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The Role of Meeting Meals in Destination Image: Examples from the West of Sweden

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Abstract

To date, food aspects in leisure tourism have been studied extensively, while in business travel, by contrast, the role of meals has been largely neglected both in academia and in business.

Recent trends suggest that meals served at professional meetings (e.g. conferences, congresses, exhibitions, trade fairs, etc.) represent an untapped potential for the host destination marketing, especially in regions where business tourism generates substantial revenues.

This study contributes to an emerging field of *meeting meals* by looking at Gothenburg and West Sweden, where business practitioners are already working with food as communication and PR medium. It is a qualitative case study based on multiple sources of evidence including interviews, observations and documents. The objectives are to describe and explain the meeting meals phenomenon and suggest recommendations for their use in destination image enhancement.

Results indicate that benefits arise from exceeding guests' expectations about the meal by serving locally sourced, seasonal, well-designed dishes with regards to healthier options. In the longer run such practice also allows for exports of national products, increases in tourist inflow and better awareness of the modern local (or national) cuisine overseas.

Keywords: meeting meals, destination image, food tourism, business travel, Nordic cuisine, Sweden.

Introduction

An increased interest towards food aspects in travel and tourism can be seen both in academic research and among business practitioners. Food is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of any trip, stretching beyond its primary nutritional purpose: "because food is often intertwined with the social, cultural and natural characteristics of a specific region, [it] carries a large number of symbolic meanings" (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011, p. 32), and in some cases selected products become almost a symbol of a destination. Examples include Italian pasta, Spanish jamon, English tea, Belgian waffles, Swiss chocolate, Russian caviar and many more. The ultimate case is perhaps the manifestation of the place of origin in the very name of product, as it has happened with Champagne, Cognac, Bordeaux, Chablis, Brussels sprouts, Dijon mustard, Porto wine and Scotch whiskey. The fact that the place (province, region, country) has become immortalized in the product name, and the product is associated with the region, has interesting implications for destination marketing with help of local food and beverages.

Within the area of food and culinary tourism as an independent research domain food is portrayed as means to enhance destination attractiveness and as an opportunity to seize in order to differentiate destination from its competitors by stressing its uniqueness. However, the mainstream research is preoccupied with, firstly, leisure travelers and secondly, with destinations already well-known for their culinary traditions – France, Spain, Italy among others. Just recently have we observed that new countries are embracing food tourism strategies as well; examples include Scotland, Wales, Ireland together with 'new world' – Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to name a few. Nevertheless, the overwhelming attention is still on holidaymakers and ways to attract them to the destination.

By contrast, business travel has been receiving very little, if any attention, in the domain of food tourism. Indeed, "the role that food functions play in the totality of a conference program has been largely neglected by conference management, as well as in academia" (Kim, Lee, & Love, 2009, p. 214). We perceive it as an obvious gap in research, because business travel at large and meetings industry in particular, can represent a significant percentage of tourist inflow into the region, to generate revenue from delegates' off-site expenditure, increase awareness, generate repeat visits and magnet more tourists (Fenich, 2001, p. 46).

The current study is a case study dedicated to the region of West Sweden and the city of Gothenburg as its regional center, which is an established venue for meetings and events. The importance of this kind of travel for the region should not be underestimated, mainly because it helps to lengthen the short tourist summer-season. For example, in 2010 Gothenburg established a local record: a number of delegate-days associated with meetings doubled comparing to the previous year, generating an inflow of 800 SEK for the city (Göteborg&Co, 2011b). Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that a "conference event can … promote the city's national and regional image, which, in turn, may bring additional visitors to the area" (Kim et al., 2009, p. 212).

Related to this is the fact that Sweden cannot compete with well-established destinations in 'mass market' leisure-bound food tourism, such as gastronomic tours in Toscana or wine-tasting in France, due to its climatic conditions – so meals can be used in different venues instead, such as meetings and conventions, especially due to the fact that when it comes to culinary advancement *per se*, Swedish and Nordic experience is worth acknowledging.

Sweden is increasingly being recognized as a country known offering distinctive and notable culinary experiences. Award-winning chefs and Michelin-starred restaurants (6 in Stockholm and 4 in Gothenburg for the 2012 edition of Michelin guide) - (Matlandet.se, 2012) are the

factors bringing international recognition and publicity to the newly changed state of Swedish cuisine. Mathias Dahlgren, Adam Dahlberg, Lindor Wink are just a few names of the most renowned Swedish chefs, competing and winning the prestigious Bocuse D'or Europe award. In 2012, Nordic cuisine is even served during the Cannes Film festival ("Nordic Kitchen Party at Cannes 2012 ", 2012).

There is a general increased interest towards food and cooking within the society at large, too. Swedish television can boast a large number of food related programmes, and Sweden is the country which publishes more cookbooks per capita than any other country in the world ("The best in the world 2006: Sweden," 2007).

Perhaps the best indication of the country's commitment to food related issues is the new national level strategy "*Sverige – det nya matlandet*" (Sweden as a new food country) (Landsbygdsdepartementet, 2011). This is a vision and a general plan for developing Sweden into a new European "food country". Issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, it focuses on five pillars, including also food tourism and restaurants. Projects within food tourism are entitled for the receipt of 62 mln SEK in financing, and goals include increasing tourists overnight stays, increasing tourists' awareness about Swedish products and dishes, developing restaurant facilities of all kinds and maintaining fine dining places Michelin-starred, enhancing communication and marketing of Swedish cuisine in collaboration with *Visit Sweden* (national tourist agency) and more (Landsbygdsdepartementet, 2011). Such a commitment on the state level indicates that food tourism and restaurant industry receive a highest possible priority in a country's development agenda.

The fine dining segment, as some of the chefs admit, has been influenced mostly by French culture of cooking, especially during the 1980-s, while the everyday food culture has experienced impacts from all over the world due to Sweden's liberal immigration policies and general openness to new cultures (Hincks, 2006). Immigrants have brought with them their own traditional flavors, ingredients and dishes (VisitSweden, 2012). The modern Swedish cuisine is therefore young, open and overt to new ideas and international trends (Näringsdepartementet, 2012), and it is more flexible in adopting new fashion as it is historically less bound to rigid culinary traditions, which is seen, for example, in French culture. Main ideas are well formulated in the so-called Manifesto for the modern Nordic cuisine, also attached in Appendix.

Internationalization however, did not dilute the Swedish character, because the principle of using locally grown raw ingredients has always been kept. The idea of "you take [from nature] what you have" (Swanberg & Granqvist, 2005) is still the leading principle for many restaurateurs in deciding which dishes to serve. According to Mathias Dahlgren, one of the most renowned Swedish chefs, "people and ideas should travel; it's good for them. But produce should not." (VisitSweden, 2011c). In a country stretched for 1500 km from North to South and about 500 km from East to West nature offers an abundant variety of raw foodstuffs: "all the lakes, forests, mountains and meadows provide a rich and varied "pantry" which inspires creativity" (VisitSweden, 2011a). Sea, land and forests provide an abundance of seafood, poultry, lamb, beef, veal, wild game, as well as mushrooms, lingonberries, blueberries, cloudberries, root vegetables and dairy products. A mix of international influence, local ingredients and chefs creativity, together with Scandinavian respectful attitude to nature it gives Sweden an edge in the international culinary landscape.

One more factor which is reinforcing international attention to Swedish (and, admittedly, Nordic at large) cuisine is the well-established reputation of Scandinavian design. The combination of a proper, high quality dish, with pleasant ambience and intelligent food display is the advantage

that Sweden has comparing to other destinations (Landsbygdsdepartementet, 2011; Näringsdepartementet, 2012).

As for the region of West Sweden, it has been a pioneer in promoting itself as a destination for food tourism via several notable projects, such as *Smaka på Göteborg*, *Smaka på Västsverige* and *Västsvensk Mersmak* (Näringsdepartementet, 2012). The region is currently working on making locally produced food available not only in restaurants, but also in grocery stores and be used in everyday cooking (Birgersson, 2012).

Gothenburg, the regional center, has been proclaimed as Sweden's "food capital" for the year 2012 (Göteborg&Co, 2011a). It is a state-level competition aiming to demonstrate opportunities of jobs generation and regional development that exist at the intersection of tourism and restaurant sector. The city has been selected because it already has a good platform for culinary tourism positioning, with 45 of its restaurants united into Gothenburg Restaurant Association; moreover, the region of West Sweden has also advanced in linking urban and rural experiences and small scale food production with industry (Göteborg&Co, 2012). Moreover, since all the tourists arrive in Gothenburg, their travel routes begin from here, and thus the city has a sort of responsibility to make the first impression favorable. Gothenburg is also the only Swedish city included in an international network *Delice – Good Food cities of the world,* together with Lyon, Barcelona, Chicago, Montreal, Osaka and several more (Delice, 2012), which gives a deserved credit to Swedish current culinary advancement. The core advantage of Gothenburg's gastronomic miracle is the city's proximity to the sea, which gives an abundant supply of fish and seafood of highest quality. Moreover, of the star chefs who have been awarded *Chef of the Year* in Sweden over the past ten years, no less than seven have come from Gothenburg (VisitSweden, 2011b).

To sum up, an increased culinary interest in society at large, an establishing recognition of Nordic cuisine together with an already deserved reputation in design, governmental support of food tourism and agriculture, a number of completed and ongoing projects related to food tourism and destination marketing, are all signaling about the importance of the topic for various stakeholder groups. It seems surprising to us that in a context of such an interest business meals have not yet received appropriate attention. For the West of Sweden the importance of business tourism presents a stand-alone significant reason for creating and promoting of what we call meeting meals.

To put it briefly, meeting meals refer to food and beverages served at professional business meetings of different kinds – conferences, congresses, trade and tourism fairs, exhibitions, symposiums, incentive trips, workshops, etc. At best (in theory), meeting meals are also playing a communication role in messaging to guests the atmosphere, event theme or identity of the host destination, depending on the event. In current practice, unfortunately, it is not always the case – yet – and we will further argue that meals' communication potential is a great opportunity for business and tourism actors.

As can be inferred from this brief description, the subject of the paper simultaneously belongs to various research fields, such as tourism, marketing as well as sociology and anthropology of food. Such interdisciplinary focus presents a novelty, and indeed the concept of meeting meals is new, both in academia and among business practitioners, with the latter being ahead of the former.

Due to its newness, the study is exploratory in nature, and aims to attain the following objectives:

 – to describe and explain meeting meals as a new occurrence in business world and a new area for research, with examples from West Sweden and the city of Gothenburg, including TUR Mässan 2012 as a meeting venue for tourism industry professionals;

 – to suggest recommendations concerning meeting meals as a tool to enhance destination's image with help of Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM).

The research question we aim to answer in this paper is *how can meeting meals be used as an instrument to develop an appealing destination image*.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical overview of previous research in relevant fields is presented. Second, methodological approach is explained, followed by the results section which includes both findings and analysis. Finally, discussion and concluding remarks are closing the paper.

