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Food Clusters and Creative Tourism Development: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

This paper examines food clusters as contributors to tourism development from a creative economy perspective. A conceptual framework is proposed that emphasizes four interdependent determinants and four facilitators that underpin the formation and operation of creative food clusters. The conceptual framework and its application to the Stratford case study site highlights the resources required as well as the place branding processes needed for food cluster development. Emphasis is given to the importance of partnerships between the public and private sectors as well as strong leadership in facilitating stakeholder collaboration and communication. The introduced conceptual framework is intended to act as a guide for those interested in pursuing a culinary tourism-focused creative economy strategy.

Keywords: food clusters; creative economy; stakeholder collaboration; place branding; tourism development

1.0 Introduction

Many local governments around the world have identified the development of creative food clusters as a means of bolstering the creative economy and tourism industry (Howkins, 2001; OECD, 2014; Richards, 2011; Richards & Raymond, 2000; UNESCO, 2006). However, recognition of creativity dialogue outside of the urban, metropolitan context is a relatively new phenomenon in the academic literature. Discussions on the creative economy have focused primarily on urban areas, despite creative economy discourse having relevance to rural, small town settings. Indeed, in many rural places, culture and heritage and the quality of the

natural environment have become important assets that are being packaged and sold as cultural products (Lee & Wall, 2014; Lee, Wall, & Kovacs, 2015). As Knox and Mayer (2009) and Stolarick, Denstedt, Donald, & Spencer (2010) note, local traditions, cuisine, the arts, and the special environmental characteristics of place, are increasingly being leveraged in small towns and rural municipalities as part of a creative economy-based development strategy.

The necessary creativity that is involved in cluster formation may be found in the introduction of place branding strategies (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993) that are built on strong partnerships and collaboration between stakeholders (Lee & Wall, 2014). Institutional arrangements that encourage participation and shared decision making are critical in place-based development strategies (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher 2005; Selin, 1999; Selin & Chavez, 1995; Selin & Myers, 1998; Timothy & Tosun, 2003) and in the formation and operation of 'food clusters' or places with a geographical concentration of inter-connected firms and service providers offering culinary and cultural products and programs (Lee et al., 2015). Consequently, effective leadership in facilitating stakeholder collaboration and promoting communication and information flows is required in food cluster development (Lee & Wall, 2014).

Although a substantial literature exists on urban manufacturing and high-tech clusters, few studies can be found on clustering in rural communities, especially in terms of service-led clusters such as those associated with culinary tourism place brands. Indeed, very little is known about how food clusters are formed or how they operate. One of the exceptions in the literature is the work of Lagnevik, Sjöholm, Lareke, & Ostberg (2003) who provide comparative case studies from Sweden on the dynamics of innovation clusters in the food industry. The focus of their work, however, is on the economic efficiency of the corporate food industry. Other relevant works are concerned more with wine-related clusters than culinary tourism development (e.g., Croce & Perri, 2010). Thus, there is a clear need for empirical research on food clusters as culinary tourism initiatives, and an appropriate analytical framework should guide such research.

This paper presents a conceptual framework that addresses the formation and operation of a food cluster. The conceptual framework to be presented is based on an adaptation of Porter's (1990) clustering model. Modifications to the cluster model were informed by a review of the economic geography, rural development, and environmental management literatures. The new conceptual framework identifies the main resources and facilitators that must be put in place to stimulate the creative process required for the formation of a food cluster. The framework also highlights the innovation processes that underlie food cluster development. The utility of the model is demonstrated through its application to Savour Stratford, a food cluster in Perth County, Ontario, Canada.

