

Service-oriented, sustainable, local food value chain – A case study



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 November 2016

Revised 11 May 2017

Accepted 20 May 2017

Available online 26 May 2017

Keywords:

Service-dominant logic
Sustainable supply chain
Sustainable development
Agriculture and tourism linkages
Case study

ABSTRACT

Many developing countries depend on tourism as their main engine for economic development, but sustainability is often a concern. In the absence of inter-sectorial linkages between tourism and other industrial sectors, opportunities for trickledown benefits to host communities are stymied. For decades, researchers have been contending with issues related to strengthening agriculture and tourism linkages as a strategy to maximize economic linkages. This service-oriented approach to the local food supply chain is posited as a new model in which agriculture and hotel linkages can be advanced. We collected data about local food hotel supply through interviews with key stakeholders. The findings from our exemplary case study confirm that strengthening inter-sectorial linkages have benefits for stakeholders. This case study suggests that there are opportunities for tourism policies that foster local food linkages with high-end accommodation properties as a strategy to spread the economic spin off from tourism and also to encourage youth involvement in sustainable tourism development.

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest service sectors in the world and is seen as an important catalyst for development, especially in developing countries (Roe & Urquhart, 2001) as benefits derived include foreign exchange, tax revenue generation, employment creation and contribution to Gross Domestic Product or GDP (Hummel & van der Duim, 2012; Pratt, 2011). Amidst intense critiques of tourism development approaches, alternative paradigms have emerged in recent years. These embrace sustainable development themes such as equity, local participation, partnership, value chain, poverty reduction, inter-sectorial linkages, empowerment, and private sector participation (Hummel & van der Duim, 2012; Scheyvens, 2007). Whereas there is no shortage of theoretical underpinnings for sustainable tourism development, its realization in practice is sparse. According to Hall and Page (2009), research on poverty reduction – poverty being one of the scourges of tourism-dependent countries – ought to be regarded as the impetus for future discourse in international tourism management.

Greater local sourcing and the use of local agricultural supplies have been identified as a critical best practice for responsible tourism (Pillay & Rogerson, 2013, p. 53). While the importance of strengthening these linkages is generally acknowledged, in practice it is often viewed as almost insurmountable due to a myriad of challenges related to demand, supply, marketing and government policies (Pillay & Rogerson, 2013). Although the pivotal role of the private sector in poverty

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reduction through tourism is generally acknowledged (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012), little attention and few targeted interventions have been made (Hummel & van der Duim, 2012; Meyer, 2009).

Some of the poorest countries in the world possess a wealth of cultural and natural assets that can be judiciously exploited through tourism (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012). In particular, there is an opportunity to harness the rarity of local and natural assets to serve the high-end tourist market which currently is more likely to use more imported foods rather than local produce and goods (Rogerson, 2012). Harnessing the benefits from local and natural assets can significantly contribute to poverty reduction through employment generation, particularly of women and youth who are some of the most marginalized people (Bennett, Ashley, Roe, & Britain, 1999). Any efforts to enhance the value chain and inter-sectorial linkages can therefore contribute to poverty reduction (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012).

This research paper presents a component of a multiple case study project in which the new conceptual framework of Thomas-Francois, Von Massow, and Joppe (2016) was applied to investigate the strength of the local food supply chain in the Caribbean. The framework represents a shift from traditional supply-chain management to a service-oriented paradigm (Thomas-Francois et al., 2016). To test and validate this conceptual model, the focus was on three facets of the local food supply chain: value co-creation and co-production, business relationships, and intangible resources. The Caribbean region was selected for this research since it is known as the most dependent tourism region in the world with high economic leakages (Clayton & Karagiannis, 2008; Roe & Urquhart, 2001).

This explanatory case study is based on the theoretical underpinnings of service-dominant (S-D) logic. This framework advances the co-creation of value by customers, emphasizes relationships, and promotes optimal use of intangible resources (Lambert & Garcia-Dastigüe, 2006; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Although prevalent in the marketing and service management literature, there has been limited research on its impact on supply chains. Overall, business-to-business service research is underrepresented in the literature (Ostrom et al., 2010) since most of the S-D logic theoretical development has focused on improving business-to-consumer relationships (Lusch & Vargo, 2011). The present exemplary case study of a luxury resort's local food supply chain illustrates its potential, importance, and benefits to sustainable (tourism) development.

A service orientation of local food supply chains can potentially contribute to tackling many of the constraints in agriculture and tourism-backward food linkages that have been identified over the decades by theorists and researchers such as Lundgren (1973), Britton (1982), Belisle (1983), Belisle (1984), Telfer and Wall (1996), (2000), Torres (2003), Torres and Momsen (2004, 2011), Meyer, Ashley, and Poultney (2004), Meyer (2007), Rylance, Spenceley, Mitchell, and Leturque (2009), Lacher and Nepal (2010), Mitchell and Ashley (2010), Rogerson (2011), Pillay and Rogerson (2013), and Rogerson (2014).

Supply chain management and the value chain

Supply chains have existed since the rise of economies (Baltacioglu, Ada, Kaplan, Yurt And, & Cem Kaplan, 2007), but the concept has only fairly recently appeared in the literature. According to Flott (2001), it was the failure of the International Organization for Standardization to ensure that its ISO 9000 standards provided sufficient guidance and tools for organizations (who want to ensure that their products and services consistently meet customer's requirements and that quality is consistently improved) that led to the concept of supply chain and the emphasis on cooperative partnership efforts between buyers and suppliers (with established ground rules and better understanding of suppliers' capacity and buyers' needs).