Theoretical Overview

1. Meeting meals in the context of previous research

Meeting meals refer to food and beverages served at professional meetings organized by political, national or international organization or a business company, and bearing a specific message in itself. Meal is used, therefore, as a communication tool and is intended to send the message about, for example, the hosting destination to the guests. Meetings can vary among conferences, congresses, exhibitions, trade fairs, incentive trips, workshops, etc. We will assume that an event can be recognized as a meeting if at least ten individuals gather for business purposes at one place for at least half a day (Mossberg & Svensson, 2009).

This definition is based on *The book on culinary tourism in West Sweden* by Mossberg and Svensson (2009) and is rather tentative. The whole concept of meeting meals is relatively new in both academic research and business practice, and appropriate research is lacking. One explanation for this fact could be that the very idea of food served at meetings playing a communicating role, is much more business (rather than academia) driven. There is some indication, mainly in professional journals, of the growing recognition of the food component in the meeting event: "The sensory environment provoked by food and drink reinforces the uniqueness and memory of a guest's experience" (Iommazzo, 2002); "When it comes to planning food and beverage for groups, we stress that it's not a meal: it's an experience" ("A new take on taste," 2006, p. 10), cited in (Kim et al., 2009, p. 212); "People truly do eat first with their eyes" (Shock, 2007).

The fact that practitioners are the first to realize the potential of meeting meals is also supported by the fact that three professional journals account for the most of the reference areas found in relevant articles: *Successful Meetings, Corporate Meetings & Incentives* and *Journal of Convention and Exhibition Management.* The study by Kim et al. (2009), conducted in the US, shows that delegates' satisfaction with food programs at the conference was the leading driver of an attendee to return. Moreover, they stress the importance of menu selection, attractiveness and presentation of a meal, more healthy options and fresh ingredients (Kim et al., 2009, pp. 226-228). However, this study utilizes a quantitative method and examines the customer side, which differs from our intention to shed light upon the supply-side of meeting meals; also, the US context is to be considered when trying to expand the findings into other geographical settings.

The most closely related academic studies represent Scandinavian school (Tellström, 2006; Tellström, Gustafsson, & Fjellström, 2003; Tellström, Gustafsson, & Lindgren, 2008). Two of these deal with meal construction during the Swedish EU-chairmanship in 2001 and National food and meal archetypes presented at world exhibitions. These two studies, however, devote much attention to politically constructed food used to "showcase national cuisine" (Tellström et al., 2003, p. 94) and in one case the event takes place in a different context of an exhibition pavilion, remote from the country of origin. Moreover, the study of world exhibitions presents a historical study, which is different from our own study purposes. It contributes, however, by summarizing food and meal culture primary functions throughout the historical development (Tellström et al., 2008, pp. 322; 325).

As can be inferred from the frame of reference to which authors (Tellström, 2006; Tellström et al., 2003; Tellström et al., 2008) allude to, the presently existing food and meal studies belong to the fields of anthropology, ethnology and sociology and are associated with food and meals as cultural symbols and messages, whilst the tourism marketing literature covers mostly such concepts as food and culinary tourism alongside with destination marketing and place branding.

Therefore, the focus of our study represents a new and unusual perspective, aiming at bringing together marketing and tourism research on one hand and food and meals science on the other. This interdisciplinary makes it difficult to locate *meeting meals* within one specific research field. In an attempt to do so references will be made to several 'parent' areas already well elaborated in literature. We will consecutively discuss the following areas:

1.1. food in social science
1.2. food in tourism
1.3. meetings industry specificity

1.1. Food in social science: the meaning of a meal

The present study deals with food and meals as much as it does with destination image, therefore we cannot ignore the contributions of social science scholars, and mainly anthropologists, to the studies of food and meal culture. As Rappoport mentions, "almost everything related to the social and cultural significance of food has traditionally been assigned to anthropology" (Rappoport, 2003, p. 21). By contrast, "food has not been seen as a central problem in psychology, sociology or the other social sciences … because it did not receive much attention from influential social theorists" (Rappoport, 2003, p. 22), and it was the anthropologists who demonstrated strong influence on sociologists and their theoretical approaches. Thus within the scope of this paper we will understand food and meals in a way it was interpreted by the most influential anthropologists. We assume that "food is never 'just food' and its significance can never be purely nutritional" (Caplan, 1997). Rather, following Roland Barthes, we agree that food is "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior" (Barthes, 1961, p. 21).

As well illustrated by Mennell, Murcott, and Otterloo (1992, pp. 1-19; 33-34), in the field of food and meals studies Claude Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Roland Barthes and Claude Fischler were the most influential figures. They clearly acknowledge that "taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled" (Mennell et al., 1992, p. 8) and shift the interest from food to cuisine (as 'nature vs. culture' continuum). Cuisine, according to Levi-Strauss, represents a language of a society and should be viewed and treated accordingly. Mary Douglas points out that "each meal carries … a meaning… and is a structured social event" (Douglas, 1972, p. 69). Roland Barthes, in turn, argued that foodstuffs (with examples of sugar and wine) should be understood as units of a system of communication, as "attitudes", as signifying items (Barthes, 1961, p. 21). Coffee, for example, has transformed itself – in social perception – from a pure substance to a situation, a ritual; the same goes for business lunches, which in the very name bear the notion of (somehow) relating to business. Food, Barthes forecasts, will gradually gain in meaning while losing in function, and be increasingly more linked to rhythms of modern life, an interplay of work and relaxation and an elusive balance in between.

In sum, food in anthropology is seen as means to express identity and is bearing symbolic meanings (Mennell et al., 1992, p. 33). Again, like in language, food meaning can shift depending on the context. Further following this metaphor, we can infer that meal can 'speak for itself'. This broader understanding of food, expanding (but not excluding!) beyond its basic physiological purpose and palatability, is the one we will adhere to throughout the paper.

1.2. Food in Tourism

An intimate connection seems to link restaurants and travel, voyaging and eating,
whether one ... recalls that Michelin makes tires in addition to awarding stars
Spang (1999, p. 80)

Food aspects in travel have received a significant dozen of attention among scholars and even led to an emergence of a new concept of food tourism. Food tourism is defined by Hall and Mitchell (2001, p. 308) as "a visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel". The importance of food service in tourism development is well stressed by (Elmont, 1995). In his normative parlance he emphasizes that food service should not be overlooked when it comes to tourism development in a region.

Some authors link food tourism to *special interest tourism* (Shenoy, 2005); critique by (McKercher, Okumus, & Okumus, 2008), while others claim that it belongs to *cultural tourism* umbrella as food represents local culture and thus its consumption means culture consumption (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000; Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003). This particularly applies to those studying gastronomy tourism, as, in Kivela and Crotts' terms, "gastronomy is the study of the relationship between culture and food" (Kivela & Crotts, 2006, p. 354).

In addition, some authors distinguish between food, culinary and gastronomy tourism: Long (2004) was first to introduce the collocation of culinary tourism in 1998 to portray the phenomenon of experiencing other cultures through their food and wine (Kivela & Crotts, 2006, p. 356; Lin et al., 2011, p. 32). The common for all three labels is the food base; however, culinary and gastronomy tourism often embrace beverages in addition to food, although wine tourism is usually separately distinguished (Henderson, 2009). Thus, with slight differences, all the three labels are the most frequently used terms to describe the same notion – tourists' participation in food related activities, with food being the focus rather than a by-product in travel experience (Shenoy, 2005). In this paper we will assume that food, culinary and gastronomy tourism can be used as interchangeable terms.

As mentioned, for food tourists their culinary experiences are put at the core of the trip. In the context of meeting meals it is not always true, however. Delegates arrive at the destination because of the event – the meeting – and obviously, food is not the prime factor in destination choice (see, e.g. (Comas & Moscardo, 2005), for the site selection process). We briefly note here that it does not mean that food should be overlooked by organizers; instead, it provides untapped opportunities for marketing the destination, and utilizing these opportunities would be a wise step in comparison to competitors and their venues.

Nevertheless, for historical reasons food roles in travel are much more discussed in leisure travel context. With respect to scholars we will cover major contributions in our overview, bearing in mind differences between traveling for business and for holiday.

1.2.1. Food as a tourist attraction and a part of tourist promotion
According to Cohen and Avieli (2004), the majority of food tourism literature falls into this category. They argue that "the existing literature on the topic (e.g. Hjalager and Richards (2002)) … overemphasizes food as an attraction" and ignores food-related factors which may damage tourists' experience such as unfamiliarity, unsafety or culturally based eating considerations. The mainstream food tourism literature, however, is quite positive in its parlance, claiming that food tourism is a possible competitive advantage and can become a core element in the branding of a

destination (Henderson, 2009; Lin et al., 2011). This can be achieved by framing and further communicating a clear gastronomic identity and culinary heritage of a place, stressing its uniqueness and thus differentiating from competitors (Fox, 2007; Henderson, 2009, p. 322). Thus food becomes very much ingrained into marketing and place branding logic (see, for example,Therkelsen (2003); (Therkelsen & Gram, 2010); Therkelsen and Halkier (2008)).

In addition, a number of studies suggest that food is an important factor for tourists when choosing a destination (Bessière, 1998; Boniface, 2003; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Frochot, 2003; Henderson, 2009; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004), and especially, to some degree a determinant of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction together with climate, scenery and accommodation (Bessière, 1998; Correia, Moital, Costa, & Peres, 2008; Fox, 2007; Henderson, 2009; McKercher et al., 2008; Nield, Kozak, & LeGrys, 2000).

Some authors argue that meal for a tourist is not a simple act of obtaining nutrients but rather a culinary *experience* (Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Quan & Wang, 2004). The perception of experience, however, depends largely on a tourist himself, and his own self-perception as of being a culinary tourist (McKercher et al., 2008). As a response to this objection, a number of studies suggesting typologies of culinary tourists and continuums of their interests has emerged (see, for example, (Kivela & Crotts, 2006); Shenoy (2005)).

1.2.2. Food as an expression of local identity
"If, as many studies have asserted, food and diet are among the most striking markers of cultural identity, then a visit to a restaurant is one of the easiest ways to encounter the Other" (Spang, 1999, p. 80). Following this notion, du Rand, Heath, and Alberts argue that local and regional food represents one of the most distinct cultural expressions and offers potential to add value to the destination, contribute to its authenticity as well as "enhance sustainability in tourism" and "strengthen the local economy" (Rand et al., 2003, p. 97). Likewise, Sims (2009) argues that local food and drink can bring benefits to both tourism and local community and moreover, build a brand which can attract more visitors and investors. Research suggests that "on a practical level a nation's identity is reflected and strengthened by the food experiences that it offers" (Rand et al., 2003, p. 98). However, it is important for local tourist actors to maintain an authenticity balance – if food is designed to suit an international tourist crowd, then some of its originality is at risk to be lost (ibid, p. 99). Sims (2009) concludes nevertheless that offering tourists authentic experiences with help of local food can bring benefits to development of sustainable tourism, not least by creating an image of a destination.

1.2.3. Food tourism as a venue for local agricultural and economic development
Obviously food industry and tourism are interconnected, and their relations may range "from the conflict over competition for land, labour and capital to a symbiosis where both sectors mutually benefit from each other" (Telfer & Wall, 1996). If tourism is seen as a means of development for the host destination, it has to be responsible and sustainable, and careful consideration should be given to a wise use of natural and labor resources.