2.0 Context

Porter (1990) defined clusters as groups of interconnected, competing and interdependent firms, specialized suppliers, service providers, and institutions that exist in geographically concentrated areas. Through synergistic relationships and competitive advantages, clusters can become significant forces for economic development (Echeverri-Carroll & Brennan, 1999; Camagni, 1991; Cassiolato, Lastres, & Maciel, 2003). In particular, members of clusters can leverage shared access to marketing intelligence, supply chain management, and knowledge and information flows (Carayannis, Assimakopoulos, & Kondo, 2008). According to

Porter (1990) competitive advantage through clustering is the result of four interdependent determinants: factor conditions; demand conditions; strategy, market structure and rival firms; and related supporting industries. These interdependent determinants can be influenced pro-actively by governments (Venhove, 2005), which may adopt the important role of chief facilitator in cluster formation and development (Lee & Wall, 2014; Lee et al., 2015).

Clustering (e.g., food cluster) can enable small towns and rural areas to be economically dynamic in the knowledge-based global economy (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Clusters provide connectivity in the pooling of scarce resources and in the development of place marketing intelligence and customer relations (Halseth, Markey, & Bruce, 2010). Thus, clustering may increase local competitiveness, productivity and entrepreneurial activity, help diversify the economic structure, and stimulate a cycle of wealth creation (Hill & Jones, 2007). In this paper clustering is also viewed as an approach to developing the creative economy of rural municipalities through a culinary tourism-focused strategy (Lee & Wall, 2014; Lee et al., 2015).

2.1 Defining Concepts of ‘Rural’ and ‘Creative Food Cluster’

2.1.1 The concept of ‘rural’. The concept of ‘rural’ is elusive to define precisely and there is no single best accepted definition. As argued by Woods (2005), and du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson (2002), many definitions of ‘rural’ are available for rural development studies as it is an interdisciplinary field with similar kinds of investigations being made by social scientists, including geographers (Woods, 2005, as cited in Lee, 2012).

For example, the definition, which emphasizes hard data with “associated thresholds, such as ‘population size’, ‘density’, ‘land use’, ‘labour market’ and ‘proximity’, tends to identify the size of the rural territories” (e.g., ‘building blocks’) that are measured by statistical indicators (du Plessis et al., 2002). Although the definitions have limitations and should go beyond the statistical indicators, “this is the approach adopted in most official definitions of rural studies” (Woods, 2005, p. 5). The definitions constructed can vary within the statistical categories; “the level of each characteristic differs for each definition of rural” (du Plessis et al., 2002, as cited in Lee, 2012).

However, as suggested by du Plessis et al. (2002), “the appropriate definition should be determined by the research question being addressed.” For this study in which the emphasis is given to the Canadian context, the concept of ‘rural’ is defined “as a starting-point for understanding Canada’s rural population” (du Plessis et al., 2002). Thus, the concept of ‘rural community’, defined by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), will be adopted. That is, a municipality that has fewer than 100,000 people: this includes both nucleated municipalities such as Stratford and dispersed municipalities (e.g., Muskoka) (as cited in Lee, 2012).

2.1.2 The concept of ‘creative food cluster.’ The concept of ‘creativity’ refers initially to the way that things are done, particularly collaboration among producers that have not previously worked together. These include producers of foodstuffs, as well as providers of foods such as hotels and restaurants, and even other firms that interact with them. These interactions result in the exchange of information and, ultimately, in the creation of new products. Thus, ‘creativity’ involves the establishment of new

relationships leading to the offering of new products. When these offerings have a substantial food component (e.g., as identified in marketing) and are concentrated spatially, it is appropriate to use the term ‘creative food cluster.’

2.2 Food Clusters Toward a Development of the Creative Economy

Food clustering, which is also known as culinary clustering in the literature, is becoming an increasingly popular strategy to bolster rural creative economies (Lee & Wall, 2014). Croce and Perri (2010) assert that food cluster strategies can contribute to a more diversified economy in small, well-defined areas that have unique natural and cultural resources. Hall and Page (2002) suggest that being rooted in agricultural production and tourism, food cluster formation can benefit farmers and other residents economically through the creation of a variety of culinary-related, small-scale local businesses. In particular, the branding of rural municipalities as culinary destinations that possess complementary arts and cultural offerings can help attract visitors and increase awareness towards the identities of place (Knox & Mayer, 2009, as cited in Lee, 2012).

