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Abstract

Gastronomic trails are a growing phenomenon in the context of gastronomic tourism. Gastronomic trails provide guidance for exploring foodscapes (Hall and Gössling 2016) or culinary terroirs (Croce and Perri 2010), and are therefore considered effective means for enhancing tourist experiences. With the growth in understandings of gastronomic tourism, trails have also been used as an important tourism development tool (Plummer et al. 2005; Bruwer 2003; Boyne et al. 2002). These trails are typically themed around different types of food or beverages. Examples of such trails include 'Craft Beer Trails', 'Wine Trails', 'Chocolate Routes', or 'Cheese Trails'.

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GASTRONOMIC TRAILS AS SERVICE ECOSYSTEMS

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Abstract

Trails with a gastronomic theme present a popular tool for regional tourism development as they market destinations/products/experiences in a gastronomy-scape or touristic terroir. They represent networks or clusters of attractions/destinations unified under a distinct gastronomic theme such as beer, wine, or cheese.

Most research addressing gastronomic trails has centered on either understanding supplier networks or understanding the culinary tourist. However, there is lack of research conceptualizing gastronomic trails as a socio-material context of value co-creation, emphasizing the involvement of multiple actors and material resources in creating the themed experience for the traveller. This leads to problems defining the value of themed routes for the businesses as well as the tourist. This chapter reviews literature to conceptualize the gastronomic trail as a service ecosystem, resulting in consideration of relevant actors, resources and institutional arrangements in creating the themed trail experience.

The ecosystem perspective establishes value co-creation dynamics and acknowledges the interplay of different peripheral actors such as marketers, government and social influencers that form part of the service ecosystem. The suggested conceptualization of a gastronomic trail informs theoretical research and experiential marketing practice to enhance value for the focal actors within the service ecosystem.

Keywords – Gastronomy, Service Ecosystem, Food and Wine Trails, Value Co-creation, Themed Trails, Wine Route

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Introduction

Gastronomic trails are a growing phenomenon in the context of gastronomic tourism. Gastronomic trails provide guidance for exploring foodscapes (Hall and Gössling 2016) or culinary terroirs (Croce and Perri 2010) and are therefore considered effective means for enhancing tourist experiences. With the growth in understandings of gastronomic tourism, trails have also been used as an important tourism development tool (Plummer et al. 2005; Bruwer 2003; Boyne et al. 2002). These trails are typically themed around different types of food or beverages. Examples of such trails include Craft Beer Trails, Wine Trails, Chocolate Routes or Cheese Trails.

Gastronomic trails are conceptualized as either itinerary products (Mason and O'Mahony 2007) or networks of regional producers (Brás et al. 2010). Hence, research addressing gastronomic trails has centered on either understanding the involved supplier networks from a management perspective (Hall et al. 2005; Broadway 2017; Prat Forga and Cànoves Valiente 2012; Brás et al. 2010) or understanding the gastronomic tourist (Peter and Hannele, 2014; Mason and O'Mahony, 2007). As the sustainability and longevity of the gastronomic trail depends on the involvement and value creation by and for multiple stakeholders including the producers, regional associations, tourism authorities as well as the tourists, these trails should be conceptualized from a service ecosystem perspective. Consequently, this chapter reviews literature to conceptualize gastronomic trails from a service dominant logic perspective (Vargo and Lusch 2004) that allows to portray these trails as a dynamic service ecosystem (Vargo and Lusch 2012), which results in considerations of relevant actors or stakeholders and tourists, resources that actors use to create value and institutional arrangements that guide them.

This ecosystem perspective forwarded by the service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2006) establishes the interplay of different actors that form part of the value co-creation processes on gastronomic trails. The suggested conceptualization of a gastronomic trail not only informs theoretical research but also experience marketing practice and provides direction to enhance value for the gastronomic tourist.