Hjalager and Corigliano, in turn, suggest a broader perspective to tourism development based on food and drink and point out the importance of non-tourism factors, such as national economic and agricultural policies (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Clearly, not all regions are equally ready and equipped for development as a food destination, and therefore tourism industry alone cannot secure the success of such a development. Other actors and factors should be considered – *inter alia* historical characteristics, current agricultural policies and regulations and social patterns.

1.3. Meetings industry specificity

When critically assessing food tourism research domain, one should bear in mind that, although being parent to the idea of meeting meals, it cannot be fully applied to this new context. Significant differences are brought in by the specific attributes of the meetings industry *per se*.

It is acknowledged that most studies covering meetings industry originate from North America and cover large conventions with an international membership as well as large associations with generous budgets with a focus on the client side. What is neglected is local party's role in a conference hosting. It is assessed as both a gap and an area for future research (Comas & Moscardo, 2005, pp. 120-122; 134).

As we mentioned already in the Introduction, little is known about applications of pro-food marketing tools to business tourism (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Food promotion materials, advertisements, brochures and campaigns – in other words, almost all the marketing tools – are used to target holiday makers rather than business travelers. The whole idea of "choice" of a destination is in fact irrelevant when it comes to business travel (and Cohen's[1] assumption that people travel for novelty and strangeness is replaced by travel for work: as Hultsman (2001) shows, delegates come mainly to "establish relationships and increase sales", and it is the convention itself which "works as an attraction" (Boo, Koh, & Jones, 2008, p. 241). Thus, in application to food, the conventions' market is much more producer-side than consumer-side, with restricted freedom of choice for business travelers. In fact, travel patterns are adjusted and linked to major events happening in a professionals' world. In this sense, meetings hosts have almost a monopoly for food: monopoly, because "a primary concern of people at most professional meetings is where to eat, what to eat, and with whom to eat" (Rappoport, 2003, p. 18); almost, because of religious, cultural or medical concerns and changing eating habits which "can become a destination barrier" (Balakrishnan, Nekhili, & Lewis, 2011, p. 8).

In a globalized world, meetings' participants come from almost any part of the world, carrying with them food preferences and constraints stemming from religion, medical conditions (mostly allergies) and increasingly self-imposed constraints (like vegetarianism and veganism). Caterers and chefs are now very well aware of dietary restrictions for Muslims, Hindu or Jews, as well as all possible allergies and intolerances. Obviously it limits the choice of acceptable products and caterers' freedom, leaving only a narrow list of foodstuffs which can suit everyone or an absolute majority. Thus people who travel a lot get exposed to almost the same all-appropriate menu, often with chicken and salmon being the compromise. Buffet meal has become one solution, but with this type of meal design, serving and storytelling possibilities are restricted, especially for those caterers who want to make food experience memorable for the guests.

Yet an event represents a *carte blanche* for the hosts, meaning that there is an untapped potential for marketing the hosting destination via food and meals served. Very often it is the chefs' creativity and managers' foresight which helps to overcome challenges such as described above. Kim et al. (2009, p. 212) point out to "unexpected" food preparation, and we perceive it as a key word in characterizing successful meeting meals. *Unexpected* implies numerous opportunities to differentiate the venue from the competitors, and first-comers will enjoy most of the benefits, because customers are not *yet* educated to demand such meals. Importance of this effort for the future should not be underestimated, as Kim et al. (2009, p. 212) concludes: "It's only the food they remember".

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[1] Cohen, 1972, cited in (Cohen & Avieli, 2004, p. 758).

Another premise of leisure food tourism – that the food is a prime attraction in destination choice – can be altered when it comes to business meetings context. Research shows that food is not mentioned among the most important factors when choosing a meetings venue (Comas & Moscardo, 2005; Fenich, 2001; Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2001). As well illustrated by Comas and Moscardo (2005), site selection is a complex process for conference associations and/or delegates, and numerous factors are considered. Factors deemed most important include, when it comes to venue choice, its size, technological equipment, location, accessibility, accommodation options, convenience, and other attributes such as atmosphere, season and weather, destination facilities in general, as well as budget and time constraints. Food is not mentioned separately, but, as one study indicates, "another element of primary importance to convention attendees is the cuisine available in a community" (Fenich, 2001, p. 50). Thus cuisine is perceived as valuable, and one explanation why it does not apply to the meeting venue itself could be that well-designed meeting meals are not a widespread practice (yet!), and delegates do not 'pull' it from the organizers. When cooked and served wisely though, this factor may enhance service quality perception and encourage more off-site restaurant visits to get acquainted with the local taste. Similar to food festivals, special events can generate spill-over effects resulting in increased off-site spending (I. Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Thus showcasing food during meetings has to uphold the level of restaurant meals in order to create a favorable impression of local cuisine and destination as a whole. Consistency of service is very important, because both congress halls and restaurants are mutually dependent parties of a destination (Balakrishnan et al., 2011, p. 10).

It appears, however, that changing eating habits happening on a consumer side present both a challenge and an opportunity for hosts when it comes to meetings. Guests are more and more demonstrating consideration in their food choices, with an increasing preference of light, healthy seasonal and, where possible, locally sourced (read – fresh) meals. Current healthy trends imply "organic foods, low-fat foods, low-carb offerings, sugar-free options, no trans-fats, no corn syrup, and no carmine". "Regional and seasonal are the buzzwords of the new meeting menus" (Durocher, 2004, p. 26; Shock, 2007). The most recent trend is so-called "brain food" – food which helps attendees to concentrate and enhances their mental performance. Some authors agree that serving specific foods to produce various physiological states is a new trend which may change the way of meal serving at meetings (Baraban, 2011; Beer, 2011). Also, as business tempo is accelerating, participants prefer to spend less time seated, particularly for lunch (Mills, 2008).

These and more behavioral changes have implications for caterers and meeting organizers. First, the major consideration for conference planners is the budget of an event. A trend towards healthier cuisine sometimes results into increased food cost because of expensive ingredients. For businesses it means finding new ways to uphold the competition – with help of good chefs or, for example, by making locally grown food sources economically viable ("Nutrition on a Budget," 2004). Second, the majority of conference menus are designed based on cost considerations, tradition and organizers' propositions of what people would like to eat (Beer, 2011) and definitely not on nutrition science research. It means that food effects have been largely neglected and underestimated. The current trends are changing the existing practices and urging caterers to comply with new demands, because "it's basic hospitality to provide for the people you've invited to a meeting or incentive program" ("Last Word," 2005).

2. Destination Image

The second concept central to our study is destination image. It has been on agenda in tourism research since 1970-s, with early 1990-s experiencing a boost in interest towards it associated with a seminal work by Echtner and Ritchie (1991); Echtner and Ritchie (1993).

Their study is still among the most often cited works in the area. Briefly, their conceptualization is summarized in a model resembling a two-by-two matrix. Matrix can be read as if a destination has two main components – a set of holistic versus attributes-based traits, and each of those has a dimension of functional versus psychological characteristics. Functional characteristics refer to more tangible, objective artifacts – climate, accommodation, scenery, etc., while psychological are those dealing with perceived images and mental pictures: people friendliness, quality of service, general atmosphere, etc. As a result each destination can be evaluated according to a number of parameters in terms of "common" versus "unique" features. The implicit assumption is that unique and holistic attributes are more important and valuable for a given destination to capitalize on.
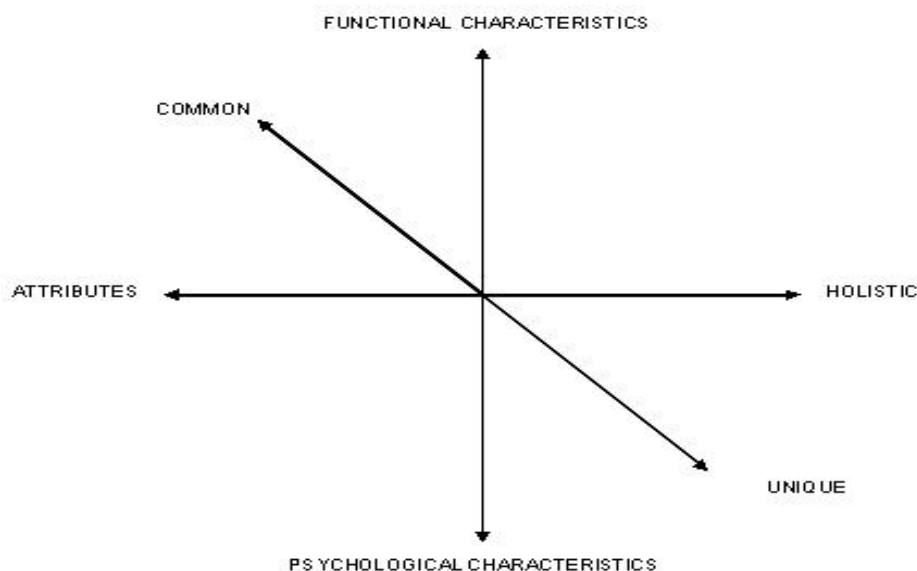

Figure 1. The components of destination image
Source: Echtner & Ritchie (1991, 1993)

A lot of research has been conducted both before and after Echtner and Ritchie's works; according to Gallarza, Saura, and Garcıa (2002), investigation has been mainly based around either effective destination positioning or destination selection process. However, despite that, as Tasci et al. (2007) conclude, "a systematized structure has not been achieved in either conceptualizing or operationalizing the destination image construct" (Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007, p. 217). When characterizing a current state of the research area, Gallarza et al. (2002, p. 73) offer a metaphor of a 'kaleidoscopic view' of the construct to illustrate that, despite numerous studies and live interest, the theoretical underpinning of destination image is yet to be established and is presently far from academic consensus.

Several definitions of destination image are presented below:

  o "the mental construct developed by the consumer on the basis of a few selected impressions among the flood of total impressions. It comes into being through a creative

process in which these selected impressions are elaborated, embellished, and ordered" (Reynolds, 1965)

o "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that an individual has of a destination" (Crompton, 1979, p. 18)

o "one's perception of attributes or activities available at a destination" (Gartner, 1986)

o "the perceptions of individual destination attributes . . . [and] the holistic impression made by the destination" (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, p. 8)

o "a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression" (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000, p. 417)

o "a sum of complex messages given by a variety of stakeholders, through a variety of communication mediums" (Balakrishnan et al., 2011, p. 5)

As can be seen, definitions of the destination image lack comprehensiveness and focus on one or more of its components instead. Some researchers use perception terminology, which implicitly suggests that image may or may not exist without its perception. Gartner's definition assumes some sort of a person's evaluation and thus cognition, while Crompton's definition relies on a somewhat gestalt impression of the whole.