Although tourism is often criticized for its excessive exploitation of local resources to generate economic benefits, culinary tourism policies that are motivated by ‘Slow Food Movement’ principles can potentially enhance the local resource base and promote sustainable living (e.g., reduction of food miles). For this to happen, synergistic relationships must be created among those involved in the food cluster so as to meet the needs and wants of both residents and visitors—specifically, in providing improvements to the quality of life of the residents as well as memorable experiences to the visitors (Croce & Perri, 2010, as cited in Lee, 2011). Thus, although often requiring higher initial production costs, the adoption of an environmentally friendly ‘Slow Food’ inspired strategy may contribute to the development of products sold at a premium while also contributing towards other benefits (Lee & Wall, 2014).

3.0 The Conceptual Framework

Clustering can help overcome a scarcity of financial, organizational, human and other resources by enhancing mutual support among firms and service providers, stimulating local creativity, increasing the capacity for new product development and/or product specialization and diversification, and by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of innovation processes through collaboration. According to Camagni and Capello (1999, p. 205, as cited in Lee, 2012)) “the local milieu and the specialized local labor market provide the economic background and constituent of continuity on which the collaborative and innovative process and information transfer become accumulated over time.” The formation of a cluster can make a jurisdiction more competitive, and a creative economy-focused food cluster can help pool and leverage scarce financial, organizational and human resources, as well as satisfy the needs of residents and tourists alike. It can also lead to the development, promulgation and recognition of a strong place brand (Lee & Wall, 2014; Lee et al., 2015).

Not all geographical places have the locational advantages or possess suitable factor conditions to form a food cluster. However, for those well-defined geographical areas with complementary cultural characteristics such as a lively arts scene and attractive built and natural environment, the question is how to convert the comparative advantage into a competitive advantage (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

Jackson and Murphy (2006) suggest that the creation of clusters can help to facilitate this conversion. Clustering strategies can provide a means of fostering an organizational structure in rural areas within which local culinary-related and supporting firms and service providers can interact, both collaboratively and competitively. Rather than being an anti-competitive activity or about price-cutting, competition in this regard is about product diversification and specialization.

Many researchers have used Porter's clustering model to underpin their research, especially with regard to high-tech industries. However, it is important to recognize that Porter's model has been criticized for its exclusive focus on entrepreneurial activities based on private sector-led competition. It is also recognized that the role of government is acknowledged only in passing in this model. Furthermore, Porter's clustering model does not address place-based development strategies or focus on the importance of leadership in relation to stakeholder collaboration. This paper presents and applies a conceptual framework to the formation of a food cluster that builds upon Porter's original model by accommodating the attributes of a food cluster. The conceptual framework highlights the resources required as well as the place branding processes needed. Emphasis is given to the role of public and private sector partnerships, and the need for strong leadership, including the role of local government as facilitator in encouraging stakeholder collaboration and communication. The conceptual framework presented below outlines the innovation process required to transform local *terroir*—the distinct sense of place that gives rise to high quality food products with attributes that reflect their place of origin—into a food cluster. The framework is also meant to act as a guide for those interested in pursuing a culinary tourism-focused creative economy strategy.

The conceptual framework (Table 1) consists of four interdependent determinants and four facilitators of food cluster development. The interdependent determinants are originated from Porter's (1990) clustering model (factor conditions, demand conditions, market structure, related/supporting industries). These determinants are not only inherited but are also created through innovation. The four facilitators of the innovation process (leadership, environmentally friendly movement, stakeholder collaboration, communication and information flows) are the challenges that have been identified in the literature, which must be met to convert the assets of *terroir* into a recognizable food cluster.

Table 1 provides a detailed description of each component of the conceptual framework. The details of the four interdependent determinants are a revision to Porter's work in line with Vanhove (2005) who suggests that the competitive advantages resulting from the interdependent determinants are applicable to tourism places. The juxtaposition of food production and consumption does not guarantee the creation of a culinary cluster; rather creative processes are required to put in place synergistic relationships. The four facilitators contribute to the institutional arrangements that drive the development of food clusters, stimulating the generation of new linkages, ideas, research and development (R&D) and, ultimately, marketable products. The result is a new chain of supply and production in the development of the rural culinary-tourism based creative economy (Lee, 2012).