Gastronomic Trails

Gastronomic tourism is linked to concepts of local, rural, tradition and history, most often implying a geographic focus in its conceptualization (Getz and Brown 2006). Croce and Perri (2010) discuss the importance of 'terroir' which encapsulates milieu (common heritage and collective identity), environment and the landscape. The terroir provides a setting for tourists to interpret and perform leisure activities. The geographic proximity of various food and beverage producers induces both production based tourism as well as consumption based tourism (Boyne et al. 2002) whereby tourists enjoy participating or witnessing gastronomic activities along with consuming these products. For the tourist, exploring these food and beverage producing regions allows them to visit several suppliers, savoring a greater diversity of foods/beverages than during a regular touristic experience. Local producer networks or destination marketing bodies can capitalize on the

geographical proximity of different agro-alimentary producers along with the tourists' interests in exploring the 'terroir' through the design of trails that guide tourists' agronomic, physical, social and cultural understanding of the terroir and movement within it.

Food producers and marketers can align themselves geographically as well as economically and form regional networks by producing a trail. Gastronomic trails are conceptualized as suppliers working together to divide marketing costs, share knowledge and achieve economies of aggregation (Mason and O'Mahony 2007; Broadway 2017). Their collaboration usually culminates in the formation of an association. Apart from maintaining relationships through collaboration events and programs and representing the suppliers vis-à-vis the government, the task of an association is also co-marketing (Hall and Gössling 2016). The association representing the trail and its businesses creates a single marketing strategy for all the member producers in the local geographic region and collects resources towards the collateral required (Bruwer 2003; Brás et al. 2010; Plummer et al. 2005). To be able to promote the various businesses under one umbrella, a theme is selected that helps consumers make sense of the diverse offerings. A specific themed trail is hence envisaged as a strategy for co-marketing various member producers in a specific geographic region. The common theme is used for all promotional efforts; for instance, collateral branded with the theme, such as maps and brochures for the trail, is circulated through visitor information centre as well as by the producers themselves (Broadway 2017; Hojman and Hunter-Jones 2012).

Mason and O'Mahony (2007) suggest that food and wine trails are more likely to succeed if they offer a meaningful experience to the culinary tourist. Most tourists are looking for food and beverage experiences to form a connection with regional produce, history and country living (Croce and Perri 2010). Themes can provide the necessary structure and inspiration to make their regional experiences meaningful (Pine and Gilmore 1998). Hence, for the gastronomic tourist, trails are conceived as gastronomic experiences built around a theme that requires them to travel on a particular touring route pertaining to a particular region. This themed movement (MacLeod 2016; Timothy and Boyd 2014) is an important part of how gastronomic experiences are appropriated within a particular region. The interpretation and imagination triggered by the theme as well as the geography of the route helps tourists decide which producers to visit and which direction to take, ultimately influencing the quality of their experience.

According to existing literature, the gastronomic trail is a valuable marketing strategy in two ways. First, it is an important marketing tool connecting the different stakeholders/suppliers/actors, leading to marketing efficiencies. Various studies on wine tourism (Brás et al. 2010; Xu et al. 2016b) and food trails (Broadway 2017) align with the idea that trails allow suppliers to come together and engage in co-marketing. Second, trail marketing is a way of ordering or structuring a thematic narrative through which tourists can meaningfully interact with space (MacLeod 2016). The gastronomic trail enables tourists to form a connection with the theme of gastronomy by exposing them to the 'terroir', sights, sounds and smells that instigate imaginaries and interpretations of the theme (Mason and O'Mahony 2007; Croce and Perri 2010). Further, trail

marketing connects geography and landscape with the gastronomic theme. Figure 20.1 further illustrates this conceptualization of the gastronomic trail as a marketing tool that forges connections between the theme, space and actor.