The complexity of defining a destination image stems from the complex nature of the image concept[1], its multidisciplinarity and connections to environmental psychology (Tasci et al, 2007, p. 195). Indeed "few products could rival the complexity of countries and destinations in the images they engender" (Nadeau, Heslop, O'Reilly, & Luk, 2008, p. 90). Moreover, when put into a context of tourism and marketing fields, conceptualization becomes even more challenging, as intangibility of tourism service hinders image assessment and keeps it far from any sort of 'objective truth'. Instead, numerous terms researchers use in their proceedings often confuse the reader, as it becomes difficult to grasp what is meant by what: in destination image domain, some terms bear the same idea although differently named (destination attractiveness, awareness, perception), some are closely connected yet different (identity, brand), some are seemingly similar and the rest is different but often put under destination image umbrella (satisfaction, competitiveness, etc). Gallarza et al. (2002, p. 59) clearly state that "there are almost as many definitions of image as scholars devoted to its conceptualization". The review of studies concerning destination image (e.g. Hosany, Ekinci, and Uysal (2007); Tasci et al. (2007); Gallarza et al., (2002)) reveal that three main components of the destination image exist: cognitive, affective, and conative (Lin et al., 2011, p. 33; Tasci et al., 2007, p. 199; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Simply put, cognitive component deals with human knowledge, affective – with feelings, and conative – with behavior in relation to destination image. In addition, as inspired by (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993), holistic vs. attributive and common vs. unique components give a more thorough apprehension of a destination image construct.

A more thoughtful view upon the kaleidoscope of destination image definitions leads us to a conclusion that, in an abundant variety, they all reflect an interplay between the whole and its parts, with a desire to attain measurability of the whole, at best through its parts. It is apparent that to make destination image an operating tool for marketers, it would be very useful to have a model which allows for a detachable construct, in which parts can be tuned and customized. Both the complex, compound nature of destination image and the importance of its elements are

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[1] "A 'complex' concept is one which allows for more than one interpretation or whose comprehension lacks a unique meaning" – Gallarza et al. (2007, p. 68).

of course recognized by scholars. One example is the comprehensive model by Tasci et al. (2007), which takes into account the holistic nature of destination image. Yet decomposition, judging by what has been written to date, has proved to be quite a challenging task from the very outset, i.e. the definition.

For the purpose of our study we will adhere to a definition by Crompton (1979) because it is a simple, easy to grasp and brief formulation. Inventing one more definition is not our goal as it would not yield any significant scientific value. Instead, we suggest an approach by which we will treat the destination image concept. It is a holistic view, meaning that destination image is a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts, and should be evaluated in its entirety. Destinations are becoming increasingly complex, making it difficult to agree on a clear-cut unique selling proposition, or single brand, or strapline (Boyne & Hall, 2004; Ren & Blichfeldt, 2011). It is especially true in relation to food, because of potential overlaps among local, regional and national cuisines. Meeting meals should be understood as a part of destination image, both influenced by, and influencing on, the whole. The connection between the two is further explained in the following section.

3. Linking the two: meeting meals as a part of destination image

In previous research destination image has been continuously left separated from food aspects. At best, food available at the destination was deemed as important factor in trip choice and, in case of culinary tourism, the prime factor. Most often, food is given a role of being one element in destination identity, or brand (Lin et al., 2011), which are both close to the image concept, but not identical to it (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005; Nadeau et al., 2008; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Beyond that, the relationship between food and destination image has not been established, and the gap is even greater in research dedicated to business travel.

This paper aims to make a small step in bridging this gap by linking together meeting meals and destination image through three connecting points.

First, following the previous research, we shall treat destination image as a whole, and meeting meals as its part: as Um and Crompton (1990, cited in Mossberg and Kleppe (2005, p. 497)) state, "the image of a place as a pleasure destination is a gestalt". Treating meeting meals as a part of destination image is the fundamental connection between the two.

Second, we claim that meeting meals are linked to the destination image via the corresponding cuisine. It is also important to agree upon what constitutes a destination. In the context of our paper we will treat it in geographical terms and assume that destination is the market being promoted. It can be therefore a region, a country or a supra-region (a cluster of countries, such as Scandinavia). Such an approach allows us to talk about local or regional, national or supra-national cuisines, respectively. Thus meeting meals are connected to destination image via the cuisine of the place they reflect or should reflect.

Third, if, as Lin et al. (2011, p. 32) argue, "food has a strong connection to a place" and "the distinctiveness of food in relation to a place plays a significant role in a destination identity", then destination image is also simultaneously influenced by, and influences upon, the country-of-origin effect in connection to local products. Using local products in meeting meals has the potential to improve the overall impression of a destination, to raise awareness of its products and to enhance "the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that an individual has of a destination", i.e. the destination image. A favourable destination image leads, in turn, to positive product beliefs (R. Lee & Lockshin, 2011, p. 11), which has important implications for the joint work of tourism authorities and exporters. Thus, meeting meals are connected to destination image via the country-of-origin effect they may impose on the local products.

In previous research, studies about country-of-origin and product-country image on one hand, and destination image, on the other, have been studied separately despite the fact that they relate to very close concepts – country's image as perceived by consumers (R. Lee & Lockshin, 2011), and to date almost no studies exist that would connect product origin beliefs with a tourist destination image (Elliot, Papadopoulos, & Kim, 2011; R. Lee & Lockshin, 2011; Nadeau et al., 2008). Country-of-origin research domain deals mainly with how consumers start thinking of products based on 'made in' cues, especially when other information about the product is limited (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001), and countries with positive images gain advantage over those with poor images when it comes to the choice of competing products. Following (R. Lee & Lockshin, 2011), we suggest that destination image can play similar role in moulding customers' perceptions of local products, and vice versa, local food can be used as a tool to strengthen the destination image resulting into repeat visits and increased exports. Thus there is a two-way relationship between destination image and product origin. Therefore if and when meeting meals

symbolize the local culinary identity and familiarize customers with local products, chances for synergetic effects increase.

To sum up, we argue that meeting meals are connected to destination image by, first, being its part, second, by the cuisine of the place they display and third, as cuisine is inseparable from the place, by the origin effect they may (and we believe should) imply.

With the research question being a '*how*' question (how can meeting meals be used as an instrument to develop an appealing destination image) recommendations for stakeholders involved receive appropriate attention. Recommendations are based on three analytical tools: first, SWOT-analysis for West Sweden as a platform for food tourism and meeting meals, second, Five Aspects Meal Model (FAMM) applied to two types of meeting meals and third, the triangle model inferred from the work by Rappoport (2003).

FAMM is a model developed in Örebro University in Sweden and is well described by Gustafsson, Öström, Johansson, and Mossberg (2006). It was originally created for the restaurant sector of commercial meals. It follows the system approach suggesting that all the five factors (i.e. room, meeting, product, atmosphere and management control system) do contribute to the entirety of restaurant visit experience. All of the five have to be considered together and, at best, integrated in business practice. Although applied to a different kind of commercial meals, the model is considered relevant because it grasps all major aspects of eating-out occasion and is a useful guidance in analysis.

We will now briefly describe what each of the five factors stand for:
- *room*: a place where meal is served and consumed, servicescape
- *meeting*: encounter with the serving personnel and other guests and all the aspects related to human interaction
- *product*: the core meal – food and drinks
- *atmosphere*: the union of the three prime factors, the entirety of experience perceived by the five human senses
- *management control system*: administrative, economic and legal support systems, "invisible" to the customer but superior to all of the four factors.

Additionally, when it comes to *product* as a core of meeting meals, we will refer to the model inferred from Rappoport (2003). He suggests that eating experience can be described as a triangle of hedonism, nutritionism and moral choice. Hedonism means that food choice is guided by pleasure-seeking in food, nutritionism implies concerns about health benefits of food, and moral choice refers to restrictions imposed by either religion or self-chosen conditions (such as vegetarianism and alike). In a given meal, usually two aspects are compromised, but to balance all the three at once is a real challenge. We assume that by balancing all the three dimensions providers improve added value offered to customers and thus make their own product more competitive.

In sum, the suggested approach of viewing meeting meals as a part of destination image aims to link together two of these conceptions relying on the notion that meeting meals originate from, and belong to, certain cuisine and therefore communicate and represent it. To date such a bridge can be perceived as a novelty in research, partly because food aspects and destination image have usually been studied separately with 'either-or' focus, and partly, due to the newness of the very idea of meeting meals.

Methodology

The current study is a piece of qualitative research, seeking to gain a better understanding of not yet well defined conception; or, as some authors point it, "a problem which is not well understood" (Blumberg, Cooper, & Schindler, 2011, p. 256). Unlike in quantitative research, we are not measuring but rather *investigating* the notion under scrutiny. Following Berg (2009), "qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (Berg, 2009, p. 3). We are more interested in how human beings "make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles and so on" (Berg, 2009, p. 8).

We use the case study approach in order to reach our research objectives – namely, to describe and explain the idea of meeting meals and also provide some recommendations about its use. As Blumberg et al. (2011) state, case studies are especially appropriate when it comes to "why" and "how" research questions (Blumberg et al., 2011, p. 256). Thus we intend to gain the *holistic* knowledge and explanation, which case studies usually aim at (Berg, 2009, p. 318; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 117). As some scholars mention, distinction between quantitative and qualitative is not as important in case studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 116; 127), and the case study itself should be treated not as a method but rather as an approach to research, reflecting upon an interplay between "what is going on in reality, available theories, the case that gradually evolves, and the analytical framework" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 127).

The widely cited definition of a case study is the one by Yin: "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 1989, p. 23). Broader view on the problem, embeddedness of a phenomenon into a real-life context and the use of multiple data sources allow us to better shed light on the subject in question (Blumberg et al., 2011, p. 256).

Cited as both a requirement and as an advantage of case study method is its multiplicity of evidence sources. Blumberg et al. (2011, p. 258) suggest that most widely used and usually sufficient sources are interviews, documents and/or archives and observations. In the current study all the three sources were employed:

- Interviews: 3 semi-structured interviews with key people in charge for Food Tourism promotion both in West Sweden Tourist Board (respondent 1, R1) and 'Göteborg and Company' (respondent 2, R2), as well as one professional meeting meals organizer who is both running a company and lecturing at Kristianstad University in Sweden (respondent 3, R3). Interview guide was sent to respondents in advance and its compound version can be found in Appendix. Interviews were conducted separately; two of them being conducted in person, and one over the telephone, and all three transcribed verbatim. The duration ranged between 45 and 60 minutes.

- Observations and conversations with industry professionals. One of the richest sources of information was author's attendance of TUR Mässan – international travel and tourism trade fair, held annually in Gothenburg and being the largest industry professionals meeting point in Scandinavia. TUR Mässan 2012 took place during 22 – 25 March 2012 and has yielded 703 exhibitors, 36 100 visitors (of which 13 076 industry professionals), 79 countries and 342 journalists (Mässan, 2012). The author participated at the fair during the first two days, when it was open only for industry specialists and not to general public, and talked to many business practitioners, including Danish chef Jimmy Petersen; hotel chef Johan Liljeberg (at Radisson Blu Malmö) and the founder of 'Brain

Food for Meetings' for Radisson concept Erica Palmcrantz Aziz; IKON[1] project coordinator Jan Hognert; a chef from Sjömagasinet (one of the former Michelin-starred restaurants in Gothenburg) and representatives of *Visit Sweden*, national tourism agency.

