherdoost 2016.) However, having reliable results does not guarantee that those results are accurate or valid; they may be consistent but still incorrect.

Validity is concerned with how well a measurement accurately assesses what it is supposed to measure. Evaluation is carried on how accurate the results reflect the applied theories, standards or other measurements of the same concept. A valid measurement should accurately measure the intended construct. While a valid measurement is generally reliable, it is essential to consider both reliability and validity. As having reliable results does not necessarily imply that the results are valid. The goal is to achieve both reliability and validity to ensure that data and assessments are not only consistent but also accurately reflect the concepts or constructs under investigation. (Cornell 2023.)

In this research, the data proved reliable due to its source (Webropol) and layout. (Appendix 1.) However, content analysis could have been done in a broader and more gradual way by the author. Mixed methods proved to support the textual information used in the quantitative part and the numerical data offered direction to reflect the participant's replies from the Webropol form. (Appendix 1.) The results proved useful to carry out the main goals of this research on the view of Finnish food tourism through the competition's products.

The data also helped on how locality and sustainability are incorporated in the products and the author was able to align the results with the theoretical framework on food in tourism. The author found the Webropol form (Appendix 1) to be comprehensive and sufficient with the provided data resulting in achieving the main goals of this research.

This thesis draws strengths from the theoretical part which backs up the validity of the results from the food tourism products of the Finnish Food Tourism Competition 2023. The weaknesses can be found from the lack of complete analysis of all the 46 food tourism products. Also, the results of the Webropol form have not been tested in a method that could define with full validity - on how Finnish food tourism is portrayed through the products of the Hungry for Finland's Food Tourism Competition 2023.

These concepts are crucial for ensuring the trustworthiness and meaningfulness of research findings. One facet of validity addressed in this research is "content validity". This entailed a comprehensive content analysis, systematically categorizing the collected data into codes and themes. Based on Taherdoost (2016) in order to bolster content validity, the categories and themes were crafted to faithfully represent the underlying concepts and meanings within the data. This process application of established coding schemes, reinforcing the content validity.

"Criterion validity", another important dimension, emerged through the alignment of participating food tourism products with the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028. A critical aspect is to ensure that the criteria outlined in this strategy accurately reflects the intended objectives of the research. The findings should align with these criteria, thus substantiating criterion validity, and affirming that the research effectively measures the intended constructs. This research paper achieved the alignment of findings according to the criterion validity.

"Construct validity" comes into play regarding the accurate measurement of the concepts outlined in the research. These constructs encompass the alignment of products with the Finnish Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028 and the categorization of products based on their type and target audience. Ensuring that these constructs are effectively and accurately measured is paramount, possibly through methods such as pilot testing or expert reviews, ultimately enhancing the construct validity of the research. (Taherdoost 2016.) This paper did not apply any pilot testing thus construct validity is not justified.

One dimension of reliability is "inter-rater" reliability, notably applicable in content analysis.

Engaging multiple researchers to independently categorize the data is a noteworthy practice to foster reliability. The assessment of "inter-rater" reliability takes shape through the comparison of results achieved by different coders. Peer review of content analysis has not taken place in this research. Another dimension is test-retest reliability, particularly relevant for surveys or questionnaires. The goal is to ensure that responses remain consistent over time. If the same set of respondents were to answer identical questions on two distinct occasions, the results should exhibit reasonably consistent patterns. Also not taken place in this thesis. However, a suggestion could be to apply test-retest reliability approach to all the theses on Food Tourism Competition by Hungry for Finland.

Evaluating test-retest reliability involves comparing the responses from a sample of participants who complete the same survey at different points in time. The responses this study used in content analysis were justified through text mining and proved consistent. However, inter-rating or peer review of consistency in the results did not take place. In summary, the pursuit of validity and reliability is indispensable for the research's integrity and robustness. By addressing these dimensions, the research bolsters the credibility and trustworthiness of its outcomes, offering readers confidence in the soundness and accuracy of the findings.

#### **6.4 Author's learning experience**

This academic journey has been characterized by a mix of experiences and knowledge that has contributed to both personal and professional growth. Several key aspects of this journey are explained as follows. Firstly, a return to the world of research was marked, after a considerable break, signifying the rekindling of a passion for academic exploration and learning development. On the learning front, valuable insights have been gained. The opportunity to explore various research materials and delve into the realm of mixed-method research was provided. This encompassed the first-time experience of content analysis and text mining, thereby broadening the author's research toolkit. Significant support and coaching were received from the commissioner, who also served as the thesis supervisor. Guidance and support throughout the research process were deemed crucial for academic development. Challenges were encountered along the way, particularly when managing a dynamic full-time job in the tourism field.

These challenges, and the need to balance work and academic pursuits, were lessons in time management and decision-making. The data utilized in the research goes with gratitude to Hungry for Finland. This collaboration underscored the significance of effective communication, planning, and a well-structured timeline for future research projects. In summary, this academic journey has contributed to personal and professional growth. It has encompassed a combination of

experiences, knowledge acquisition, and lessons that will continue to impact the author's, future academic and research endeavors.

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## Appendix 2. Categories of competing products (1) and their strengths (2)

In which food tourism category the product belongs?

Respondents number: 46

	n	Percentage
Food tourism related tours	6	13.0%
Food events	2	4.4%
Food tourism related itineraries with multipurpose tour.	6	13.0%
Vendor sales location	2	4.4%
Cafés, restaurants	11	23.9%
Market Halls, Food Trucks, Food Vendors	2	4.3%
Guided cooking in Finnish food	1	2.2%
Breweries, distilleries, winyards	4	8.7%
Home cooking experience	1	2.2%
Other food tourism experience (ie. Lunch- and night cruise etc.)	11	23.9%

What are the strengths of the products?

([Food Tourism Strategy 2020-2028](#). [Food Tourism product suggestion 2020](#).)

Respondents number: 46. Number of selected answers: 229

Strengths	n	Percentage
Flavor profile	27	58.7%
Storytelling	25	54.3%
Planned meals	7	15.2%
Guests immersed actively or educationally	10	21.7%
Sustainable business operations	14	30.4%
Customer journey	2	4.3%
Successful product development	6	13.0%
Skilled workforce	12	26.1%
Ambience, interior style and aesthetics	17	37.0%
Seasonality	12	26.1%
Product innovation	4	8.7%
Stakeholder collaboration	22	47.8%
Locality and authenticity	37	80.4%
Product quality	18	39.1%