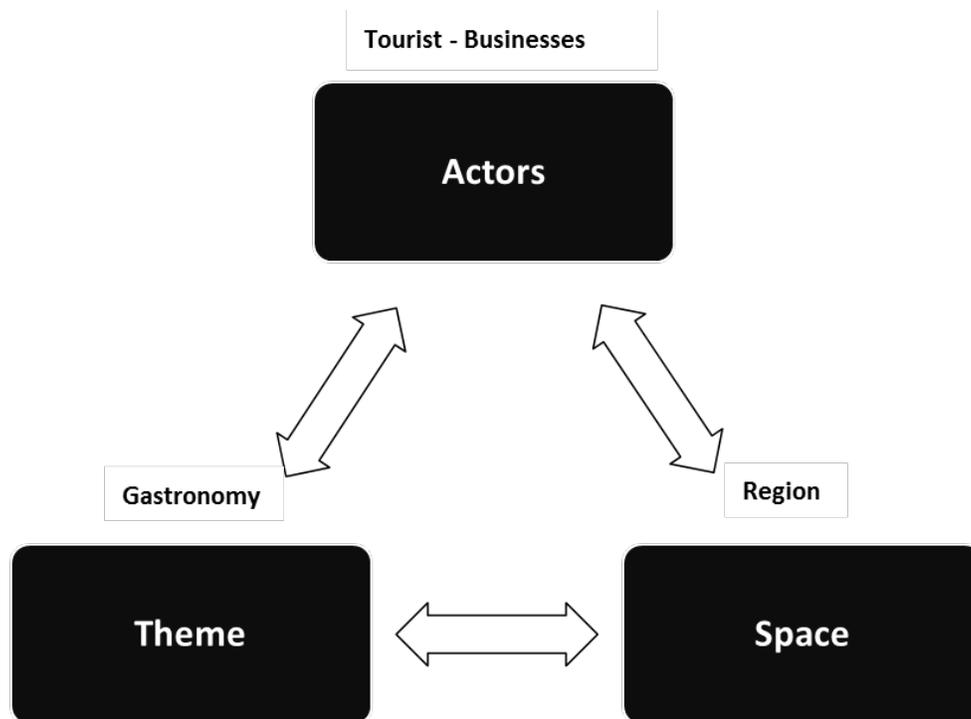


Figure 20.1 Conceptualization of a Gastronomic Trail

'Actors' describes all actors including suppliers, tourists and other stakeholders involved in creating or appropriating the trail. 'Theme' implies the gastronomy-related topic selected to unite the producers and inspire the consumers and is reflected in all aspects of the trail marketing strategy. 'Space' implies the terroir of the gastronomic region including its agronomic, physical, social and cultural characteristics. The gastronomic trail hence can be conceptualized as interplay of actors, theme and space. Previous conceptualizations of gastronomic trails have concentrated on either individual elements or single connections and have not explained the interdependence of these elements. Studies have either explored the actor-theme connection, such as how tourists perceive the theme of gastronomy (Mason and O'Mahony 2007, López-Guzmán et al. 2014), the actor-actor connection, involved in creating the gastronomic trail such as supplier networks and supply chains (Broadway 2017; Hojman and Hunter-Jones 2012; Brás et al. 2010; Anderson and Law 2012) or the actor-space connection through exploration of geographic aspects that define the development of wine routes (Xu et al., 2016b). As each of these connections is important to understanding the workability and future sustainability of the gastronomic trail, it is pertinent to use a framework that studies these elements simultaneously as a systemic whole that reflects interrelationships as well as reciprocation. Hence, the gastronomic trail is conceptualized as a dynamic service ecosystem as forwarded by Vargo and Lusch (2006), a concept that is further explained in the next sections.

The Service Ecosystem

A service ecosystems perspective views a service system as a network of actors that co-create value with each other using resources during activities and interactions, which is also described as the process of resource integration (Lusch and Vargo 2014). This approach further emphasizes that the dynamism of the service ecosystem comes from institutions or ‘rules of the game’ composed of human actions and interactions that are continuously changing (Giddens 1984). Institutions or institutional logics are described as socially constructed norms, rules, beliefs and assumptions by which individuals structure their activities and that influence resource integration practice (Friedland and Alford 1991).

Such a systemic ‘ecosystem’ perspective facilitates the study of gastronomic trails as firstly, it moves away from the dyadic relationship between the producer and consumer and recognizes the involvement of multiple actors in the value creation process. This conceptualization helps in understanding actor-actor relationships and their impact on value co-creation (Sergio et al. 2017). Secondly, it recognizes the role of institutional context as a factor influencing value co-creation. In case of the gastronomic trail the institutional context can be studied as not only the socio-cultural context of actors but also ‘rules of the game’ or the understandings of activities and interactions that connect the actors to the theme and space. Hence, the eco-system perspective also helps in grasping the impacts of space and of the actor-theme-space interplay that happens in the context of a gastronomic trail.