The author has also taken part in Bohuslän brunch, served at the first day of the fair and has talked to representatives of local tourism organization *Södra Bohuslän Turism*, municipality of Tjörn, restaurant owners and chefs from Bohuslän archipelago.

Finally, the author has attended the mingle at West Sweden Tourist board and was able to talk to tourism industry and regional development practitioners and cooks of the restaurant which served the meal.

During all of the three occasions food was tasted, photographed and field notes taken.

- Documents therefore include: field notes from TUR Mässan, government publications available at TUR Mässan (National Strategies for developing tourism and agriculture, respectively), company publications and brochures (Brain Food for Meetings by Radisson Blu), press, magazines; web sources (national tourism portal *Visit Sweden*, *Sweden.se*, web pages of 'Göteborg and Company' and West Sweden Tourist board, blogs available at the portal *Sverige det Nya Matlandet*), photographs taken at TUR Mässan and the evening mingle, interview transcripts, TV programme "My planet. The kitchen of the Danish King".

The data was analyzed in accordance with guidelines by Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, p. 130). Findings were screened for emerging patterns and themes, and some agreement and disagreement aspects were detected in informants' disclosures. Pattern matching, explanation building and data triangulation were used as analytical tools, as well as instruments introduced in theoretical part of the paper: SWOT and FAMM models and Rappoport triangle.

The study is not without its limitations. First, as almost any case-study, it is very much context dependent and its results cannot be easily transferred to other cases (Blumberg et al., 2011, p. 256). However, they might serve as point of departure for the studies on similar topics. Second, the focus of this paper is on the 'supply side' of meeting meals, i.e. producers, and not consumers. It would be beneficial to study consumer preferences as well, and it can be a suggestion for future research. Research may also benefit from future investigations of cross-countries comparison of two or three Scandinavian culinary cultures, or from focusing on what we call "local" meeting meals and their dramaturgy. The current paper is the first modest attempt to attract attention to the new and very interesting area of research yet closely connected to business practice.

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[1] IKON (Interregional Cultural Experience Network) is a collaborative project consisting of municipalities, counties, regions, tourist organisations, museums, chateaux and university environments in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The aim of the project is to strengthen tourism in the region, increase competence and break down border obstacles. Source: http://www.interreg-oks.eu/en/Menu/Projects/Project+List+Kattegat/IKON

Results

This section is dedicated to the results of the study and contains both findings and data analysis. We start with the findings which represent a condensed version of collected data organized into several thematic sections under respective headlines. We further proceed to analysis of our findings, seeking to answer the research question and attain the study objectives.

1. Findings

Taken together, interviews, observations and documents enable us to form a comprehensive picture of contemporary state of Swedish cuisine and meeting meals as part of it. Information was condensed and organized into sections that follow. Several themes appear to be shared and agreed upon among all of our informants, while some aspects showed differences in judgement. Both are consecutively discussed below, with more explanation surrounding conflicting topics.

- **Driving forces and contemporary state of Nordic cuisine**. Following (Higman, 2012, p. 164), we define cuisine as "rules of cooking (what ingredients should be selected, how they should be combined, and what processes applied to them), the rules of eating (who should eat what, when and with whom), and the rules of food service (how dishes should be served and in what order)". To date, Nordic cuisine has become well-known abroad, mostly thanks to chefs winning prestigious culinary contests (Bocuse d'Or is one example) and bringing fame to their countries of origin. However, foreigners tend to perceive Scandinavia (or Nordic countries[1]) as a cluster and do not distinguish between the national cuisines. However, according to informants, regional differences exist even within one country. The degree of difference was a subjective issue, and informants have subjective opinions about it, stating however that common traits of Nordic cuisine are its naturalness and freshness. These characteristics are well articulated in numerous web-sources and publications in press. Chefs and restaurants are named as major driving forces to promote Nordic cuisine abroad. For example, the restaurant 'Noma' in Copenhagen was labeled as the best restaurant in the world for three consecutive years (Davies, 2012) by the reputable British 'Restaurant' magazine. Despite differences, however, the trend towards integration and further acquaintance with Nordic cuisine can be turned into strength and create spillover effects beneficial to all countries. Countries can exchange knowledge already accumulated: for example, Denmark has expertise and recognition in haute cuisine but Sweden has gone further in food tourism.

- **The dominate trend**. The current trend for Swedish, and Nordic at large, cuisine, can be called "back to roots", which means reliance on local produce, minimizing imports and trying to use seasonal products as far as possible, emphasis on natural taste of products, "letting them speak", using local ingredients mixed with influences from the outside world (which has at its base open-minded and geographically active Swedish people who travel a lot and bring influences and trends from newly discovered countries back home. The same pertains to Nordic chefs). Purity and simplicity are the characteristics. Traditional ways of cooking such as salting, smoking, drying, grilling, pickling and *surning*[2] are re-discovered and therefore traditional dishes with a modern twist are appreciated. The natural taste and freshness are emphasized, and artificial additives are frowned upon. In a popular TV programme Danish chef Claus Henriksen summarizes his

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[1] Scandinavia comprises Denmark, Norway and Sweden; with Finland and Iceland the cluster forms the Nordic countries. We use terms Scandinavian and Nordic cuisine interchangeably throughout the paper, because cross-country comparison falls beyond its scope.

[2] Surning is a Swedish word *sur* (sour) turned into English gerund. Surning is a way of conserving products by souring, pickling or fermenting them.

principle in the following way: "Cuisine should be tasty, elegant and honest. Do not disturb the ingredients, they will tell their story by themselves" (Chekmarev, 2012). The trend has been in place for the last 5 years approximately, and is still present, although avant-garde restaurants are forecasting a new, Asian-inspired influence, coming up (R2).

- **The core products**. When it comes to West Sweden representation, the main products are first and foremost fish and shellfish (according to R1, R2, observations and conversations at TUR Mässan and during the mingle). Depending on the public, event and country (if the event occurs outside Sweden) food might change slightly, but most often the selection of products does not vary because they intend to represent the best of the region: unique seafood of the highest quality. Fish and shellfish is what the coast and Gothenburg are known for: "We are the only ones who have this, this good kind of oysters, lobster, mussels and shrimp" (R1). However, the advantage of the region is also in its lakes, forests and soil, which in combination provide an abundance of locally sourced foodstuffs. In addition to that, West Sweden is working all the way along the chain – from local producers through distribution system to restaurants and finally customers (R1, R2). It makes it a good platform for developing food tourism in the region.

- **Key markets**. For Sweden domestic tourism is very strong and important. Beyond the country, key markets are located in Scandinavia and outer Europe: Denmark, Norway, UK, Germany, Northern Italy, France (R1, R2). These countries express more interest in Sweden and also have better accessibility due to direct flights to Stockholm and Gothenburg. United States is the very promising market, and links with this country are desirable.

- **Health awareness**. In connection with the naturalness of the cuisine and increased health awareness all around the world, the informants shared an opinion that Sweden is perceived among foreigners as a healthy country in general, and that Swedish lifestyle, given its attention to exercising combined with food of good quality and exposure to nature, is overall healthy. However, with regards to meeting meals and traditional dishes, disagreements arose about how seriously health concerns are taken into account by those who are responsible for the meal. The pro-healthy trend is started by Radisson Blu hotels, who offer *Brain Food for meetings*, a project aimed to educate customers by showcasing healthy food and debunk their misconceptions that healthy may be unappetizing or plain. Within Radisson chain, Scandinavia was the first to introduce this concept.

- **The role of design**. When it comes to food serving, design is always involved. Chefs' creativity is a unique advantage which makes food a very positive surprise for the customers (R1, R2, R3). Design pertains both to the way how food is served and displayed, but also, on some occasions, to the way of organizing surroundings – the room where meeting takes place can be modified (decorated, illuminated) in accordance with the meeting's theme. Moreover, meeting meals often do not involve a seated meal (sometimes only the main course). Often, it is a stand-up meal including small portions of various dishes which enables customers, first, to taste several dishes and second, as they are not bound to sit, to move freely, socialize and 'network' with colleagues or other guests. *Smörgåsbord*[1] is historically a Scandinavian invention initially meant to cater guests arriving from distant parts of the country, and its modern 'rebirth' has become a way to deal with guests' special needs, such as allergies and religious considerations

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[1] Smörgåsbord refers to a buffet meal, where participants are picking whatever they prefer from the entire selection offered. Interestingly, in Russian linguistic tradition this type of meal is called – literally – "Swedish table".

(especially given rising numbers of immigrant population of first and second generations in Scandinavia). Food is put on display, and it may, but not always does, reflect traditional dishes. Traditional dishes and everyday food should not be confused: for meeting meals traditional (original, authentic) recipes come in a "twisted" way – in small portions and new serving, to encourage elaborate appreciation of it: "It gets exclusive [emphasis], because you only get a little part and you have to really think about what it tastes" (R3). Thus traditional becomes exclusive, and it is not readily cooked in modern households nowadays; rather, it has come to be ceremonial meal. Ceremonial does not imply a four-course seating dinner, and most often it is not. Scandinavian countries were pioneers in this new, modern, out-of-the-box way of working with meeting meals. Customers are not passive eaters, they are curious about the food, its origin in terms of recipes and ingredients, they ask questions about the design and ideas that inspire such a design. They are positively surprised and express amazement: "What's made with love and taste and *känsla* [feeling], it tastes better" (R3).

- **A holistic view**. There is a shared agreement and explicit awareness about interlinkages between restaurant or meeting meals and a greater system of agriculture and farming. Tourism, food tourism and service sector present new opportunities for jobs generation and economy diversification, but cities rely on the countryside in terms of produce, and vice versa, in terms of tourists. Sustainability concerns were explicitly pronounced in each and every informant's speech.

At the same time, the informants belong to different professional groups, organizations and backgrounds, therefore several issues demonstrated that their opinions differ and reflect subjective experiences and perceptions. Several paradoxes were encountered, but they can all be explained:

- **Known vs. unknown Swedish cuisine**. On the one hand, as mentioned above, Sweden and Scandinavia at large have recently become famous for the fine dining segment and top class restaurants. At the same time, traditional Swedish food and everyday meal are hardly known to people outside the Scandinavian cluster, and stereotypes are narrow. To some degree IKEA has contributed to the formation of stereotypes regarding Swedish products through it's a) photo catalogues showcasing the kitchen and products, b) food stores adjunct to furniture malls and selling Swedish goods. Thus, when customers encounter well-served and well-designed meals at trade fairs for example, they are positively surprised.

- **Healthy vs. unhealthy meeting meals**. Some informants were certain about the dominance of pro-healthy trend in food and meals, pointing out that "a lot of chefs and restaurants are thinking about it now, especially when it comes to meetings and conferences" (R1). The entire concept *Brain Food for meetings* offered by Radisson Blu hotels is a manifestation of the trend. However, the author's own observations prove that meetings dishes contain a more than fair amount of cream and fat, and only the small serving portion is saving customer from over-eating. As confirmed by one of the informants, the paradox is in healthy lifestyle on one hand and traditional use of cream in foods, on the other (R3). In this case meetings can be a venue for experimenting and re-discovering traditional recipes with a healthier, lighter twist. Again, an overall perception of Sweden as a healthy country is a good platform for promoting healthier message through meeting meals and thus maintaining the image. One informant has noted that the peak of selectivity about the food choices has passed, and more concern is given now to sustainability and responsible agricultural practices rather than sharp fat reduction in a

dish (R2). What is healthy in a Swedish dish is naturalness and safety of its ingredients, stemming, again, from sustainable agriculture.

