

# Food tourism as a way of integration into the Swedish labor market?

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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### Keywords

Tourism, local food production, integration, business models

### Background and objective

The tourism industry is a sector with a large income and is expected to continue its expansion both in Sweden as well as internationally. The last couple of years have seen the total consumption within the tourism industry amount to 270 billion SEK. Due to Sweden's rich natural and cultural values, attractive and clean nature and well-functioning cities, growth is expected. However, not all parts of the country partake in the expansion at the same rate.

In Gothenburg, its north-eastern districts receive almost every second newly-immigrated resident, while the pressing housing shortage locks in a familiar pattern of poor living conditions, ill health and dire future outlooks (cf. Göteborg stad and SCB, 2016). Gothenburg continues to be a socio-economically segregated city, while its northern districts are in strong need of enhanced development to increase their level of self-sufficiency and of breaking negative patterns (Tillväxtverket, 2016). At the same time, there are great assets vested in the area in the form of agricultural landscapes, attractive natural settings and a strong cultural life with influences from all over the world (cf. Dymitrow and Halfacree, 2018; Olsson, 2018).

To this background, this presentation looks into whether socio-economic problems inherent of a segregated city can be partly solved by engaging in the growing tourism sector and by focusing on food production, sustainable tourism, and the natural and cultural advantages of

the area. This is done by investigating an ongoing municipal sustainability project (Stadslandet) in the north-eastern areas of Gothenburg. Stadslandet is an interdisciplinary project involving several different municipal authorities, research institutions and non-governmental organizations, with the intent to increase the areas sense of involvement and to strengthen sustainable business development within: food production, tourism, green business and climate-smart logistics platforms and networks for cooperation. The aim of this presentation is to explore how social inclusion and labor market integration can be facilitated through tourism and food.

### Theoretical framework

Participation of local people is an oft agreed upon criterion and an essential condition for development and sustainability of any „new“ form of tourism (Poon, 1994). Yet, it is the combination of the two words „local“ and „participation“ that is paradoxically implying that local residents are being so often left outside of the planning, decision-making and managing of tourist development. Indeed, many have failed to understand the social structures that affect the outcome of participation (Mowforth and Munt, 2009). This issue is important to have in mind, when we truly wish to embrace and develop local food production and tourism in the social setting of socio-economically challenged districts, such as the north-eastern parts of Gothenburg.

Using food tourism as an integration strategy, however, can be problematic since a focus on food may also breed stereotypes about immigrants („immigrants are usually farmers, so the project is perfect for them“) or suspicion („if there's intrinsic knowledge amongst migrants,

why do we use Swedish educators?"), and thus attract negative media attention. Moreover, low levels of trust in municipal authorities in the areas of deployment can create difficulties of implementation and reluctance among key actors in the area (Hansson, 2018).

This presentation takes in both tracks into account: the benefits of food tourism and the area's many assets, but also the challenges these assets may entail due to the specific socio-economic characteristics of the area.

### Method

This presentation reflects primarily the adopted working method of Stadslandet, which is interaction and involvement through identification of individuals, companies, organizations and social networks and in a dynamic, ongoing process, developing and organizing educational workshops and network meetings. The method is continuously developed through the experiences made during the development process and through the needs and demands of the participants.

In the case of Stadslandet, untangling the controversy and assessment of the project's sustainability agenda requires a systematic, evidence-based methodological effort using socially approved methods. In order to acquire a complex view of the project, both material and conceptual investigation need to be conducted. By conducting a multi-aspectual evaluation of Stadslandet from different viewpoints the presentation opens up for a discussion whether its innovative take on integration and involvement through tourism and local food production will be successful and is applicable on a larger scale.

### Findings and research implications

The project has been going on since January 2017 and has, as many projects, had an initial phase where the partners have been focusing on how to best cooperate in order to reach the set goals. Several initiatives have been taken with individuals who want to start producing food in an urban setting and a process of gathering the actors in the area who want to work with tourism and local food production. In March 2018 an inspiration day for local and sustainable food was organized, which attracted 130 participants with different backgrounds and experiences. In May 2018 a workshop was held to gather those who work with or are in-

terested in working with sustainable tourism. Several of the participants have an immigrant background and are very interested in developing local sustainable tourism by taking advantage of both the multicultural identity of the area and its peri-urban settings.

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