Conceptualizing Gastronomic Trails as a Service Ecosystem

Actors

Actors are recognized as all social and economic players that are involved in the system exchange processes (Vargo and Lusch 2011). It brings into view not only focal actors (the firm and the beneficiary, producer and consumer) but also the context – networks of resources and resource providing actors (suppliers, industry associations, customer communities, friends and family). In case of the gastronomic trails, there would be seven types of actors. First, the producers or actors that are involved in the food and beverage production supply chain. For example the producers on a wine trail would include the vineyard owners, fermenter, and production machinery owners, wine-branding and bottling companies, grape pickers and crushers and the cellar door personnel. Second would be the infrastructure providers or institutions and organizations which regulate or provide infrastructure for the movement along the trail. For example, the local councils, the state government and land agencies which decide land sizes, road hierarchies, speed limits, cycle-ways etc.

The third type of actors would be the intermediaries or connectors that support trail tourism such as tour operators, bus operators, limousine hire, cycle-hire companies, tour guides, horse-riding companies, online travel agents etc. These intermediaries are service providers that help in literally bringing tourists to the wineries. A fourth category of actors would be the influencers or people

who influence the decision of tourists to get on to the trail such as the marketers or visitor information centre, tourism organizations, wine magazine companies, family members through word of mouth etc. The fifth category of actors would involve peripheral or associated actors which work alongside other actors such as accommodation owners, restaurants, other related businesses such as antique shops, art galleries etc. These actors benefit from people travelling on the wine trail by providing them with associated services. Sixth, tourists are also considered actors and classify as consumers in the process of value co-creation as they use resources such as previous knowledge, skills of interpretation and their own possessions such as the vehicle, camera, sun glasses etc. to appropriate the themed route. They can be further classified as those that belong to the immediate travel party and therefore likely share resources and those who are encountered along the trail. Last, another group of actors that has been discussed in detail recently is the residents (Xu et al. 2016a). These actors may or may not be relevant for certain gastronomic trails depending on their proximity and claim to the terroir. A further differentiation can be made between residents who stay permanently in the area such as farmers etc. and temporary residents such as tourists who stay for longer durations, or wine-makers who might come to the region only at the time of harvest. The chart below displays these seven types of actors involved in the process of value creation on a gastronomic trail.



Figure 20. 2 Types of Actors

Resources

Resources are described as anything (tangible or intangible) that can be drawn on for support by an actor during activities or interactions. Arnould et al. (2006) describe operand and operant resources that are used by the consumer. Where operand resources are tangible resources that require another actor or resource to act upon them to create value (such as goods, materials), operant resources are by themselves capable of creating value and involve resources such as knowledge, imagination, skills etc. This conceptualization is problematic as it does not consider the agency of materials and spaces in molding the experience. We argue to entertain and recognize material agency as discussed in reference to tourist movement, space (Haldrup and Larsen 2006;

Ponting and McDonald 2013), and material objects (Epp and Price 2010). In context of the gastronomic trail the thematic materials as well as spatial elements such as the road, landscape and location are conceptualized to be capable of exerting agency over actors. For instance, the location of wineries or vineyards influences tourist movement on the trail. Also, tourists do tend to surrender agency to the road and let the views, landscape or signage take them to their next stop. Hence materials and space need to be considered as resources that can exert agency; a distinction between operand and operant resources is therefore counterproductive. Figure 20.3 provides examples of different categories of resources relevant in the gastronomic trail context.