- **Seasonality: local vs. imported**. Due to geographical disposition and climatic conditions, Sweden has a short summer season and therefore seasonality of products is somewhat delayed. A good example is spring time, when nature is awakening, but nothing has grown yet. Some informants pointed out that seasonality pertains only to vegetables, fruits and herbs, while animal-derived food is available all the year round (R1, R2). Nevertheless, it does not eliminate the challenge of over-reliance on imports, especially given the rising numbers of people becoming vegetarians and vegans. The contradiction here is, on one hand, the desire to use as much local produce as possible and, on the other hand, its seasonal scarcity, which compels importing foods from other parts of the world (R3). One sign of this dilemma is visible in restaurants' efforts to study traditional ways of conserving foodstuffs, a way which save both the product and the local identity.

- **Local produce: expense vs. identity**. Some of the informants have pointed out that local produce can be also more expensive than shipped one, partly because of inefficiencies in distribution systems, but mostly because of economies of scale that outfights small producers (R1, R3). Therefore, often despite chefs' desire to use only local produce, the budget of an event does not allow them to do so. The same pertains to organically grown foods with a usually higher spot-price. It is both a challenge and a goal to include local producers into the value creating chain, an area where West Sweden is working a lot with. Here the encounter of service end of continuum and its agricultural origin is ever clear.

In sum, our findings give us a comprehensive picture of destination culinary image, including the current trends, core products and health awareness being the characteristics of the entire Scandinavian cluster, with differences among countries and regions visible through certain products which are used to market the smaller destination (country or region). Moreover, the contemporary state of Nordic cuisine reflects the connection between food as an expression of local identity, and holistic view shows clear understanding of food as a venue for agricultural and local development.

2. Analysis

This section of the paper has at its core the research question and study objectives, which serve as mark-ups in structuring the text. Based on our findings, we will first present explanation and description of the meeting meals idea and further on provide recommendations for their use in destination image formation.

To begin with, in order to familiarize the reader with the current situation at the level of our case, (or destination – the region of West Sweden), we condense our findings in the form of SWOT matrix. It is based on our own whole collection of data, i.e. interviews, observations and documents as well as secondary data such as publications in press, books and web. The purpose of SWOT is to present the destination's advantages and disadvantages as a platform for developing food tourism and meeting meals and to propose some recommendations for tourism authorities to address the negative sides.

TABLE 1
SWOT-Analysis for: Destination West Sweden as a Platform for Food Tourism and Meeting Meals

Strengths
- high quality of raw ingredients
- variety of sources (sea, lakes, forests)
- creative chefs
- strong design

Weaknesses
- climate conditions
- expensive local produce
- inefficiencies in distribution

Opportunities
- positive spill-over effects from neighbouring countries (image capital)
- positive surprise from clients
- strong base for pro-healthy movement

Threats
- accessibility of the countryside
- urban-rural imbalances
- food imports

We will now briefly comment on issues which have not been discussed in the previous Findings section.

High quality of raw ingredients and the variety of sources were well emphasized by our respondents, and quality also meaning safety and cleanliness: "That we are unique about!" (R1).

Climate conditions were indicated as weakness because, at the level of a destination, it poses a challenge when competing with other destinations for tourists – due to shorter summer season and lower temperatures, as well as delayed seasonality: "We have a very short growing season" (R3).

There are opportunities of positive image capital spill-over, because, as mentioned before, foreigners do not always distinguish between intra-Scandinavian cuisines, and the Nordic label is more convenient for them. Thus uniting efforts in familiarizing foreigners with Nordic cuisine is advisable.

Urban-rural imbalance exists due to the fact that Gothenburg is the start and often the end point for a business trip, while restaurants on the archipelago can offer distinguished dining experience as well. Package tours would be advantageous, but, as one informant mentions, "we are not there yet" (R2).

In order to overcome shortcomings of the current situation it is advised to pay attention to:
- supporting local producers through partnership agreements with restaurants and possibly regulating certain fraction or percentage of foods which restaurants (after a certain amount of annual turnover) should source locally only;
- involving countryside restaurants into meetings and events;
- encouraging chefs to further investigate traditional, authentic recipes of those times when cooking relied on one's backyard;
- encouraging cross-region and cross-country joint events in order to promote Nordic cuisine;
- improving availability of local produce to general public and extending the venues sold to tourist places;

– overall, either lowering the cost of raw ingredients or increasing added value of the final dish.

Some of these strategies are already pursued in West Sweden through projects involving local producers and a selection of restaurants. It is reasonable to assume that implementation is the key here, and not the sophisticated solution. For meeting meals, the efficiency of a restaurant system is essential: first, it is mostly restaurants and catering firms who cook and serve food at meetings, and second, both convention organizers and restaurants are in the same boat, because they both participate in tourists' overall destination image formation and local cuisine as its vital part.

However, at a closer look one can distinguish between three different kinds of meeting meals: outbound (Sweden goes abroad to promote itself as a destination), inbound (when tourists and travelers come to Sweden), and local (corporate events for Swedish customers by Swedish suppliers within the country). Local meeting meals will not be discussed in this paper because they are usually not concerned about destination image, but rather food is used as a tool to tell a story about a company or its brand, or linked to a particular event. By no means does it compromise the design and quality of the meal, quite the opposite – it might be that local customers are already more demanding and can serve as a platform for developing meals saleable abroad or to foreigners; but due to their local belonging they fall out of the scope of the paper.

Description and differences between outbound and inbound meals are summarized in the table below:

TABLE 2
Outbound and Inbound Meeting Meals

Criteria	Outbound Meeting Meals	Inbound Meeting Meals
Definition	Food and drinks served at professional meeting organized by political, national or international organization or a business company, and bearing a specific message in itself. A meeting constitutes physical presence of at least 10 people for at least half a day for business purposes	
Examples of events	Trade and tourism fairs, special events, combined Nordic initiative, exhibitions	Conferences, congresses, trade fairs, travel and tourism fairs, incentive trips, exhibitions, workshops
Purpose of the meal	To promote Sweden as a destination, to encourage visits to Sweden, to increase export of Swedish foodstuffs and by-products, to raise awareness about the country, its culture and cuisine, to trigger interest and curiosity. These are often PR meals	General rule: purpose depends on a meeting. Most often: to exceed customer expectation by surprise; to communicate local cuisine or the event's theme if applicable; to increase return visits; to "educate" customers; to provoke positive word-of-mouth as networking is always a part of any professional event; to raise awareness, familiarize public with local food and increase off-site restaurant visits and expenditure on them, cookbooks and products
Event scale and cuisine focus	Usually national level (therefore national food); supra-national (combined with other Scandinavian/Nordic countries)	Depending on the event, national or regional/local cuisine and food

Target audience	General public, prospective tourists, often leisure segment, prospective clients – legal entities and individuals.	Mostly business travelers, could be general public; both B2B and B2C.
Venue	The venue of the event: pavilions, halls, booths	Event's venue and/or off-site facilities, usually hotels and restaurants

As can be seen, both inbound and outbound meeting meals, despite differences, share one major characteristic – their PR nature (which does not automatically mean that meeting meals are identical to PR meals[1]). Both events outside Sweden and within it aim at increasing incoming tourism as well as revenues and jobs it generates. It is difficult to conclude which one succeeds better in reaching the goal, but it is plausible to suggest that inbound meeting meals possess greater potential and freedom, because the event occurs inside the country and the customer's experience is complete. Outbound meals, in contrast, only precede the encounter and can at most create the feeling and pre-image of a destination. Apart from that, Swedish "ambassadors" have limited freedom in altering location, design or interior of the meeting room.

As for the event scale and cuisine focus, we assume that for outbound meals national and supra-national level is more appropriate, as it is often more expensive to participate in such an event rather than to host one, therefore joint efforts and funding could be required. Thus what constitutes a destination is a country or a supra-region. Therefore, the food showcased reflects national (Swedish) or supra-national (Nordic) cuisine as part of the destination's image. For inbound meals, by contrast, the scale of event is assumed to be smaller, and thus destination area is shrinking, and food can be even more local (for example, at Bohuslän brunch the author was informed that one dish is cooked slightly differently by each family, and each claiming it has the authentic version). This assumption of what constitutes a destination in each type of meeting meals has its exceptions of course; for methodological purposes we divide them in accordance with the scale of the event.

Linking together the knowledge about modern Swedish cuisine and meeting meals as a PR tool to market the destination, we will now embark on a normative part of the paper, discussing what could and/or should be taken into account when it comes to serving meeting meals. The recommendations are based on SWOT analysis described above and Five Aspects Meals Model (FAMM) applied to meeting meals.

Given the variety of meetings in terms of purpose, format, customers and audiences, it would be impossible to suggest a universal scheme for using meal as a communication tool. The message that the food is sending depends largely on the purpose and theme of the occasion, and therefore would differ from meeting to meeting. In the following table we summarize those areas of consideration which seem to be important for offering a competitive meeting meal product.

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[1] PR meal refers to a meal intended to create, strengthen or change the image. It usually implies a special event with invited participants – key stakeholder groups. Although it is closely related to meeting meals idea, a meeting meal may often have a broader purpose (Mossberg & Svensson, 2009, p. 41; 86).

TABLE 3
FAMM model for Meeting Meals

Factor	Outbound Meeting Meals	Inbound Meeting Meals
Room	Venue choice is limited; Design the room: authentic, distinct, recognizable, memorable, inspiring Accessibility, capacity	Choice of the venue: conference hall/hotel/ restaurant; Design: lightning, color, music; Layout, capacity
Meeting	Crowdedness; presence of representatives; Communication is crucial	Script: beginning-middle-end (how/when do guests arrive, agenda or programme of the meeting, how they leave); Communication: the need to tell the story about the food; personnel knowledge; Food as a topic of conversation
Product	Similar to the room: distinct, memorable, recognizable, encouraging to try again, reflecting what's awaiting in the destination, designed; By-products: cookbooks, foodstuffs, utensils	The task is to offer superior product that will speak for itself. Superior: exceed expectations by positive surprise via: design/seasonal/choice options, etc; Consider 'fashion timing' factor: anticipate the trend
Atmosphere	Plus to the above: Timing: season (weather conditions and food available); Consistency of service – from day 1 to day N	Plus to the above: Timing: season (weather and food available); day of the week and time of the day; Theme of the event; Format – clearly understood
Management control	External support – negotiations with partners, organizations, governments, countries' representatives	Entirety of experience: meeting as a whole should be smooth and memorable up to a 'would recommend' level, but the food is remembered as its crucial part; Outstanding core – the *product*; Internal support system – HR management, economic, legal; External – networking with local producers, restaurants, state agencies

To begin with the *room*, for outbound meals the choice of the venue might be limited as it is likely that decision is made by non-Swedish party. Nevertheless, the recommendation is to adjust the room to the theme or purpose of the event by available means – décor, artifacts, clothing, give-aways, etc. The design should at best be distinct, recognizable and memorable, so that the customer remembers and further recalls the whole image. The same pertains to inbound meals, although in this case companies have, *ceteris paribus*, more flexibility in choosing a venue and are not bound to a conference hall. Practical considerations such as accessibility (the floor, stairs or elevator access, door locks, getting in and out), room layout (how easy it is to move within the room, if it is a stand-up meal or a seated one, how visible are other guests, where are the smoking areas if any), room capacity have to be carefully thought through.