Supply chain management is a very important aspect in managing organizations. It has been defined as the management of information, processes, goods, and funds from the earliest supplier to the ultimate customer and including disposal of products (Ellram, Tate, & Billington, 2004, p. 17). The Global Supply Chain Forum produced a modified definition which stated that it is the integration of the key business processes from end user through original suppliers of products, services, and information that add value for customers and other stakeholders (Lambert, Cooper, & Pagh, 1998, p. 1). This definition goes beyond others to suggest value creation for customers and benefits to stakeholders, notions usually associated with the value chain concept (Baltacioglu et al., 2007). This evolution in the discussion on supply chains and their management is supported by Lau, Zhao, and Nakandala (2015) and Flott (2001) who emphasize the importance to businesses of moving beyond price (only) and shifting from coercion to collaboration. Rather than viewing products as commodities, the focus should be on true value exchanges; time savings, quality, improved market share, and reliability of suppliers.

Relatively new to the supply chain literature is the concept of sustainable management, i.e., optimizing resources to focus on stewardship in processes throughout the chain (Linton, Klassen, & Jayaraman, 2007). Hence, sustainable supply chains introduce environmental and social issues (Linton et al., 2007), often considered in 21st century business practice as paying respect to the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998). Sustainable supply chain management is defined as "the management of material and information flows as well as cooperation among companies along the supply chain while taking goals from all three dimensions of sustainable development, i.e. economic, environmental and social, and stakeholder requirements into account" (Seuring, Sarkis, Müller, & Rao, 2008, p. 1545). This heightened focus on sustainability has either a lower cost in the chain or provides positive or neutral value to businesses involved.

Arguably, trust plays a vital role in strengthening the relationships in tourism supply chains. As posited by Nunkoo and Gursoy (2016) and Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, and Gursoy (2012), lack of trust among relating stakeholders in tourism can significantly hinder sustainable development in a destination.

Our study provides insights on managing the business-to-business service relationships in a sustainable manner, a gap in the literature identified by Johnston (2005).

Service and service-dominant (S-D) logic

Today, the service sector represents a major factor in economic development, contributing 80% and more to GDP in advanced economies (Stauss, 2008). Tourism is now one of the world's largest industries and the largest service industry (WTTC, 2015).

Lovelock (1999, p. 5) explains the concepts of *service* and *services*, respectively, as:

"An act or performance offered by one party to another. Although the process may be tied to a physical product, the performance is essentially intangible and does not normally result in ownership of any of the factors of production."

"Services are economic activities that create value and provide benefits for customers at specific times and places, as a result of bringing about a desired change in or on behalf of the recipient of the service."

These definitions of service and services complement the axioms of S-D logic. Greer, Lusch, and Vargo (2016, p. 29) refine it further by suggesting that service is the application of resources (primarily knowledge and skills) for the benefit of another individual or organization (the beneficiary). According to Greer et al. (2016, p. 29), all businesses are service businesses since S-D logic implies interactivity and togetherness between service provider and beneficiary. It embraces a focus on working together (employees, managers, suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders) to integrate resources (combining or aligning assets) for mutual value creation (producing benefit for all participants).

Pre-theoretic in nature (Lusch & Vargo, 2011), S-D logic applies 11 fundamental premises as starting points of reasoning (i.e., axioms) upon which theory can be built (Lusch & Vargo, 2011). It evolved from the dynamics of marketing services, linking resource advantage theory, core competency-based theory, and relationship marketing (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2006). These conceptual foundations grounded S-D logic with its customer-centric, market-driven, and service-centered nature. The focus on *operant resources* – defined as invisible or intangible resources such as human resources possessing core competencies, skills or special knowledge of organizational processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) – can provide competitive advantage and maximize customers' involvement to facilitate the customization of product and/or service offerings (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2006).

Resource advantage theory goes beyond land, labour and capital, to also stress financial, human, legal, organizational, informational, and relational resources (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2006). It recognizes that each business will have some unique resources (e.g., extremely knowledgeable employees or cutting edge production processes) that allow it to produce efficiently and effectively and therefore contributing to the business's comparative advantage that cannot be easily replicated by competitors (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2006). Under competence-based theory this is achieved by identifying, seeking, developing, reinforcing, maintaining and leveraging distinctive competencies through the effective use of resources to realize key strategies (Hunt & Madhavaram, 2006). In relationship marketing, the focus is on interactions and the management of customer relationships to gain competitive advantage (Grönroos, 2007) and requires three fundamental tactics: redefining business as a service business with service competition as a critical element of *total service offering* and not just a product or core service; management of the business from a process management perspective where the process creates value for customers rather than from a functionalistic perspective which only distributes products or services; and establishment of partnerships and a network to meet the needs of the entire process which requires close contact with suppliers.

These three theories contribute significantly to the conceptual power of the S-D logic paradigm which is positioned for further theoretical development and can be unified with other logics to form a unified theory (Lusch & Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2008a, 2008b). Application of the paradigm has already begun to unify traditionally different research in areas such as customer and market orientation, services marketing, relationship marketing, quality management, value and supply chain management, resource management, and network analysis (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It is thus one of the best paradigms for the way forward in service science (Ostrom et al., 2010) as this service-centered model of exchange emphasizes intangible resources, competences, dynamics, exchange processes, operant resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and the resultant co-creation of value and relationships (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Indeed, the customer is always considered a co-producer and therefore a co-creator of value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a, 2008b).

Vargo and Lusch (2004) are clear that firms cannot offer value but rather value propositions, and it is only the consumer who can claim value. Interactivity, integration, customization and co-production are recognized as the hallmarks of the service centeredness of S-D logic which intrinsically complements the focused approach on the customer and relationships (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This, then, implies that the goal is to customize offerings for consumers and to attempt to maximize their involvement to better fit their needs. Service-dominant logic has indeed brought about a new perspective in service thinking, particularly as it relates to value, the nature of relationships, and the use of resources, but one that requires further development to advance the service science (Lusch & Vargo, 2006, 2011; Vargo, Lusch, & Akaka, 2010).