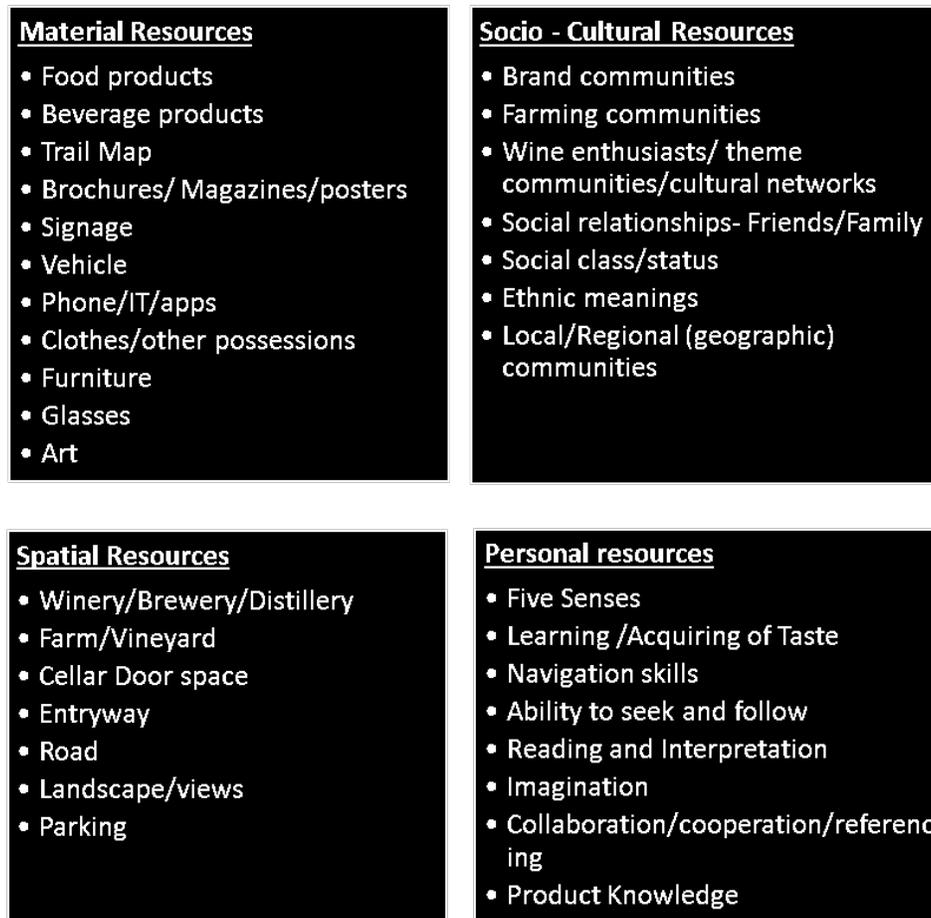


Figure 20.3 Types of Resources

Resources include materials, space, socio-cultural resources and personal resources of actors. Different actors utilize multiple resources during resource integration. In the case of a gastronomic trail, where the tourists need to decide which route to take / producer to go to, they may simply follow the map (material resource), go along the road to see what they find next (physical resource), use social resources in the form of word of mouth/ suggestions of influencers (friends, family, marketers), rely on personal resources (e.g. product knowledge), or use any combination of these resources.

Resource Integration

The service ecosystems perspective posits all actors as resource-integrators who are guided by the institutional understandings of their context (Edvardsson et al. 2011). Hence, it is assumed that resource integration involves actors' understandings of the social, cultural and material rules or structures that are embedded in the usage of these resources. Vargo and Lusch (2012; 2016) suggest using a practice-based approach to analyze resource integration as these notions of meanings, rules and symbolic values associated with interactions and activities are integrated into social practice. A practice approach recognizes activities and interactions as part of a larger integrative social practice based on understandings, procedures and shared meanings (Warde 2005; Schatzki 1996). The practice approach also lays emphasis on material arrangements that influence practices (Schatzki 2016), which is of particular relevance in the case of gastronomic trails.

Applying the practice based approach to the gastronomic trail, both consumption and marketing practices need to be considered (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2006). Hence, resource integration on a gastronomic trail can be discussed as involving five types of integrative practices (Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005): 'Theme-oriented' cultural consumption practices, 'journeying/movement' practices, 'collaboration' practices, and 'exchange' practices, as further described in Figure 20.4. Where theme-oriented practices consider the social, cultural and material associations linked with the gastronomic theme for the consumer, the movement practices define the terroir focused activities that all actors indulge in. These movement activities are defined by the normative structures of physical geography. The collaboration practices encompass activities and interactions associated with networking amongst organizations as well as referencing practices which are aimed at controlling business within the trail region. Exchange practices denote the activities involved not only in economic transactions such as purchase of goods and service but also social exchanges such as small talk with service personnel.