Table 1. *Interdependent determinants and facilitators of a food cluster*

Interdependent Determinants & Facilitators	Content
Factor conditions	Factor endowments and attractions (natural and cultural landscapes); Factor endowments are not only inherited but also created through the application of natural, cultural, historical, organizational and human resources
Demand conditions	The market for food tourism products and services; The existence of a sufficiently large number of sophisticated tourists within a reasonably close market area; Quality-conscious tourists with sufficient disposable incomes exert constant quality control, moving suppliers towards high-quality market segments
Related and supporting industries	Firms or producers in the region that provide inputs that support the establishment and operation of a culinary cluster: the diversity and the quality of supporting industries (e.g. high quality service and parking facilities)
Market structure	A term that encapsulates the conditions in a place that govern how firms/organizations are created and managed, as well as the nature of local rivalry; Institutional and organizational infrastructure; Cluster plan and branding strategy
Environmentally friendly movement	Environment-centered strategy focused on reducing food miles (e.g., Slow Food Movement); Investment into improving quality of place and encouraging reduction of consumption and waste
Leadership	Strong leadership is among the most critical factors for the successful development of a creative food economy and food cluster as there are usually a large number of stakeholders involved in such clusters; There are various aspects of leadership: government (at various levels) and local organizations (DMO or culinary organization); A successful policy depends on strategic partnerships between private and public sectors
Stakeholder collaboration	Cooperation amongst stakeholders to create sustainable food production and consumption nexus (food cluster); Stakeholders: chamber of commerce; economic development office; DMOs; NGOs; travel operators; restaurants; farmers; cooking schools; chefs; artisans; retailers; and others
Communication & information flows	Communications strategy to bring in new ideas, encourage consensus, and share accumulated knowledge and know-how

4.0 Case Study and Qualitative Analysis

The underlying principle for a case design approach is that it encourages theory building through qualitative analysis (Yin, 2014). A case study approach provides an opportunity to use mixed methods, giving an opportunity for researchers to observe a phenomenon from multiple perspectives. The outcomes of the mixed method case study approach can be synergistic. As Mintzberg (1979) suggested, while systematic data provides the foundation for theory, it is the subjective data that enables theory building: “we uncover all kinds of relationships in our ‘hard’ data, but it is only through the use of this ‘soft’ data that we are able to ‘explain’ them” (p. 113). This study applies the conceptual model using qualitative research methods and a narrative strategy as a basis for collecting and analyzing information. The subjective information obtained through qualitative research means was useful for understanding the relationships between the determinants and facilitators of the conceptual model (Lee & Wall, 2014; Lee et al., 2015).

4.1 Study Site

The conceptual framework was used to guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation in the study of the Stratford food cluster. The City of Stratford (2011 population: 30,866) in Southwestern Ontario (Perth County), Canada, was selected for investigation because it is a leader in Ontario’s culinary tourism movement. Stratford (see Figure 1) is one of a small number of places that have been cited by the provincial government as an example of best practice. Moreover, a wide range and number (253) of interdependent firms, supporting organizations and service providers are involved in the Stratford food cluster, thus providing a data-rich study site to examine. Stakeholders included 42 restaurant owners, 16 producers, 71 accommodation providers, 62 retail and service outlets, 57 events and attractions, and 5 associations. Complementary economic initiatives are focused not only on promoting the local agricultural base of Perth County but also shopping, leisure and recreation, environmental quality, and Stratford’s vibrant cultural heritage and creative arts industry (Lee, 2012).

Fieldwork was conducted in Stratford, Perth County using a mixed method approach. The busiest season for event tourism was chosen because it gave an opportunity to observe many activities taking place in the study area. In-depth interviews with key players were undertaken, published and unpublished documents were collected and analyzed, official websites were examined, and field observation occurred through visits to relevant member establishments (e.g., restaurants/café, farms, farmers’ and artisan markets) and cultural and culinary events (e.g., culinary trail, performing art festival).