Adapting S-D logic to study the farmers-hotel local food supply chain at the enterprise level (Fig. 1) allows for a consumer-centric focus on the food needs of guests at a hotel. Doing so should contribute to stronger inter-sectorial linkages between the agriculture and tourism sectors (Thomas-Francois et al., 2016) and hence reduce leakages from the excessive importation of food to satisfy the demands of the tourism industry. The development of linkages between tourism and agri-

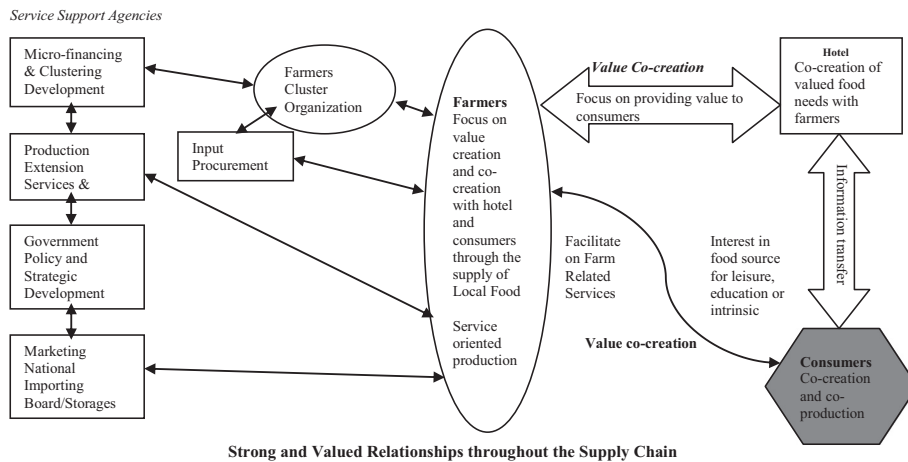


Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual model of the service oriented, farmers-hotel supply chain from the S-D logic's service management perspective.

culture has been acknowledged as having potential for future sustainable development including increased income for local economies (Singh, Milne, & Hull, 2015). In addition, food service that is linked with socio-cultural connections has been found to have an impact on visitors' decisions to return to destinations (Milne & Singh, 2008). The use of local food not only improves the economic and environmental sustainability of both tourism and the rural communities, but it encourages sustainable agricultural practices, support for local businesses, and brand building (Sims, 2009, p. 322). Circumstantially, niche markets also emerge (Mason & Milne, 2006). Despite these opportunities, agri-food systems have been ignored from the perspective of the interrelationship between food and tourism destinations (Hall & Gössling, 2013) and also from the perspective of a service-centered approach (Johnston, 2005).

Case study: Case location and resort

Familiarity with the island of Grenada, its agricultural and tourism sectors, and the presence of a resort renowned for its use of local foods, led to the choice of Grenada as the study location. The island is one of the most southern, tourism-dependent Caribbean destinations (Fig. 2). Its economy in the immediate post-colonial period was agrarian-based, but over the past two decades the economy has shifted from being one driven by agriculture to one dominated by services with tourism being the leading foreign exchange earner (MoA, 2008, p. 6). In 2012, the contribution to GDP from agriculture sectors was recorded as 3.96% (CSO, 2016). Travel and tourism's direct contribution to GDP was recorded as 6.4% and the total contribution of to the economy was 21.8% of GDP in 2012 (WTTC, 2013). Grenada's population is 100,000 and in 2012 the tourism sector contributed direct employment of 2500 jobs; this represents 5.9% of total employment (WTTC, 2013). The largest tourism business segment is accommodation with a total room stock of 1968 rooms in 28 resorts and hotels, 19 apartments, 16 guesthouses, 9 villas, and 8 cottages (CSO, 2016). Market access is one of the major problems faced by the agriculture sector in Grenada (MoA, 2008, 2009). Since the tourism sector represents a viable market, it is important to determine what barriers might exist to reinforcing linkages between agriculture and tourism. Previous research by Thomas (2009) indicates that these linkages exist in Grenada, but some major challenges impede hotels from purchasing local foods: inconsistency in supplies, insufficiency of supplies, unreliability of suppliers, and pricing. According to Thomas (2009) local producers indicated that these challenges can be attributed to ad hoc or inadequate planning, seasonality, limited technology, and inadequate information sharing between farmers and hoteliers.

The tourism-related economic leakage rate is 55%, a consequence of the high rate of importation (Clayton & Karagiannis, 2008). Key stakeholders in agriculture and tourism are generally supportive of establishing formal inter-sectorial linkages (Thomas, 2009). However, the agriculture sector continues to face decline. The Grenada Agriculture Census indicates that there are now 9206 farmers (71% males) that represent a decline in farmers of 22% compared to 1995. This sector contributes 9.6% to the labour force. The land used for farming in the country has also decreased by 25 acres (James, 2015). The country has an unemployment rate estimated in 2014 at 33.5% of which 55% was among youths 12–24 years of age (GoG, 2014). The poverty rate (i.e., the share of the population that cannot afford to buy a basic basket of goods) increased from 32.1% in 1998 to 37.7% in 2008 (NSAP, 2012, p. 47). Both the agriculture and tourism sectors are considered as tools to address the socio-economic challenges in Grenada, however, the Ministry of Agriculture embraces the agriculture sector as one that, if stimulated, has the potential to distribute wealth which is necessary for poverty eradication and rural development (MoA, 2008, p. 7).

The case luxury resort was established in 1951 as an inn by the parents of the current owner. It was one of the first not just in Grenada, but in the Caribbean, to be owned and operated entirely by locals and who were the first to serve local cuisine to visitors to the island. The introduction of Caribbean fusion cuisine made with local ingredients resulted in almost every guest passing through the island dining at the inn (Wolf, 1986).



Source: Nation News (2016) <http://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/91445/cdb-approves-grant-study-water-sewerage-facilities-grenada>



Source: World Atlas (2016)
<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/america/caribb/gd.htm>

Fig. 2. Map of Grenada. (See above-mentioned references for further information.)

