



eISSN : 2687-3737



## The 'place' and the 'otherness' through the eyes of a restaurantscape

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### ABSTRACT

Within a growing relevance of food in shaping cities' profiles, this paper discusses the glocalized food landscape from the perspective of the city of Inverness, Scotland. Based on the analysis of the restaurantscape in the city center, the research discusses the (dis)connection between place and food and how this informs culinary cosmopolitanism as a driver for urban food tourism management and marketing.

### KEYWORDS

Food tourism, Global culture, Local identity

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Received 27.10.2023; Received in revised form 21.04.2024; Accepted 30.05.2024

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e-ISSN: 2687 - 3737 / © 2021 The Authors. Published by Anadolu University

<https://doi.org/10.48119/toleho.1382017>

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The study of food in urban destination management and marketing is growing (Amore & Roy, 2020; Stalmirska, 2023), and restaurants are a vital ingredient of contemporary food landscapes (DiPietro & Levitt, 2019; Sparks et al., 2003). Drawing from previous studies that have studied the characteristics of a destination based on restaurants (Gordin et al., 2016), this research aims to understand how a food experience is formed in an urban-based food landscape in a marine environment. In this sense, the results of this paper add texture to recent conversations about the cosmopolitanism of food tourism (Leer, 2016). Also, this paper analyses the relationships between food and tourism in Scotland (see Everett, 2012), which has remained an underexplored area of study in food tourism (see De Jong and Varley, 2017). How much local is the restaurantscape? How much global diversity does it convey? To what extent do we eat 'place' or 'otherness' when traveling?

The paper examines the relationship between the local context of Inverness, Scotland, and its food landscapes (Fusté-Forné, 2023; Roe et al., 2016). In particular, the paper analyses how global and local influences shape the city's food scene and adds to the understanding of the relationship between place and food (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Edwards et al., 2021). The focus on the restaurantscape in the city center informs about the contribution of food establishments to the overall urban experience (Čaušević & Fusté-Forné, 2022; Hernández-Rojas & Huete-Alcocer, 2021). In this sense, the novelty of the paper relies on the analysis of the (dis)connection between place and food and whether the local food scene is reflective of the regional's identity or if there are elements that create a sense of detachment, which in turn suggests the influence of culinary diversity on the city's character and as a potential attraction for food tourism. In addition, the research provides implications for food tourism management and marketing for city planners, policymakers, and businesses involved in the food and tourism system.

Restaurants are marketing ambassadors (see Min and Lee, 2014) of a city food-based landscape profile. Restaurants contribute to protecting and promoting a food identity as a source of destination marketing (Fuentes-Luque, 2017; Gordin et al., 2016). This research contributes to recent studies that have paid attention to the role of menus (see Noguer-Juncà and Fusté-Forné, 2022) and restaurant experiences (see Matson-Barkat and Robert-Demontrond, 2018) in the creation of destination storytelling. The current local-global dynamics are changing and challenging gastronomic identities (Mak et al., 2012). One of the characteristics of contemporary food practices is cosmopolitanism. In an urban context, according to German Molz (2007), cosmopolitanism "is often evidenced by the diversity of foods on offer in the city's restaurants" (p.79), which attracts a diversity of global food and audiences to a local environment. In this sense, 'food' becomes a consumable commodity that, delivered in a particular place, offers 'the world on a plate' through food experiences (Cook & Crang, 1996). This research builds on the understanding that traveling to a cosmopolitan city is in one journey a cornucopia of culinary experiences (German Molz, 2007).

As a result of the mobilities of people, cuisines have also moved, and food has been increasingly used "in favor of urban destination marketing that is socially and culturally informed: where food can be utilized in the cultural representation of place and expression of the social landscape" (Stalmirska, 2023, p.161). It is evident that every destination conveys a unique sense of place, and restaurants, both as local and tourist spaces, have a relevant role in constructing a place identity. This research analyses a local restaurantscape (a term that fuses the words restaurant and landscape) from the perspective of Inverness, the capital of the Scottish Highlands.