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview method. Interviewees included the executive marketing director and the food program developer, administrative staff of the Stratford destination marketing organization, member farmers, restaurant managers and employees, tourists, and food product retailers. In-depth stakeholder interviews provided insights into the practices and issues surrounding the formation of food clusters as part of a rural creative economy development strategy. Although farmers and restaurateurs were not considered to be key informants in the sense that they were not expected to possess inside knowledge of the cluster’s operation, they were purposefully included to better understand the leadership and communication processes, which are critical

factors for stakeholder collaboration in food cluster formation (Lee, 2012; Lee & Wall, 2014; Lee et al., 2015).

Figure 1: Map of Stratford in Perth County, Ontario.



5.0 Findings

The findings for the Stratford food cluster, as summarized in Table 2, show how each of the interdependent determinants and facilitators of the conceptual framework contribute to the development and operation of the food cluster. Each of the components of the adapted cluster model will be discussed in turn.

Table 2. *Determinants and Facilitators in the Savour Stratford Food Cluster*

Interdependent Determinants & Facilitators	Contents
Factor conditions	<p>Strong core, leading and supporting assets (agricultural sector is one of top three leading economic sectors; tourism has already been well developed); Natural, cultural, institutional, organizational and human resources (e.g. pastoral countryside, culinary attractions, food festivals/events, farmers' markets, cooking schools/chefs, slow food convivial, creative arts industry, museums, gardens, built heritage, accommodations).</p> <p>Well-developed food products/programs integrated with hard and soft factors (e.g. culinary getaways, culinary adventures, cooking schools/chefs, culinary walking tours, farms, restaurants, dining and tasting events, creative arts industry, and annual food festival).</p>
Demand conditions	<p>Both local residents and visitors. Primary target market: 'empty-nester' urban couples, and singles; on average over thirty years old, well-educated, upper-income and sophisticated Canadian and international travelers seeking quality food and cultural experiences.</p>
Related & supporting industries	<p>Creative industry as strong supporting assets for creative food economy and culinary movement.</p> <p>Suppliers and related firms: hotels and inns, B&B, motels and resorts, culinary products shops, books and music shops, gifts and photographers shops, arts and antiques shops, fashion and design stores, wedding facilities, spas and aesthetics, recreational facilities, and the creative arts industry (theatres and galleries); high quality service facilities: all day free parking, tourism information centre, health care, public recreation centre, and security.</p>
Market structure	<p>Unified marketing organization (mixture of top-down and bottom-up structure); Established institutional and organizational infrastructure; place marketing/branding plan/strategy/budget.</p>
Environmentally friendly movement	<p>Understanding of the concepts of environmental well-being and sustainability (local food and agricultural products); Clean and pleasant environmental quality; Slow food convivia: reduction of food miles, and certified restaurant program to advocate members to use local food products to reduce food miles.</p>
Leadership	<p>Strong leadership led by Stratford Tourism Alliance (place marketing organization); Partnership with local and provincial governments through funding programs; Financial support from provincial and local governments; Funding programs: membership fees, partnership funds, City of Stratford fund, and destination marketing fund.</p>
Stakeholder collaboration	<p>Stakeholders: chamber of commerce, economic development office, DMOs, NGOs (slow food convivia), restaurants, farmers, chefs, caterers, retailers, creative arts industry, and other associations.</p>
Communication & information flows	<p>Communications strategy to bring in new ideas and make consensus: annual food summit, training and communication strategy for chefs and farmers sub-committee, e-newsletter and press release for members and general public, blogs, websites and other social media</p>

5.1 Interdependent Determinants

5.1.1 Factor conditions. Stratford is a renowned centre of professional theatre. However, agriculture and manufacturing lead the region's economy. According to Stratford's website, Perth County is "one of the most agriculturally productive counties in all of Ontario" (Savour Stratford website, 2011) and there are many local food products to be found (e.g. strawberries, heirloom vegetables, cheeses). Stratford now hosts two food festivals each September (Stratford Garlic Festival and Perth County Culinary Festival). The factor conditions (core and leading assets) are contributing towards Stratford's competitive advantage as an emergent food cluster. Besides local agricultural products, Stratford possesses a Chefs School, Farmers' Market (established 1855), a variety of upscale restaurants, and many culinary artisans.