After holding directorship positions with the beachside hotel for some years, in 1975 the entrepreneur became first the majority shareholder and later full owner. After phased expansion, the resort now employs 210 people that provide service for guests of its 64 luxury suites. The resort describes its market segment as one with well-travelled guests – professional executives – both working and retired. The majority of the customers are from the United Kingdom but there are also many from the United States as well. The high-end, family resort boasts of a 65% repeat guest visitation rate.

Research methods

Based on experiences gained from previous research in the area of agriculture and tourism linkages related to food, and the literature on service management, specifically S-D logic, we abductively constructed propositions per previous examples (Ramroth, 2006; Van de Ven, 2007). Abductive reasoning is a pragmatist method aimed at creating new knowledge and involves four steps: (1) identifying the object needing understanding, (2) matching object needing understanding with theory (existing knowledge), (3) deriving new insights, and (4) proposing future directions based on the insights (De Brito & Van der Laan, 2010, p. 6). Consistent with pragmatism, we approached our research not necessarily to *prove* truth or falsehood, but rather to effectively provide clear guiding action, predictions and useful findings for stakeholders (Meyers, 1999; Ramroth, 2006). This explanatory case studies a socially complex, contemporary event over which the researcher has no control and for which there is a need for in-depth understanding in order to provide clear insights that may solve existing problems (Yin, 2014).

The unit of analysis included both primary and secondary informants. The primary informants were local food suppliers, farmers (12: 4 female and 8 male), in the resort's supply chain; and resort staff who are involved in making decisions on behalf of the consumer (5: 2 female and 3 male), who interact with the consumer as it relates to their food needs (11: 6 female, 5 male), and who are involved in producing a product or service for the consumer (5: 1 female and 4 male). Specifically, resort staff held positions as waiters, senior managers, chefs and purchasing officers. Secondary informants included support service agents such as agricultural input suppliers (2: both male), policy makers for tourism and agriculture (5: 2 female and 3 male), agricultural extension officers (2: both male), micro financiers (2: both male), and senior managers of the National Marketing and National Importing Board (2: both male). A total of 46 semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted that ranged from 20 minutes to 1 hour in duration. Resort management facilitated interviews with staff and provided a list of suppliers. A total of 18 females and 28 males were interviewed and all participants were of legal working age.

Yin's (2014) process for explanatory case study data analysis was meticulously adhered to. Data collected was analyzed using Nvivo software and coded under prioritized themes based on S-D logic that informed the conceptual framework. New themes also emerged from the data. During this axial coding process, categories and sub-categories were connected and integrated using the mind mapping technique under the three overarching themes of a) value co-creation and co-production, b) valued relationships, and c) intangible resources in the resort's local food supply chain. Secondary source material, primarily focused on media and web sources, was also consulted. Outcomes from the resort's *modus operandi* were identified and examined since these are integral to asserting causal links for the pattern matching data analysis technique. Finally, data gathered from the wide range of interviewees were triangulated with observations and document analyses to reach conclusions about strong causal inferences (Yin, 2014).

Results

Although the resort has not been placing much emphasis on service support services, it acknowledged the role of these stakeholders in its local food farmers-hotel supply chain. Thus, unwittingly, the resort has been applying several of the axioms of S-D logic related to value co-creation and co-production within its supply chain together with emphasizing valued relationships and harnessing intangible resources to the benefit of all its members, especially its guests. Specific findings related to the main propositions together with other themes that emerged from the data follow. Only a few verbatim quotes are included given the lengthiness of this research type.

Value co-creation and co-production

Service-dominant logic stipulates that the service offered must be co-created or co-produced with the customer for the customer to acknowledge its value. In this case study, local food or goods become transmitters of embedded knowledge or attributes that are used by customers, resort workers, and local food suppliers who are all involved in the value creation process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 7). The resort was able to ignite this process through frequent information transfer throughout the value chain, especially at the consumer level because of its consumer-centric *modus operandi*, via several operant resources (e.g., chefs to guests, waiter to guests, guests to waiter, guests to chefs, senior managers to guests, farmers to purchasing officer to chefs to waiters to guests, guests to waiters to chefs to purchasing officers to farmers). Thus, numerous utilities for consumers were co-created and co-produced based on their needs and expectations of the resort's foodservice.

Six main themes emerged that are summarized below.

1. The guests' desire to know where their foods are grown

Staff relay the necessary information about where foods are grown and accede to guests' requests by providing tours of the resort's garden (i.e., one of the farms where produce is sourced). Informants at the resort suggested that in future the resort should consider allowing guests to visits the farms of their suppliers so that they will have the opportunity to pick their own foods. These exchanges between the resort guests and staff serve to assure guests that their foods are locally grown, that they are contributing to the local economy by eating at the resort, and that they are limiting carbon emissions through reduced food transportation.

"A lot of people like to know exactly where you are getting your foods from...Where?...because they want to know how it is being produced, whether it is being organically grown, chemically grown or processed, if it's from a tin So we let them know that it is locally grown. It is not a processed item, it is not a fully chemically grown produced but it's straight from the farmer to the kitchen to your plate." (Foodservice Interviewee 5)

2. The desire of guests to experience a 'taste of place'

The co-creation and co-production process also relates to the desire of guests to experience a *taste of place*. A phenomenon that substantiates Backe's (2013) observation of a global trend of offering place-unique food experiences that perpetuates social and cultural sense of place.

This *taste of place* is a major value proposition suggested to guests even prior to their visit. On arrival, each guest is greeted with a drink called *The Spice Island Classic*. Local food suppliers play a major role in realizing this value proposition together with the chefs and waitstaff. Farmers supply the resort with unique and indigenous produce that the resort's chefs use to create international cuisine infused with local spices and flavors. Servers are instrumental in conveying information to guests on these aspects and provide guests the opportunity to taste and change meals. Resort informants indicated that very often guests will have conducted research on the food and culture of the destination before visiting and are therefore expecting that cultural experience through food. In response, the resort provides a Caribbean night buffet where guests can experience a variety of foods indigenous to Grenada and other Caribbean islands, such as 'Oil Down' a distinctive Grenadian dish that hails back to slavery days and the *one pot* cooking common in many of the other Caribbean islands.