When it comes to a *meeting*, communication about the meal is of paramount importance. For outbound meals, it is country representatives who are in charge of communicating the meaning and telling the story about the local food, therefore their continuous presence at the pavilion is essential. For inbound meals, to some degree food speaks for itself, but again, it is important that customers *receive* the message and apprehend this particular meal as local (Swedish or West-Swedish) and authentic. It is at this stage that customers are educated about the local culinary culture through observing and tasting the food; at best, food should become a topic of a conversation or an ice-breaking tool. Personnel are playing an indispensable role here, especially if the seated course is included. It is the personnel whom customers turn to with questions regarding origin of the food, recipes and means of cooking ("Customers are very interested in the origin, ask where food comes from. They ask a lot" – R3), and therefore waiters and sommeliers have to be well-prepared and knowledgeable. They are the ones who deliver the message about the food and cuisine. For inbound meals the script is also an issue to gain more attention. By script we mean the development of an event – how do guests arrive (together or not, at the same time or not), how are they welcomed, is there any special agenda, programme or perhaps speeches, how do they grasp when the meeting is over, how do they leave and whose responsibility it is to transport them. This dramaturgy is a part of management control system, but in a part related to the *meeting*, too.

The *product*, i.e. food and beverage, is the core of the meeting meals and the platform for competition. By creating the superior product can the company (or a network of agents) advance in pursuing the major goal – marketing the destination. Superior product implies the competitive product which exceeds customers' expectations by a positive surprise. Competitive product is the one which offers a better ratio of added value to price in relation to competitors. By added value we mean the compound benefits of the product, and by price – its cost.

Balancing the ratio added value / price is at the essence of competitiveness, and professionals involved in meeting meals should work on it on a daily basis. Chefs and tourism agents possess abundant knowledge about their customers and what constitutes added value for them. For the purpose of this paper we suggest to have a look at the triangle model described by Rappoport (2003). We shall remind to readers that it implies that eating experience can be viewed as a triangle of hedonism, nutritionism and moral choice, meaning, respectively, pleasure seeking, health benefits of food, and restrictions imposed by either religion or self-choice (vegetarianism is one example). In a given meal, usually two aspects are compromised, but to balance all the three simultaneously is quite a challenging task.

In application to meeting meals this model seems to be useful in answering the question 'what constitutes added value for the customer', - thus being the base for a competitive product. In other words, what kind of value the product has to offer in terms of hedonism, nutritionism and moral choice in order to be successful.
Bearing in mind our findings related to Swedish cuisine and current trends, some recommendations follow.

Starting with hedonism, a meal should be appealing to human senses, which involves work on both display and taste. Meeting meals is the food on display, and has to be well-designed and elaborately served, usually in small portions which gives an experience of exclusivity. Small portions also allow participants to taste several various dishes, and to appreciate each of them. If possible, ingredients should be locally sourced and preferably be in season, but the general rule is to reflect the message of the meeting. In absence of a theme in a meeting food should reflect local culinary heritage and be apprehended as authentic.

Nutritionism implies that food is balanced – both in major nutrients but also in a way that different dishes do not conflict with each other. Healthier, lighter options should be considered and when it comes to knowledge-intensive meetings, complex carbohydrates should be preferred to sugars and saturated fat avoided where possible.

Moral choice is perhaps the most challenging dimension, because it involves dealing with customers with special needs, i.e. those who impose medical (allergic, intolerant, diabetic, etc), religious or self-chosen restrictions on menu. Thus organizers should be prepared to either offer options for such guests or, if their amount is significant, to negotiate menu before the meeting.

Striking the balance among all of the three dimensions is a challenge for those in charge of meeting meals; nevertheless, keeping them in mind as guidelines for creating added value could be helpful in planning, cooking and serving processes.

Coming back to what was said about the superior product, we repeat that in our view, it is the one which exceeds customers' expectations by surprising them in a positive way. The important notice here is a factor of time. Modern cuisine has adopted fashion similar to haute couture, where themes follow each other, forgotten trends return reborn, and the process is never stable (Zimin, 2011). Thus surprise (that said, competitive edge) lies in proactivity – serving today what will become popular tomorrow. The current trend 'back to roots' still surprises many foreigners as they encounter Nordic cuisine, but to those who are already familiar with it, surprise no longer exists. To some extent it pertains to what we labeled as local meeting meals, where customers know in advance the product they order and will be offered. It secures customer base for some time, but, as in any other business, the environment is changing and so does the competitive field. In relation to cuisine, trends resemble the fashion world – they replace each other, and to be in demand business has to either be on the same wavelength, or to be one step ahead, which Scandinavia has already successfully been doing in several areas of economy, sustainability and research.

When it comes to by-products, we should note here what we introduced as a country-of-origin effect as one medium of linking together the destination image and meeting meals. As some scholars suggest, "a key managerial implication is that exporters and tourism authorities should cooperate to harness a country's destination image for exports" (R. Lee & Lockshin, 2011, p. 7), because a two-way relationship exists between the destination image and the 'origin effect'. On one hand, the favorable country image "is argued to have a positive effect on the export of products and services" (Nadeau et al., 2008, p. 90); on the other, the quality of products affects the intention to visit (ibid). Thus the competitive meeting meal product is equally important for both inbound and outbound initiatives.

Atmosphere relies on three pillars stated above – the room, the meeting and the product. In addition to that it is suggested to deliberately choose the timing in terms of season, month, day(s) of the week and time of the day. Brunch is different from an evening meal, and Friday mood is different from Monday's, and the first day of the trade fair has probably different flair comparing to the last day. That is why it is also important to communicate the format of the meeting, which might be related to the "script". To feel comfortable, guests need to be aware of the programme, dress codes, duration and purpose or theme of the meeting.

Finally, *management control system* is the one which makes the event possible to occur. It would be a far ambitious task to provide recommendations on how to build the whole support system, but there are some aspects which cannot be overlooked. First, an outstanding core product – as main element of competitive advantage; second – internal support system in terms of personnel management, economic, financial and legal aspects; third – external support which might be

more important for outbound meals. It implies networking with partner organizations, government officials, host and partner countries' representatives and necessary negotiations prior to the event. For inbound meals external support system includes collaboration with local producers, distributors and transport companies, chefs and restaurants and communication with end users. The overall objective (and evaluation criteria) for management control can be based on achievement of customer experience of a meeting as a whole as memorable, smooth and complete experience up to a level 'would recommend', with the food remembered as its immanent part.

To sum up, recommendations presented here suggest that meeting meals should at best exceed customers' expectations by creating an extra value in the product offering. Broadly, food should be apprehended as special (bearing some message, in our case – reflecting the destination) and appreciated by the customer. Our findings show that at present surprise exists because customers, especially foreigners, do not expect their meeting meals to be served in such a graceful manner. It is reasonable to propose that over some time, as customers get better educated, they may start to 'pull' a qualified meeting meal product from the market, which in turn will lead to increased expenditure and exit for some firms. Competitive players (most probably not those who manipulate with price advantage) will stay in game, and over time market price will stabilize (pioneers like Radisson can already now declare that organic foodstuffs are not more expensive than conventional ones). Thus competitive advantage will be still hidden in added value creation, with value being customer-dependent and changing over time together with, not least, culinary fashion trends. Therefore, balancing the triangle of hedonism, nutritionism and moral choice in meals would remain an elusive dish to cook.

Finally, the importance of communication for meetings cannot be overestimated. As our findings indicate, customers do not expect that food might be local and thus may not apprehend it as such. To deliver the message is of utmost importance. Restaurants, by virtue of positioning, are secured from misunderstanding: if tourists want to try local food, they will probably choose the local restaurant (more precisely, the one positioning itself as such). With meetings positioning is not that clear, which means that the story of the food is yet to be told.

Discussion

Throughout the paper, starting from theoretical overview through the choice of study approach up to this point, we have argued that a system approach and a broader context should be applied to a discussion of food aspects in travel, due to complex economical and cultural interlinkages food has with other aspects of life. Having answered the research question, we now embark on a more macro-level discussion addressing the relativity of a destination concept, as well as some conflicting areas that appeared in our findings.

According to Belasco (2005, p. 220), cuisine as "a set of ideas, images, and values … can be "read" just like any other cultural "text". Bearing this in mind, we look at contemporary Swedish (and Nordic) cuisine as a social and cultural establishment that can be 'deciphered' and understood in a broader context.

As we assumed in the beginning of the paper that meeting meals are connected to destination image, *inter alia*, via cuisine they showcase, we first need to understand the relative nature of any attempt to capture cuisine with geographical boundaries and thus the relativity of the very idea of a destination. In this paper we assumed simply that destination would be a market promoted – a region, a country, a number of countries. But this geographically-bound assumption is of course a simplification. Linking food and food culture to their geographical origin can be seen at any possible scale: we call some products, dishes and recipes 'traditional' *and* local (Gothenburg, Bohuslän, Marstrand, etc.), regional (West Swedish), national (Swedish) or supra-national (such as Scandinavian or Nordic). To some degree, it is an attempt to structure the reality around us, but also, when it comes to marketing, to build up identity and make the product saleable and desirable as authentic – i.e. not readily obtainable elsewhere. Obviously, a generic product and a branded product cannot boast the same level of customer appeal, therefore since hailed as authentic – *ceteris paribus* – makes the customer believe it truly is. Higman (2012) states clearly that "the temptation to conjure something from nothing became increasingly compelling in the competitive world of modern tourism. So too did ethnic cuisines…" (Higman, 2012, p. 163).

Especially evident here is the construct of national cuisines: "National cuisines do not really exist but are merely constructs built up from regional cuisines" (Higman, 2012, p. 188). Spang (1999) points out that cuisines are "imagined communities that may (but not necessarily) overlap with the imagined communities known as nations" (Spang, 1999, p. 85). For most of the history, "regions" were elements of governance, not states, and they relied on available resources and shared culinary habits and therefore formed some sort of localized identity. Nationalism as a way of segregating the world space has only become dominant in the late XIX century, and is therefore a recent form of social and cultural identification (Higman, 2012, p. 162). This may partly explain why our informants found it difficult to describe Swedish cuisine, especially "traditional Swedish cuisine". We can even suppose that each of them has his or her own image of it, and of Nordic cuisine as well (an ever aggregated version of culinary identity), which explains inconsistency in estimates regarding familiarity with it abroad, - what we call 'known versus unknown' cuisine in our findings. Therefore, one should bear in mind that although widely used, the geographical labels are most often constructs artificially created, not least following economic rationale: "…menu language and restaurant service are technologies as well: more often than not, they are means by which geographical difference comes to be articulated as a matter of cuisine" (Spang, 1999, p. 85). All in all, this polemic might be of interest to industry professionals rather than customers: for tourists on holiday or a business trip the food is "…never a food of a country, but the foods of a *place*" (Higman, 2012, p. 188).