The following quote indicated that the marketing team had clear information on factor conditions of the region before establishing the food cluster:

When we did consumer research and the analysis of data, we discovered that tourists were interested in performing arts, very interested in heritage, and very interested in fine food. With that information, we looked at what Stratford had to offer in terms of products. We discovered that we had three things: character, culture, and cuisine (Executive marketer).

Product development is an important part of place branding. Thus, the identification of the strengths of the agricultural base, and inventory and mapping of the food-related assets are a necessary step to establishing a creative food economy. The branding strategy for Savour Stratford has involved a wide range of marketing media tools (e.g., website, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, brochures). Stratford Tourism Alliance (STA) is spearheading the formation of the cluster, and a wide range of local stakeholders are participating in the process (Program developer). The goal of the STA's focus on promoting a culinary place identity is to diversify the regional cultural products and services to attract tourists, particularly in the off-season (end of September to beginning of June) (Executive marketer). A logo with the identification of Stratford Perth County as a food place was created as part of this place branding strategy (Lee, 2012).

5.1.2 Demand conditions. "Our primary market is well-educated, well-travelled, and well-read couples. They have at least \$100,000 income per year... and spend their disposable income on travel and on cultural and culinary products" (Executive marketer).

The Stratford food cluster was developed in response to the local and international culinary movement, catering to domestic and international tourists' curiosity to experience the region's artistic heritage through local cuisine (City of Stratford website, 2011). Key players in the Ontario culinary movement, including high profile Toronto chefs, helped spread the word about a culinary attraction that is now central to the food cluster: the Savour Stratford Tasting event. In 2008, "this event exceeded the STA's objectives by 200%" (Program developer). Stratford's

destination marketing organization has since been invited to participate at local and provincial culinary symposia, and 'Savour Stratford Perth County' is now a recognized culinary place brand. With enhanced food products and programs, live music concerts, demonstrations by celebrity chefs, farmers' and artisan markets, as well as a silent auction, sidewalk sales, and cafés, the STA expects more than 10,000 tourists per day for its food event. The arrival of the anticipated tourist numbers who fit the primary target market has only served to reinforce stakeholder belief that demand conditions are more than adequate (Lee, 2012).

5.1.3 Market structure. The Stratford Tourism Alliance is a membership-driven place-marketing organization. A board of directors made up of private and public sector representatives and associations directs the STA. Currently the organization is managed by four full-time and six part-time staff. Board members consist primarily of local representatives: the city's deputy mayor, a representative of the Ministry of Tourism, the General Manager of Stratford Summer Music Festival, the General Manager of the Shakespeare Festival, the General Manager of the City Centre Committee (business development association), a representative of restaurants, a representative of producers, a representative of the Bed and Breakfast (B&B) sector, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, two business consultants, a representative of the retail sector, and representatives from each of the hotel and motel associations. STA is funded by membership fees, partnership funds, the City of Stratford, and a destination marketing fund. The purpose of the STA is to manage, develop and promote Stratford as a national and international cultural place, to strengthen the creative economy, and to enrich the quality of life in Stratford. The quotation below articulates the fact that the STA has adopted service-branding techniques, exploring tourist demand and how a culinary brand image can be articulated by the marketing organization.