Theme-oriented

- wine-tasting/food-tasting
- eating/drinking
- photography
- seeking views of the countryside/farms
- learning about local stories
- reading about producers to visit

Journeying/Movement

- driving/walking/cycling
- planning the movement/trip
- parking
- stopping
- navigating and referencing on the route

Collaboration

- negotiating and liaising with other organizations
- referencing other businesses on the trail to consumers
- non-monetary exchange of goods amongst businesses

Exchange

- producing/selling/marketing
- after sale service (delivering/packaging)
- buying products/souvenirs/gifts
- storage
- engagement with front end staff
- communing with other tourists

Figure 20.4 Resource Integration Practices

Institutional Logics

Vargo and Lusch (2017) prioritize institutional logics as a structuring agent, which frames the dynamic service ecosystem. Friedland and Alford (1991) describe institutional logics as socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices including assumptions, values and beliefs by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and reproduce their lives and experiences. In other words, the dynamic social and cultural understandings of actors, structures, influences and guides resource integration practices. The practice approach, elaborating on the role of contextuality of space, suggests the incorporation of teleo-affective structures (Schatzki 2002) into the social and cultural. Teleo-affective structures are a set of acceptable ends, orders, emotions and uses associated or embedded within a context (differentiated setting) and govern practices (Schatzki 2002). For instance, in a study of brand community practices by Schau et al. (2009), the specific brand community values, myths and meanings act as teleo-affective structures that provide virtual contextuality to participants (Arsel and Bean 2013). Hence, the institutional logic on the gastronomic trail includes the teleo-affective structures that are introduced by the gastronomic trail settings as well as the social and cultural meanings and values that guide the actors.

Diving into the three institutional structuring agents of the service eco-system, teleo-affective, social and cultural, all three have some common elements (Figure 20.5). Firstly, they are all guided by assumptions, which are reflected in rules of engagement. Secondly, they all comprise of

meanings for the actors that stem from beliefs and values, and lastly, they all generate imaginaries or aspirations for actors. Hence, in order to understand value co-creation from an ecosystem perspective, it is important to understand the linkages amongst activities or interactions of resource integration and the rules, meanings and aspirations enforced by the structuring agents.

<u>Teleo-affective Structures</u>	<u>Social Structures</u>	<u>Cultural Structures</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meanings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • being part of something • challenge • increased familiarity • safety • Rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sticking to one region/road • following the guide/map • Aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning • relaxing • exploring • Feeling like a local • Sensory stimulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meanings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social status • belonging • Rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spend more money • show off • follow others • Aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • socializing • escaping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meanings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exclusivity • Rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taste Regimes • adopt the cultural code • Aspirations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-identity

Figure 20.5 Institutional Structuring Agents

Discussion

This chapter proposes that the gastronomic trail is a marketing tool that establishes connections between multiple actors via a gastronomic theme and within the gastronomic ‘terroir’. It is further argued in this chapter that the interrelationships amongst these elements call for a service ecosystem approach to understand the value of such trails for all the involved actors. This conceptualization initiates further discussions on three subjects that help understand gastronomic tourism. First, it withdraws from the dyadic relationship between the producer and consumer evident in extant studies and adopts an ecosystem perspective whereby each actor is recognized and identified through interdependencies and involvement in value (co-)creation. This is a departure from current conceptualizations in tourism where only one type of actor-actor connection (tourist-business or business-business) is conceptualized at a time. Investigating and identifying the multiple actors involved in a specific trail service ecosystem is of theoretical importance but can also greatly inform the management as well as further development of the trail.

Secondly, the service ecosystem perspective accounts for contextual relationships including social, cultural as well as material interdependencies that bring together multiple actors in the process. This is particularly helpful to understand gastronomic tourism where actors are related and co-create value not only through economic exchanges but also through spatial and social interactions.

Hence, this also triggers thinking about value beyond utility maximization or economic exchanges and therefore opens up important areas for value research.

Another way forward in gastronomic tourism research is through understanding the activities and interactions in the gastronomic service ecosystem using a practice approach. Conceptualizing resource integration as practices involves distributing agency to human and 'non-human' actors that guide the gastronomic experience. Hence, the socio-materiality of objects (food and beverage products, trail maps, brochures) that form part of the theme and space (socio-cultural understandings of terroir, milieu, landscape, geography) becomes an important area of research. In addition, understanding the different institutional structures governing the practices may positively influence value (co-) creation. Hence, there is a need to further understand resource integration practices in gastronomic trails to create superior trail experiences.

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