"Most of the times when they [guests] come to the Caribbean they basically look forward to local foods. They don't want to have the same thing they had back at home. They would tell you that. For example, when you have buffet night they would say. . . yeah I am accustom having steak back home so I'll have some curry mutton. I'll have the things that I cannot prepare at home and things I do not have. They would tell you that. So you can see from the time they probably booked the trip that's when they have the mindset. . . . That's why you have to meet these expectations so that when they return home they can go back with that sort of memory." (Foodservice Interviewee 4)

3. The provision of nutritional benefits to guests

The resort promotes its cuisine as farm-to-table and organic. It arranges delivery of produce directly from farms to the resort to ensure freshness and preservation of nutritional content. The subliminal suggestion of healthy eating as part of the resort's value proposition is further supported by one-to-one engagements between its waitstaff and guests. In addition to assuring guests of the quality of foods being served, servers detail the meal's ingredients and nutritional benefits (e.g., local callaloo soup is described as being high in iron). At times, guests are encouraged to learn more about the nutritional content of the particular produce. The two-way conversations between waiters and guests provide the opportunity for the latter to ascertain the value that can be had from their meals and it is often these factors that entice them to explore foods that are new to them. Guests also provide feedback on their meals. Some indicate that they can taste the freshness in the fruits and vegetables thereby indicating their approval and satisfaction with the 'farm-to-table' concept.

"Well, in local food, I think we get more nutrients than the imported food, because when the imported foods come, it comes in a tin or in a package, or it comes in frozen. . . but we can get it fresh so all the minerals and vitamins are still in the fruits and vegetables so they get to enjoy it fresh. Because when it comes in local the shelf life is just three days and we have a quick turn over so guests always get it fresh." (Foodservice Interviewee 8)

4. The opportunity for guests to make special food requests

One of the most idiosyncratic features of the co-creation and co-production process at the resort is the opportunity for guests to make special food requests. These needs may be related to dietary restrictions for health reasons (e.g., allergies) but also to pleasure and personal gratification. Guests communicate with staff about their special food needs, often prior to arrival, but also during their stay. The particulars for each guest are stored on the resort's guest information management system, so that they can be retrieved if and when the guest returns. Guests can meet with the chef to discuss the specifics of their food needs to ensure that all expectations are met and exceeded. Servers are aware of the special food requests of individual guests since these are communicated at daily briefings. Staff are at liberty to anticipate and exceed guests' expectations during their stay, but to do so, staff must be aware of personalized needs to prevent misfortunes that might be related to food allergies. There is similar communication with local food suppliers to ensure that the requisite ingredients are on hand.

"If you are here and you really don't like what's on the menu you can order just about anything . . . today if you feel like you want curry goat you could just say. . . . ok I'll like to have curry goat for dinner.. you pre-order that and your wish is our command more or less and a lot [number] of guests have said, and they are well traveled people, that they haven't really gone anywhere and had such services." (Foodservice Interviewee 15)

5. Providing guests with unique food experiences

Combining international foods together with local foods in novel ways is another distinctive value co-creation process at the resort. Through communication exchanges, guests often acknowledge that they have experienced particular international dishes, however, at the resort these recipes are tweaked with local ingredients. For instance, an Irish potato will be replaced with a local breadfruit or dasheen that, like potatoes, are starchy foods but differ significantly in taste and texture. The new tastes and flavors usually stimulate guests to repeat these taste experiences. Staff indicated this is a major contributing factor for repeaters. Guests who indicated strong liking for particular meals are served the meals on subsequent

visits since this information has been recorded. Guests are also provided with recipes (upon request) and the resort has archived a *taste of spice* collection of recipes.

6. Consistent communication between staff and guests

Analysis of value co-creation and co-production at the resort through its local food supply chain made evident that consistent communication between the resort staff and guests during their stay is critical to the value process. The communication channels facilitate early detection of foodservice failures and the opportunity for immediate amends. Within three minutes of a guest expressing dissatisfaction with a meal, the meal is replaced. Resort staff engage guests constantly about their special interests and use the information as an opportunity to exceed expectations thereby delivering what they term a “foodservice wow factor.” Guests also provide feedback on their liking of local foods and express how the tastes, textures, and flavors are different from what they know. This feedback serves to motivate more creative use of local foods. This feedback currently does not reach the suppliers. Nevertheless, the opportunities for staff to communicate and provide stories about local foods are deemed valuable to the guests’ overall food and service experience.

Valued relationships

The local food supply chain at the resort epitomizes valued relationships not only between the resort and its customers but among its suppliers and staff too. The overall environment at the resort appears to be one of valued relationships. In this service model, humans are both the center of and active participants in the exchange process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 12). Inevitably, the provision of service that emphasizes value co-creation is also relational as opposed to simply transactional (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The resort describes its relationship with its local food suppliers, farmers, as a major facet of its ability to operate a service-focused foodservice. It has working relationships with 65 farmers and fosters a close relationship with 15 trusted ones. Perhaps the extent of the reciprocal (i.e. mutual) trust between the resort and farmers can be translated to the desired economic outcome it produced (Nunkoo et al., 2012). The resort communicates verbally with suppliers on a regular basis and disseminates information on the resort’s occupancy to several of the trusted farmers. Periodic meetings are convened with farmers to facilitate the mutual sharing of expectations on behalf of the guests and to share the resort’s vision and goals as they relate to procurement requirements of local foods; these meetings eliminate the need for intermediaries. In the event that suppliers are out of stock of a particular produce, resort staff said that their suppliers source the produce from other island farmers to signal their reliability.

Farmers have demonstrated strong commitment to responding to special requests for produce by the resort on short notice in order to meet guests’ needs and wants. Even in times of food scarcity, the resort noted that supplying it rather than alternate local markets is a priority for farmers. Acknowledging the important role played by farmers in producing local food for its foodservice, the resort is willing to pay higher prices and give tokens of appreciation to farmers.