When Stratford Tourism Alliance formed in 2007, there was a mandate for how we determine to attract people outside of the theatre experience... When we did consumer research, things came to light...Cultural tourists are very interested in traditional theatre and performing arts. As we analyzed the information in greater depth, we discovered that cultural tourists were interested in fine food. Soon after, we [decided] to create a festival for which we could attract tourists and also harness all of the people and community around an idea...(Executive marketer)

The emphasis in this approach is on organizational leadership: key individuals who are employed by the organization lead the stakeholders to create the interconnected identity and image of the place as a brand (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2010). One of the interviewees stressed that Prince Edward County in Ontario is a competitor of Savour Stratford since it has established a high quality culinary place image and there is a growing wine industry there, something that does not exist in Stratford. Prince Edward County has been able to leverage many local producers, its natural beauty, and its growing number of wineries to develop itself as a cultural tourism

destination. However, as the quote below pointed out, it does not have the prominent professional artistic experience that is available in Stratford.

Every place needs to find an identity and focus on that identity. You cannot be all things to all people... you need to find the best asset... what you need to do is to make it better; how do you refine it to make it more attractive and how do you reach out to people and how do you make sure the experience here is going to be a good one? We are fortunate because people who own restaurants, shops, B&B's and hotels have a great deal of status for tourists who come here. That's perhaps because, over the years, the cultural festivals attracted the people—better educated and a better-behaved kind of market. And remember that we do not call them tourists...we call them guests. That unsaid mentality flows through the way people provide the service here (Executive marketer).

5.1.4 Related and supporting industries. Stratford has the significant advantage of possessing not only a strong agricultural sector but also a wide range of supportive creative products. In fact, Stratford's creative economy is well ahead of most other rural municipalities in Ontario due to the longstanding presence of arts and cultural events, which are an outgrowth of the establishment of the Stratford Shakespearian Festival in the early 1950s (Executive marketer). The strong arts and culture sector underpins the creative economy of Stratford and contributes to the success of the Stratford food cluster and the growing strength of its culinary place brand. The Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Summer Music Festival, and Stratford Swan Parade, among other festival events, attract visitors who possess the characteristics of cultural and experiential tourists (mature, well-educated and economically comfortable). Certainly, the enjoyment of theatrical performance and fine cuisine are activities that fit well together (Lee, 2012).

5.2 Facilitation as a Creative Process

The conceptual framework consists of four interdependent determinants, which have just been discussed, and four facilitators that account for the innovation process that supports food cluster development. This section examines further the innovation process that has facilitated the formation of the Savour Stratford food cluster.

5.2.1 Environmentally friendly movement. Members of the Stratford Tourism Alliance believe that the food cluster is enhanced by the presence of a local environmental movement. According to one interviewee, the presence of a Slow Food Movement including a 'Slow Food Convivia' (community chapter) in the city has helped bring the food community together. Its presence has also served to provoke thought about the sustainability of the local food economy (e.g., food miles). Reflecting the strength of the environmentally friendly movement, the STA has actively encouraged member establishments to use more locally grown products. If a restaurant includes items from at least five member farmers it is certified a

“Savour Stratford” restaurant and can use the Savour Stratford logo. Such restaurants will also be featured in a special section of the not-for-profit organization’s official website, thus receiving significant advertising advantages.

5.2.2 Leadership. Leadership can come from many sources. According to one of the interviewees, the provincial government of Ontario has taken a leadership role by undertaking studies and producing reports that encourage the development of culinary clusters.

It is all based on fact and data/information... Too many people in the tourism industry do not really use the facts, data/information. In all of North America, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism probably provides the most significant statistical research data bases... not only local, but also international (Executive marketer).

Savour Stratford is a stakeholder within the province’s food tourism initiative and it is a member region of the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance. There are currently a large number of people involved in the Stratford food cluster. Even so, key informants believe that Stratford needs more artisans and more culinary products to meet the expectations of the highly-demanding visitors and to assure that the culinary tourism experience is equivalent in quality to the performances of the professional theatres. Stratford is an ‘early adopter’ in developing its rural creative economy as encouraged by the province. The not-for-profit organization has implemented activities outlined in action plans provided by the Ontario government, which were partly based on examples of best practice from culinary tourism initiatives in other Canadian provinces. The marketing organization (STA) has built partnerships not only with its members but also with local and provincial governments and it receives much needed financial support for its marketing activities.