## METHOD

Previous authors have argued that a food-based tourism offer allows cities to differentiate in a competitive environment (Henderson, 2016). This research focuses on the city of Inverness, where tourism is driven by the attraction of Loch Ness, and the relationships between food and tourism are scarcely analyzed in the context of Scotland. Inverness is located in the north area of the United Kingdom (Figure 1a), south of Beaully and Moray Firths (Figure 1b), and north of Loch Ness. In particular, the data collection takes place in the city's downtown and historical old town (Figure 1c), which concentrates on the city's restaurants. Drawing from a qualitative design, the

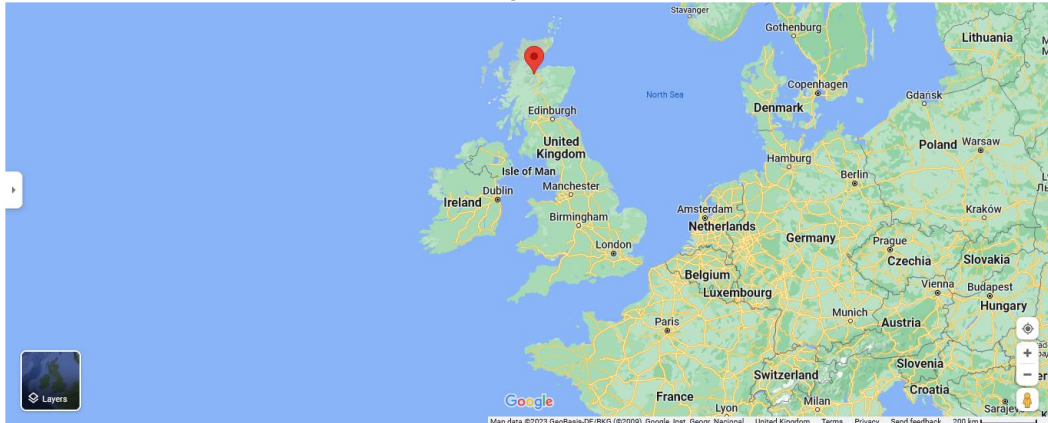
researcher conducted a participant observation with 14 restaurants in the area (Figure 1d). The restaurants analyzed are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.  
*The Inverness downtown restaurants (own source based on Google Maps)*

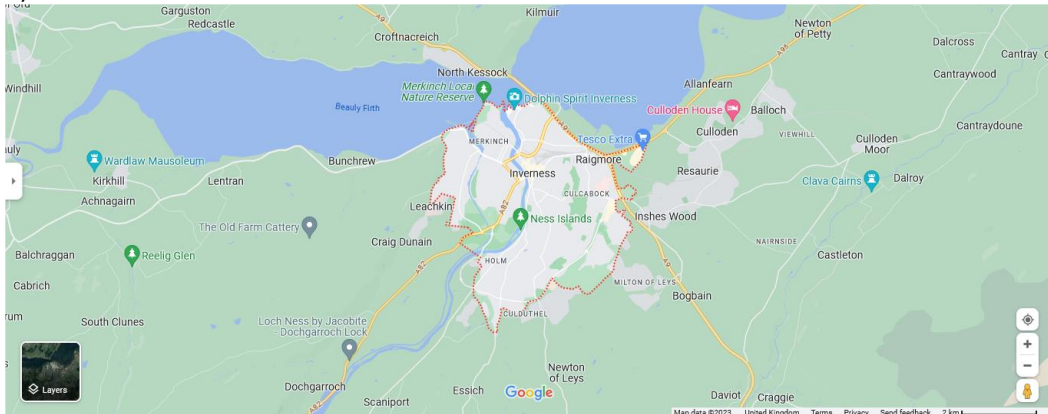
Restaurant	Description	Type
River House	Elegant, sustainable Scottish dining	Seafood restaurant
The Kitchen Brasserie	Hip, modern brasserie with castle views	Modern British restaurant
Urquhart’s Restaurant	Home-cooked Scottish and eclectic cuisine	Restaurant
Rocpool	Refined modern Scottish cuisine	Restaurant
Encore	Highland restaurant with a hearty menu	Restaurant
The Mustard Seed Restaurant	European cuisine in a former church	Modern European restaurant
The Brasserie	-	Restaurant
Comfort Foods	-	Fast food restaurant
Zizzi	Casual pizza and pasta chain	Restaurant
Bella Italia	Relaxed restaurant for Italian dining	Restaurant
Scotch and Rye	Speakeasy-inspired bar and kitchen	Bar and grill
Filling Station	Comfort food in an American-style diner	American restaurant
Girvans	Modern, eclectic eatery and patisserie	Restaurant
Fig and Thistle	Bistro plates in snug, casual quarters	Restaurant
Little Italy	-	Italian restaurant