Farmers described their relationship with the resort as a mutually beneficial partnership. They also perceived that business relationships between themselves and the resort’s purchasing officers have evolved into personal friendships. Prices paid for their supplies were considered rewarding and farmers claimed that the resort pays some of the highest prices for local produce on the island and has reliable, bi-weekly payment arrangements. Farmers also noted that large quantities of local foods are purchased by the resort which is unmatched by other hospitality businesses and local supermarkets on the island. They pride themselves for contributing local produce to a high-end, award-winning accommodation property, and feel both important to the resort’s foodservice operations and personally gratified in knowing that their produce is being used to make guests happy and satisfied.

“[I am] able to take care of my family, and [being] able to do a lot of other things in terms of educating my children.” (Farmer 6)

“When the check comes and ‘it marks these are tourism dollars,’ it makes me feel really happy. . . so you know [I have] money in my pocket and once you work serious business you would want pay [to be paid] and they [resort hotel] pay a decent price.” (Farmer 11)

The nature of this business relationship between the resort and local suppliers creates a level of interdependency. The resort is promoted internationally as one with a local foodservice. Its guests have shown tremendous liking and demand for its fusion cuisine, a major factor that influences repeaters. According to the Trip Advisor website, 73% of visitors rate the resort’s food as “Very Good” or “Excellent” (21% and 52%, respectively). This has been instrumental in the resort winning ten Gold Awards in Virgin Holidays’ Worldwide Platinum Collection; this is only one of the resort’s many international awards for its foodservice.

Resort staff interviewed estimated that, on average, over 80% of the food served per plate to guests is local. According to farmers interviewed, they have been supplying the resort for an average of over 10 years with some exceeding 20 years of service, indicative of a high level of interdependency. Farmers indicated that they have had some of their most successful business transactions with the resort since it has fairly high occupancy during the October to May tourism season, and that they depend on the resort for their livelihoods. Commitment to social responsibility by the resort’s leadership also adds to the complex influences to foster relationships among stakeholders in the supply chain. This business is committed to support

local farmers and the local economy. Farmers and nationals credit it as making one of the greatest contributions to agricultural development on the island.

Based on Trip Advisor comments, many of the resort visitors acknowledge the role of staff in creating an excellent service experience, of which food experiences are a part. This could be a result of several interactions working together. Due to cordial and family-type relationships forged with guests over discussions about food and the total experience at the resort, guests tend to repeat their visits. This vote of confidence also impacts staff that shared that this type of environment contributes to their overall job satisfaction and motivation to constantly improve their service performance.

Intangible resources of the resort's local food supply chain

Tangible products are often used in the provision of services, but there are several other mechanisms actively working to warrant that these are satisfactory to consumers. Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 8) argued that goods are not the common denominator of exchange: rather, it is the application of specialized knowledge, mental skills, and to a lesser extent, physical skills. They claimed that knowledge and skills may either be transferred directly, through education and training, or indirectly by embedding them into objects. The matter, embodied with knowledge, is an “appliance” for the performance of services; it replaces direct service (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 9). The research illustrates the operation of intangible resources relating to both local food and humans involved in the value chain that work together to provide exceptional foodservice at the resort. The knowledge and experience of farmers are its dominant intangible resources.

Interviewed farmers had, on average, 30 years of commercial farming experience and most started farming as children. Farmers possess capabilities and technical ‘know how’ for producing local foods with special characteristics required by the resort (e.g., a particular taste, texture and/or size). Their individual plants receive hands-on care throughout the growth process (e.g., molding and mulching) to ensure the highest quality foods. Their tacit knowledge applied especially to the production of fruits creates special, distinguishable tastes that have been identified by the resort's guests. These farmers are also consumer-centric as they apply their knowledge and skills to food production in a manner that translates into meeting guests' needs and for the benefit of their health. Furthermore, their farming practices attempt to ensure limited negative impacts on the environment (i.e., permaculture). Servers are knowledgeable about the production processes in which farmers engage to supply quality foods and shared that this gives them a good feeling and strong sense of pride in serving indigenous foods, and an impetus for explaining and telling stories which also helps to build their confidence in serving because of their familiarity with the foods.

Knowledge and experience of the resort staff play a key role in the delivery of exceptional foodservice. On average, staff had 10 years of working experience. This included all resort staff interviewed who are involved in the food value chain. Wait staff possess and share their indigenous knowledge about local foods, national dishes, and cultural experiences with their guests. This facilitates knowledge transfer from staff to guests. Constant interactions between them inspire in staff a commitment to innovate, to learn, and to pursue personal development to attain the highest standards of service performance in satisfying guest needs. Staff demonstrated a daily commitment to understanding guests' needs and attempting to meet them. There was evidence of intense application of service training by staff in executing daily duties. This atmosphere also spurred non-rival competition, in particular among chefs, to create unique food options using local foods.

Another intangible resource that emerged from the findings is one that has not been explicitly explored by S-D logic and might only be applicable to food. There is a specific benefit from the geographical location of the country in which the food is being produced. This intangible resource is referred to as a “geographical indicator” by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO, 2015). Not only does the tropical climate facilitate year-round farming, but the availability of sunlight and Grenada's rich volcanic soils that contain high levels of natural nutrients and that demand little synthetic agro-chemicals and fertilizers, are reflected in the taste and quality of local foods. Nature-based farming on virgin soils (soils that have not been used for intensive mechanical farming) is another noted feature of farms where the resort's foods are grown. Local produce also retains its freshness and nutritional value due to the short distances travelled. Interviewees identified these factors in differentiating between local and imported foods.