5.2.3 Stakeholder collaboration. The strong stakeholder collaboration that is evident from the below quotes is in no small measure due to the activities of the Stratford Tourism Alliance.

Partnership and collaboration are very important. If you do not have partners, you cannot achieve your goals. The story about quality dining experience could not be told only by the fact that a restaurant has a creative chef. Our story of what is unique to this particular culinary strategy is the fact that the individuals that belong to Savor Stratford actually met the criteria that the majority of produce and products they use come from less than 100 miles. That’s exactly what should happen. It needs to be more grassroots-oriented and everyone has to be involved. In cultivating relationships we have gone to the individuals—the producers who have already been direct selling products to local restaurants. (Executive marketer)

According to the program developer, “community sponsorship and volunteer programs also help support the place branding initiative.” Further, she pointed out that:

It is really about getting out into the community and working to bring different members together and to get them to think about how we create products and programs. It is doing an inventory about what we have here so that we know what we have and how we can build on the assets we have... (Program developer)

Significantly, representatives from both the local and provincial government sit on the board of directors of the marketing organization, along with representatives of the local business associations. “The STA has a \$1.3 million operating budget and about \$80,000–90,000 is spent annually for marketing and branding activities. About a quarter of the total funding is provided by the City of Stratford and another major funding source is the tourists’ overnight stay tax in which 3% of taxes charged through guest accommodation fees go directly to the marketing organization” (Executive director). In addition, annual membership fees are charged and vary depending on business type (e.g., \$125 for B&B association, \$50 for non-member social organizations).

5.2.4 Communication and information flows. Communication is required among members of a food cluster, and between them and the outside world. In Stratford, an annual regional food summit (Perth County Regional Food Summit) has become the most important communication tool for sharing accumulated information and knowledge with members of Savour Stratford as well as the general public. For example, “farmers and producers learned the importance of adding value to their business by becoming or aligning themselves with culinary attractions” during the second annual food summit in 2010 (Savour Stratford website, 2011). The latest creative food economy and culinary trends and the influence of grassroots-focused social marketing were highlighted at this summit: farmers, producers, chefs, restaurateurs, artisans, and accommodators from across the region were invited to participate in networking forums and present new business opportunities. In 2011, Stratford held its third regional food summit, the focus of which was on bridging communication gaps between producers, chefs and buyers (Savour Stratford website, 2011). In addition, the official website has also become an important means of communication and an important repository of information (i.e., archived press releases on the creative food economy) (Lee, 2012).

6.0 Conclusion

Food clusters emerge where a geographical concentration of inter-connected firms and service providers offer culinary and cultural products and programs. Building on Porter’s classic clustering model, the conceptual framework has been applied to exploring the links between primary (agriculture) and service sectors (tourism), and it is innovative in this respect. The conceptual framework was developed from an assessment of the literature and, as demonstrated in this case study, it has a variety of roles. First, the model was used to guide the collection of information in the field investigation. Second, it was used to structure the qualitative analysis in the case study. Third, the details of each of the components of the model (interdependent

determinants and facilitators) were employed as an evaluative tool of the study site. Thus, the conceptual model can assist prescriptively by drawing attention to elements that require special attention to strengthen food cluster and rural creative economy development.

The transformation of a place's comparative advantage into a competitive advantage is based on the identification of the strengths of a place, and the inventory of the food-related cultural and environmental resources. Since these will differ from place to place, one should expect different outcomes based on local context and the knowledge used to create the culinary tourism brand. Synergistic relationships between primary and service sectors should be a key goal, bolstering the creative economy through entrepreneurial activities that build upon local strengths and assets. Furthermore, the determinants identified in the conceptual framework should be present for the creation of a food cluster. Thus, for example, it is necessary to have agricultural products within proximity to an interested market of sufficient size. In the absence of this, it will be difficult to establish a successful food cluster. It is also essential that a facilitating organization exist to help promote partnerships and collaborative initiatives and, eventually, to help market the place to outsiders.

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