This research represents an exploratory approach to the configuration of the restaurantscape, following previous studies that have also analyzed the look of restaurants in food tourism management and marketing (Fusté-Forné & Leer, 2023). For data collection, the researcher used Google Maps to search for ‘restaurants’ in Inverness, showing 15 restaurants in the city center. However, the search did not include other dining places like bars or pubs. While this is a limitation of the paper, it also opens new opportunities for future research, as explained below. As a result of the participant observation, 14 restaurants were selected as the study sample because one of them was closed. For data analysis, information included the analysis of product and marketing strategies, focusing on the menus, where the researcher annotated all the information in a diary, which was supplemented by visual materials. The researcher categorized the textual and visual data following a thematic analysis, which allows the identification of four categories described in the next section: food cosmopolitanism, the role of place, the authenticity of the experience, and the influences of food and non-food elements.

a) Inverness in the context of the United Kingdom



b) The area of Inverness



c) The city center of Inverness



d) The location of the restaurants analysed in Inverness

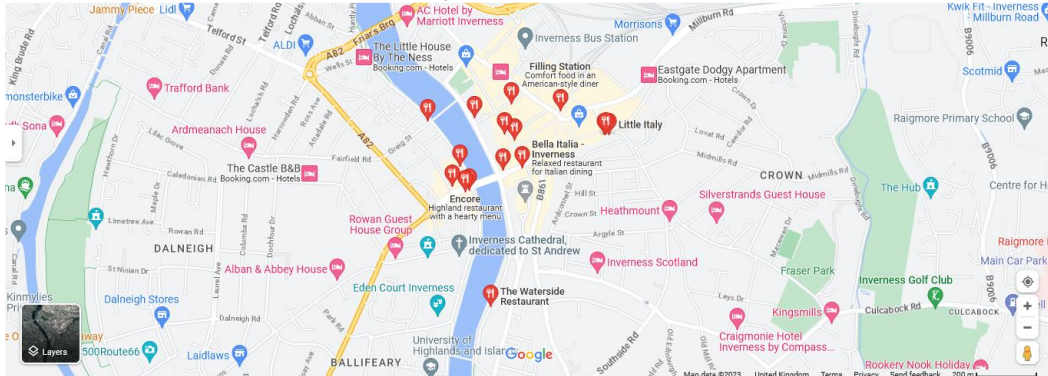


Figure 1. Location of the study site

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Navigation Between Local and Global*