The organizational culture at the resort is one that mimics a family and this culture is believed to influence service delivery. Overall, the general belief connotes that the resort is a family and resort guests are special visitors. Resort staff seemed to have accepted this idea and it has translated into a type of motivation which allows them to provide exceptional services to guests. This family culture appears to have stimulated genuine care for and enjoyment in meeting guests' needs. The open door policy of senior managers and leaders encourages fluid communication and the sharing of ideas, suggestions, and feedback. Unity among the staff, another intangible attribute, was described by those interviewed. It allowed them to share the common goal of exceeding guests' expectations. Feedback from guests, which supports continuous service adjustments, is instrumental in ensuring that guests' needs are met and exceeded. Undoubtedly this family culture has influenced the number of returning guests. Suppliers have also demonstrated a strong sense of loyalty in their provisioning the resort with local foods, but it is uncertain whether the family culture also influences their loyalty or whether they are motivated by tangible benefits from doing business with the resort.

Explanation of outcomes as proposed by S-D logic

Our results indicate that the consumer-centric supply chain, that proposes co-creation and co-production throughout the value chain in the resort studied, has contributed to a strong farmers-hotel food linkage. The resort made specific requests of farmers based on guests' needs and these suppliers were able to deliver the requisite supplies. The robust communication flow throughout the chain, including foodservice staff, resulted in consumers' needs being met and farmers benefiting from the resort's service operation. As a result this supply chain integrates several functions to deliver service offerings for customers that ultimately benefit all actors (Lusch, 2011).

Strong and valued business relationships among stakeholders in the value chain contributed to strengthening farmers-hotel food linkages. The number of years of service to the resort by both staff and farmers is indicative of satisfactory relationships. Resort staff and farmers also mentioned mutual dependency, loyalty, friendships, and personal satisfaction that attest to strong and valued relationships. The business relationship is one of the most valued resources in the value chain and can be described as one that is agile, adaptable, and fluid towards value co-creation for the end consumers (Lusch, 2011; Lusch, Vargo, & Tanniru, 2010).

Intangible resources embedded in local food and possessed by operants of the value chain contributed to the strengthening of farmers-hotel food linkages and also played a significant role in creating strong linkages between the resort and the local economy. Intangible resources seem to have played a mechanistic role in the process. Special characteristics embedded in local food and special competencies belonging to operants surfaced to improve the foodservice. These are essential for creating competitive advantages for the resort's foodservice and these findings show that they are being optimized. Not only are there powerful advantages in linking food with place to enhance visitors' experiences (Sims, 2009), but the role of local operants is also integral to the overall success of this strategy.

Overall, the study indicates that all members of the chain were benefiting from the service-oriented focus. Farmers' livelihoods are enhanced, guests are happy and satisfied with their foodservice, long-serving resort staff feel personal satisfaction, and the resort benefits from approximately 60% repeat visitation, which also contributes to Grenada's long-term success. As identified by Godfrey and Clarke (2000) the capacity in destinations to foster repeat visits to is an essential contributor to minimizing economic leakages and increasing the economic benefits of tourism in destinations.

Emergent themes: Leadership and innovation

The concept of leadership was not reflected in the proposed model for strengthening local food farmers-hotel supply chains. However, the resort's leadership emerged as a critical success factor in this study. The vision and commitment to use local foods at the resort came from the owner who was influenced by his parents' experiences in the family-owned business. He recognized that fusion cuisine that utilizes local foods in unique ways provided a competitive advantage to the foodservice led by his mother. In addition to assisting the local economy, this visionary committed to using this strategy combined with high levels of consumer centricity and service. As indicated by one interviewee, the resort acknowledges that its guests already have had food experiences in many different parts of the world. To be distinctive, the resort pursued creativity and innovation in its foodservice. With reference to Brooker and Joppe's (2014) tourism innovation typology, foodservice appears to be a combination of both radical and liminal innovation, radical in the sense that some meals have never been created before and liminal in that other meals represent a tweaking of ingredients in international cuisine. The sharing of ideas between foodservice staff and guests is integral to the creativity that exists within the resort's foodservice, creativity led by the chefs. This dynamic at the resort demonstrated that engaged entrepreneurship co-opted with innovation, contributes significantly to institutional success (Joppe, Brooker, & Thomas, 2014). This case study also supports the idea that the presence of a strong, highly motivated and charismatic leader together with passion and single-mindedness has the potential of allowing a business to overcome all impediments, inspire employees, and maintain dedication for the business's success (WTTC, 2016).

The resort's leadership and innovativeness account partly for the strength of the farmers-hotel supply chain. As an all-inclusive boutique resort, the mandate is to pursue service excellence, not only for foodservice but also for the holistic service offering. Every six to seven years, the resort is refurbished and re-equipped with five-star amenities to remain competitive. The resort's spa is believed to be on par with any spa around the globe. The property is decorated with local paintings and crafts and holds membership in the association of Small Luxury Hotels of the World. It therefore competes with premium accommodation properties worldwide.

While it can be argued that the total service offerings of the resort contribute to its success and high number of repeaters, interviewees said that foodservice is perhaps one of the most important services, especially for an all-inclusive resort where meals are served up to five times a day (i.e., breakfast, lunch, dinner, and teas). Also, the length of stay for many guests is two weeks, so meals must be appealing each day. When guests are asked why they return, they point to the food and the service. These insights emphasize that the resort's innovation, both minor and major adaptations of products and services (Hjalager, 2002) and including those related to local food, has allowed it to offer a differentiated service experience that is unique to its destination (Brackenbury, 2006).

Conclusions

This explanatory case study validates the research propositions that posited that a service-oriented, local food supply chain informed by the theoretical power of S-D logic can strengthen farmers-hotel local food supply chains. In particular, value co-creation and co-production, valued relationships, and intangible resources can work together to strengthen agriculture and tourism linkages. Leadership and innovation in the supply chain was also identified as key to strengthening the supply chain. The core axioms of S-D logic highlighted in this study play an integral role in sustaining economic exchange relationships within the local food supply chain.