Next, in Swedish context issues of 'seasonal but imported' and 'seasonal and local' take on a special meaning. The advent of Nordic cuisine onto European culinary arena is an appearance deserving thoughtful scrutiny, mainly because of geographical and climatic conditions in these countries. It is not surprising for France, Italy or Mediterranean regions to boast their food and meal culture, as they have at their disposal an abundant variety of ingredients almost all the year round. It is not the case for Sweden due to its short summers and cold winters. However, behind this stereotypical way of thinking lay the issues of abundance and scarcity as prerequisites for any cuisine: "national cuisines are equally likely to develop in the midst of plenty and in the midst of shortage (perhaps with contrasting … culinary styles)" (Higman, 2012, p. 169). What is demarcating here is the acceptance of what to consider edible: "It is the willingness to extend the variety of what is eaten that is crucial" (ibid.). One study gives an example of how inhabitants of northern Sweden perceive the bounty of nature: "It was a myth that only a few things could be planted", - pointing to the fact that the midnight sun makes vegetables and berries tasty and rich in vitamins (Fjellström & Göranzon, 2000, p. 243). Again, the relativity of what we as humans consider abundant or scarce, rich or poor, necessary or sufficient, a) depends on an alternative comparison and b) produces subjective estimates. Thus one of the informants pointed out that seasonality only pertains to fruit and vegetables, while animal derived food is available all year round, and another informant complained that in the midst of spring there is nothing spring-signifying available within the region. What implications may this paradox have for cuisine as a point of departure for meeting meals? Probably the fact that for Sweden and Nordic countries exposure to hardship of planting and cultivating has resulted in, first, conscious and earnest appreciation of nature and, second, creativity in culinary styles and ways of treating the ingredients available. Some authors even say that "Swedish identity is based on a specific relationship with nature [to the point that] nature … became a symbol for 'swedishness'" (Fjellström & Göranzon, 2000, p. 242). Out of this creativity and environmental respect comes the distinct style which has earned Scandinavia a deserved space on the European culinary map. In absence of seasonal spring ingredients chefs and designers strive to create a feeling of spring with help of available means and their outstanding creativity: "You have to find the way of getting to that feeling without using products from other parts of the world. It's all the way of dreaming of what is coming up" (R3).

Another area of seemingly conflicting findings is the continuum 'healthy – unhealthy' food. The obvious contradiction here is, on one hand, high awareness of a healthy lifestyle and engagement into home cooking alongside with working out routine and, on the other hand, indulgence and disregard evident in ponderous use of cream, fat and sugar in cooking. As our informants pointed out, Sweden is perceived as a healthy nation at large, which gives it a choice to either strengthen this image or to ruin it, and meeting meals is only one way of doing it. A probable explanation could be that on a national average Sweden is a truly healthy country, but everyday food choices should be broken down to a household or individual as a unit of analysis. At this level the significance of nutritionism would depend on each and every decision maker, be it a family member, a chef or a client choosing which dish to order. Consciousness of self and self-awareness in regards to food are the factors shaping each other's identity. Scandinavian "back to roots" trend reflects this identity to some degree; apparently, chefs are awakening and starting to treat meeting clients with much greater respect to their health through the food they serve.

In addition to the issues stated, one cannot disregard the current context in which the cuisine is also the part of national economy. The new strategy (*Sverige – det nya matlandet*) issued by the Ministry of Agriculture aims to turn Sweden into a new food country. The objective is complex, and food tourism is only one part of reaching the goal, but quite as much the part of the whole. By the same token, meeting meals is only a part in promoting food tourism, albeit influenced by, and influencing on, the whole. The system approach should be taken when analyzing food and its numerous meanings for the society and economy. Meeting meals can serve as a new venue for

marketing the destination and making its cuisine well-known abroad, and positive spill-over effects include increase in inflow of tourists (both leisure and business), increase in Swedish exports of foodstuffs and cookbooks, off-site expenditure in restaurants and shops, generation of jobs, as well as indirectly affected living countryside, local producers and agricultural self-sufficiency. Meal is only one part of the meeting, but a very powerful part which can improve or deteriorate the entire experience; it should be treated and analyzed within the context of the whole. Likewise, meeting meals belong to a greater system of commercial meals in the service sector of economy, and do not exist in vacuum. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and travelers perceive the destination in its entirety, therefore the country which boasts award-winning chefs and the city with four Michelin-starred restaurants should devote a good deal of thought to the issue of culinary experiences they prepare for the most revenue-generating customer segment.

Conclusion

The current paper is an explorative case study dedicated to a new and very interesting area of research and increasingly business practice – meeting meals as a tool for communicating destination image. The paper seeks to make a step forward in bridging several gaps in existing research: the neglect of food aspects in business (rather than leisure) travel, the underestimation of food in studies devoted to destination image and, by showcasing a Swedish case, the over-reliance of meetings industry literature on Northern American examples.

The study was conducted in Gothenburg, Sweden, and its prime focus is on the West Sweden region; however, national and supra-national cuisines as reflections of respective destinations, are also discussed.

We assume that meeting meals are connected to the destination image via, first, representation of the cuisine of the place, second, the country-of-origin effect they have for local products and, fundamentally, being a part of the whole. The study has two major objectives; first, to describe and explain meeting meals as a part of destination image. Due to the explorative nature of the study, the results are mostly descriptive: two types of meeting meals – inbound and outbound – are described and differences between them explained. The second objective concerns suggesting recommendations on how meeting meals can be used as a tool to enhance destination's image. Recommendations are based on Five Aspects Meal Model and Rappoport triangle. It is suggested that by offering a product which exceeds customer expectations by a) competitive core, i.e. being balanced along hedonic, nutritious and moral dimensions and b) positive surprise usually stemming from outstanding design, meeting meals organizers can enhance the destination image of a corresponding place, be it a region, a country or a supra-region.

Beyond that, a broader perspective upon meeting meals, commercial meals and food tourism at large is discussed. For modern Swedish economy tourism sector offers great opportunities of jobs creation, regional development and economic diversification and is recognized as an important part of national strategy aiming at making Sweden a new "food country". Meeting meals can be viewed as one element of a much larger system of national economy, but they also offer many possibilities for reaching larger audiences and promoting a country's culinary advancement thereby enhancing the destination image. Similar to the challenge of locating meeting meals in existing research due to the interdisciplinarity of the subject are their complex interlinkages with a whole system of tourism, agriculture, economic development and respective stakeholders. Being a part of the whole, meeting meals can be investigated closely as a venue for generating economic benefits, but never isolated from a broader context of economy and culinary fashion they evolve in and belong to.

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Appendix I

Interview Guide

What is the current state of modern Swedish cuisine? What is the difference from other Scandinavian countries? What are the major trends and influences? Where is modern Swedish cuisine moving?

Where is Sweden on European cuisine map? Is it well known outside Scandinavia? Who are the driving forces behind its promotion (chefs, restaurants, celebrities, authorities)?

What is the perception of Swedish food among the foreigners? What is Sweden known for?

What is considered traditional by Swedes/chefs/foreigners? What is traditional Swedish food? Is it at least sometimes served at meetings?

If there are regional differences, how would you describe West-Swedish food?

To your knowledge, outside Sweden, which other countries work with food tourism? Is there any benchmark that Sweden is following or looking at?

To your knowledge, outside Sweden, do other countries working with meeting meals? If yes, to what purpose?

What projects are currently running related to food/food tourism/meeting meals? What are the vision, obstacles, challenges? Who is involved in promotion? What is the role of *Göteborg and Co* in it? Is there cooperation with Västra Götalandregionen?

What does *Mathuvudstaden* mean for Gothenburg?

Are there differences between Gothenburg and the region (Västra Götaltand) when it comes to food tourism promotion?

How important is business tourism to Gothenburg? What are the differences between business and leisure tourists when it comes to food (serving meals, off-site expenditure, eating out patterns, etc)?

What kind of meetings are you working with? (public, purpose, industry, regular/occasional)

Are there any thoughts, concerns or actions about doing something unusual for meals when there are meetings?

For a given meeting, how are meals usually organized and who are the main stakeholders involved? Who are the main decision makers? Who is involved in menu planning? To which professional occupations do those people belong?

How is it decided what (which dishes) to serve? Is there any theme or headline for the food served? If yes, what could it be (or previous examples)?

Do you consider it important to deliver messages about the region or a country through food to international guests? To locals? Why?

What is the idea behind the food – does it symbolize anything special? Does it change depending on either public or event or other factors? If the food "speaks", then what does it say?

Is there any design involved in meals preparation and serving? If yes, where does inspiration come from?

Does it change from everyday meals?

Where the food comes from – ingredients and recipes? How important are raw ingredients? Their origin? Any requirements for raw ingredients?

How should the customer apprehend the meal, if at all? Have you ever received any feedback on food served? If yes, what were the reflections?

If guests are Swedish/Scandinavian/European/international/a mixture, how does that affect the way food is selected, prepared and served? Does the purpose of the meal change? Does its message change?

Do customers (guests or organizers) demand a novelty in food or are they surprised when it is well-presented? Are clients surprised when they see more than coffee with buns? Do you think they remember the food?

After the event, how do you evaluate if food was successful or unpopular?

Are there any recent concerns about healthy trends? Also, how is menu altered when medical/religious/self-chosen constraints are posed by the guests?

Appendix II

Manifesto for the New Nordic Cuisine[1]

As Nordic chefs we find that the time has now come for us to create a New Nordic Kitchen, which in virtue of its good taste and special character compares favourable with the standard of the greatest kitchens of the world.

The aims of New Nordic Cuisine are:

1. To express the purity, freshness, simplicity and ethics we wish to associate with our region.

2. To reflect the changing of the seasons in the meals we make.

3. To base our cooking on ingredients and produce whose characteristics are particularly excellent in our climates, landscapes and waters.

4. To combine the demand for good taste with modern knowledge of health and well-being.

5. To promote Nordic products and the variety of Nordic producers – and to spread the word about their underlying cultures.

6. To promote animal welfare and a sound production process in our seas, on our farmland and in the wild.

7. To develop potentially new applications of traditional Nordic food products.

8. To combine the best in Nordic cookery and culinary traditions with impulses from abroad.

9. To combine local self-sufficiency with regional sharing of high-quality products.

10. To join forces with consumer representatives, other cooking craftsmen, agriculture, the fishing, food , retail and wholesale industries, researchers, teachers, politicians and authorities on this project for the benefit and advantage of everyone in the Nordic countries.

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[1] Retrieved from http://nynordiskmad.org/om-nnm-ii/koeksmanifestet/om00/