The description of the restaurants (Table 1) shows a mix of cuisines that provide a combination of local and global influences, with a flavored Scottish cuisine that is also complemented by American, French, and Italian-styled restaurants. The diversity of food cultures results from the globalized relations between foods and places (Fusté-Forné, 2020). As globalization moves foods from local to global, Mak et al. (2012, p.171) reported that “the common perception of globalization as a threat to local gastronomic identities is contrasted by its other facet, as an impetus that opens up new opportunities for the reinvention of local gastronomic products and identities.” In this sense, the connection to the regional identity is central to the restaurant experiences. A banner on the wall of one of the restaurants says, “The chefs at The Mustard Seed have close relationships with their suppliers, selecting a variety of produce each week to create a menu of dishes that reflect each season. They use the quality Scottish ingredients to create a modern European menu with Highland influences”. The description of the culinary practices shows the close relationships with suppliers and suggests a collaborative and connected culinary process. Also, the selection of produce reflecting each season shows adaptability and freshness, and local-sourced products anticipate a fusion of traditional and contemporary culinary styles.



Figure 2. Examples of traditional Scottish cuisine

### *The Place as a Source of Food Tourism*

While ‘traditional food’ is often claimed by restaurants, with classics (Figure 2) such as the soup of the day with bread and fish and chips available in many of the restaurants, menus also attract a clientele that searches for comfort foods (see, for example, Jones and Long, 2017) evocative of cultures such as the Italian, with pasta and pizza and calls for cheese lovers (Figure 3). The use of local meat and seafood, also from the Orkney and Shetland islands, is another feature of the menus, which constantly show examples of local-based dishes with global flavors (baked cod, served with curried seafood risotto) and vice versa (haggis popcorn). The combination between local and global products and techniques is also nurtured by a relevant role of seasonality, as observed in a Scotch rib eye steak with stir fry of wild mushrooms, pancetta, and cepe puree with craps golden polenta, parmesan, and truffle oil, which increases the engagement of customers with the territory and the enhancement of storytelling attached to the source of the products. Implementing strategies to foster a deeper connection between customers and the territory involves initiatives to celebrate the distinctive elements of the area manifested in local recipes. Results show that there is an emphasis on the narratives that highlight the origin of the products, focusing on the producers, the traditions, and the unique cultural and environmental aspects of food. This creates consumer awareness and a more relevant experience based on their connections with the place.