Central to the interrelations of value co-creation, valued relationships, and intangible resources is a customer-centric focus in the service-oriented model. Leadership is a critical input factor that operationalizes the service model whereas innovation appears to be an outcome of all factors working together. Fig. 3 illustrates the conceptual composition that exists within the resort's supply chain and the factors contributing to the strengthening of local food linkages with the resort's foodservice. Value co-creation is also central to the interplay within the model. Both valued relationships and intangible resources are critical to the value co-creation and co-production processes.

The managerial approach towards strengthening agriculture and tourism with a service-oriented supply chain has been beneficial to the private sector entity, but it also contributed significantly towards rural prosperity through local food suppliers. This has translated into creating rural employment and likely a reduction in poverty. The case study represents a best practice and a shift from the transactional approach, one usually focused on the cost of products and effective and efficient supply. The shift is towards a form of agriculture and tourism-food linkage where food is *traded* with an intensive focus on 'service'. This sets up the ability to create value beyond that of the commodity, providing benefits for both the consumer and members of the supply chain. The service includes a concentrated focus on the consumers' needs, and co-creating or communicating value within the supply chain. Guests then benefit from a differentiated service. The emphasis therefore is on finding utility for the consumer, co-creation with the end consumer, and ensuring exceptional service experiences.

The resort's supply chain can be considered as one that has evolved into a value chain since its members mutually benefit. The case demonstrates evidence of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. It suggests that sustainable supply and value chains are achievable in tourism-related development and can enhance livelihoods in developing countries. The case also indicates that such supply chains are viable even among stakeholders who traditionally are known for power differentials (e.g., between farmers and small local suppliers and hotels). In this case the value that the farmers are creating is well recognized and consequently they are rewarded accordingly.

The clear guiding principle of this case study which indicates how this particular value chain has been able to improve lives and societal well being (Rorty, 1998; Wicks & Freeman, 1998) is engrained in the resort's strategy to tie its international cuisine to the place in which the resort exists (Backe, 2013). This strategy forces the resort not only to maintain authenticity of its food service by purchasing and using local foods (Sims, 2009) but due to its service commitment to the end consumer, the resort became obliged to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with its suppliers. Farmers benefit from consistent business relationships that allow for large volumes of their produce to be purchased at premium prices. These suppliers are able to increase production and farm revenue. Simultaneously, the resort benefits from a reliable, trusted relationship with farmers that has empowered the entity to satisfy its value propositions to consumers while at the same time offering a flexible food service that is consumer centric (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In addition, the *taste of place* phenomenon also provides, to some extent, explanatory power of the cuisine's effect on repeat visits to the resort (Backe, 2013), which translates into greater usage of local foods. Future research in this area is necessary for greater certainty although in this research, findings suggest a relationship.

While one resort's contribution to poverty reduction, economic development, and employment on a national level may be considered insignificant, it can be argued that given the number of years suppliers have been involved in this particular value chain, if this food service model becomes established in the destination by other resorts and hotels, it can have significant impact on socio-economic factors.

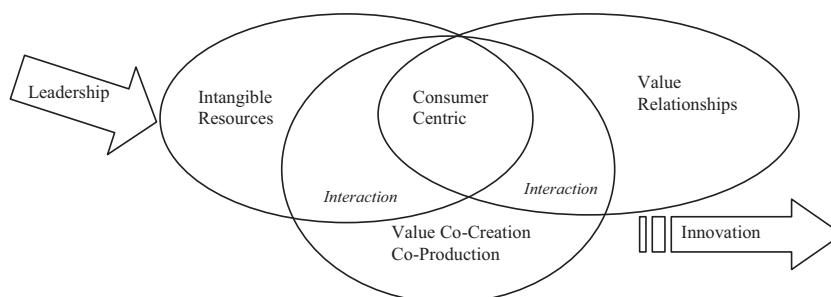


Fig. 3. The case study's service-oriented, supply chain model.

There are also opportunities for youth involvement in such agri-food systems; however, deliberate policy interventions are essential to develop the necessary platforms that will permit youth involvement. Youth participation can also contribute to increased farm productivity to meet the local food demands of the tourism industry since there is a correlation between adoption of on-farm innovation with youth participation (Aphunu & Atoma, 2010). Suppliers of this particular case study were adaptive to technologies that allowed them to meet the needs of the end consumer. The case also illustrated that there are opportunities for involvement in the service-oriented value chain for female farmers, women being often among the unemployed, together with youths (Bennett et al., 1999). Studies about these constructs could be conducted in other Caribbean countries and tourism regions in order to broaden understanding of the scope of this study's contribution to international tourism management.

This case contributes to the general gap in research and the literature on agri-food systems (Hall & Gössling, 2013), and in particular to the benefits of focusing on business-to-business supply chains from a service management perspective (Johnston, 2005). It illustrates a new dimension in which the complexities identified in the literature on agriculture and tourism may be considered. There is a wealth of opportunities for tourism destinations when focus is placed on agri-food systems (Hall & Gössling, 2013) and future investigations could focus on different research contexts.

Although suppliers, all who were from rural areas, indicated satisfaction with the economic benefits from their business relationships with the resort, the major limitation to this research was the inability of the field researcher to capture quantifiable economic benefits derived by members in the value chain due to the sensitivity of this type of information. It was also difficult to access the end customers, however, Trip Advisor reviews were analyzed to gain insights. This presents an opportunity for researchers to investigate in depth the role of the consumer in a service-oriented value chain.

This exemplary case study confirms that the service oriented approach to agriculture and tourism linkages can result in benefits that strengthen inter-sectorial linkages but more so benefits to all stakeholders. This case study puts forward the key tenants of the service oriented approach that should form the basis of dialogue among tourism planners, policymakers and researchers to inform strategic frameworks for ensuring tourism benefits host communities in developing tourism destinations and simultaneously contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Disclosure statement

Authors have no financial interest or benefit arising from the application of this research.

Acknowledgement

With sincere appreciation we acknowledge the contributions of research participants to this study.

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