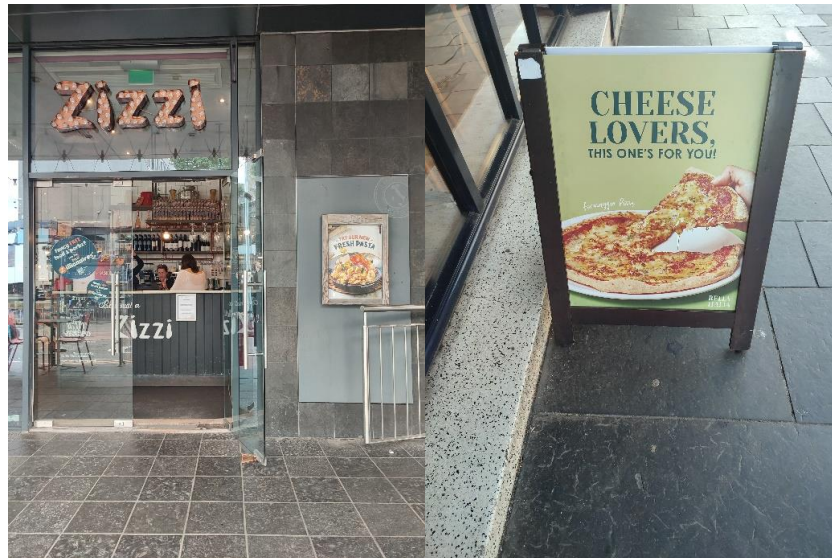


Figure 3. Examples of Italian-styled restaurants

### ***The Scottish Authenticity***

Based on previous attempts to assess authenticity (see Grayson and Martinec, 2004), this paper also shows examples of indexical authenticity (dishes that are elaborated with local ingredients) and iconic authenticity (dishes that evoke or are illustrative of Scottish style). In this sense, the restaurantscape creates a dialogue between tradition and modernity, which is not only manifested at the table but also through the buildings where restaurants are located (Figure 4). From the stone buildings that populate the center of Inverness and other Scottish cities to modern glass buildings, the local-global synergies arise not only from the food itself but also from the atmospheres surrounding the food experience (see Park and Widyanta, 2022). In the context of the relations between food and tourism, previous research shows the importance of architecture (see Albrecht et al., 2019) and interior décor (see Matson-Barket and Robert-Demontrond, 2018). The design and aesthetic of the building also evoke a cultural identity where architectural elements draw local inspiration, for example, based on the use of local materials or the incorporation of local motifs, which create an atmosphere that reflects the region's cultural heritage.



Figure 4. Examples of buildings that accommodate restaurants

### ***The Dialogue Between Food and Non-food Elements***

This paper aims to open a dialogue that discusses not only the dislocation of restaurants but also the dislocation of places, based on the configuration of their restaurantscape, and how a food experience in Inverness talks about contemporary food cosmopolitanism. This research shows that a food experience means ‘eating food’ and includes immersion in culture (recipes) and nature (landscapes). Askegaard and Kjeldgaard (2007) advocated that “localities are increasingly, perhaps reflexively, articulated constructions based on available and appropriate local cultural resources. These articulations feed into the global cultural economy as a production of cultural differences” (p.145). Results show that in a food experience, ‘place’ is not only food but also includes elements such as architecture, and ‘otherness’ is not only other cultures but also other ages, where there is also a confluence between ‘place’ and ‘otherness.’ This aligns with recent research showing that sensory and non-sensory factors contribute to food tourism experiences (Jensen & Fusté-Forné, 2023; Muskat et al., 2023).

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper shows how the (dis)connection between place and food informs culinary cosmopolitanism as a driver for urban food tourism management and marketing. In particular, the analysis shows that the restaurantscape celebrates local but embraces global, engaging visitors with a Scottish sense of place and a diverse culinary landscape. In addition, results also offer an approach to elements such as architecture, contributing to the urban-based food landscape in a marine environment. This anticipates a dialogue and a tension between local and global, authenticity and inauthenticity, and food and non-food elements, which shape the understanding of a food experience. If food tourism refers to the notion of traveling to eat, as German Molz (2007) states, this study demonstrates that food tourism “is always about eating the differences mobilities make” (ibid, p.91)—the mobilities of food, the mobilities of cultures, and the mobilities of people. The paper shows that the mobilities also include the spaces. While this paper is limited to the restaurantscape of the city center of Inverness, Scotland, future research should also expand the sample of dining places to understand how ‘place’ and ‘otherness’ are promoted by restaurants and perceived by tourists.

The paper’s contribution relies on the glocalised food landscapes of Inverness, Scotland, and its exploration of the (dis)connection between place and food. Results show how global and local influences dialogue in shaping the food scene. This approach contributes to the literature as it provides insights into how cities in smaller or less studied regions engage with global culinary trends while maintaining local culinary identities. In addition, the analysis of the restaurantscape in the city center adds texture to the urban culinary dynamics based on food production and consumption. This also informs the (dis)connection between place and food. While the restaurantscape reflects Inverness’s identity, some elements create a sense of detachment. This aspect provides novel insights into the relationship between food and tourism in a city where the diversity of culinary influences is a source of tourism attraction.

From a theoretical perspective, the paper advances the understanding of food tourism based on the relationship between local food and tourism dynamics. Also, the focus on the (dis)connection between place and food within the urban context of Inverness represents a theoretical contribution to urban studies. Through the restaurantscape, the paper shows how cities shape and are shaped by their food landscapes, contributing to broader discussions about urban identity and culture through food. This also means that urban planning and policymaking benefit from understanding the local food scene. In addition, the paper has practical implications for food tourism management and marketing in Inverness. Based on the paper’s results, the city’s culinary diversity could serve local businesses to enhance food tourism attraction based on marketing strategies that contribute to protecting and promoting the regional identity through food.

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