
9 Neolocalism and Social Sustainability: The Case of Öland's Harvest Festival, Sweden

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Abstract

Food festivals are common happenings in rural communities. Arguably, these events are a form of neolocalism, where the efforts of local stakeholders promote a sense of place based on attributes of their community. In this chapter, we propose that food events foster residents' sense of place, and thus contribute to rural social sustainability. We explore the case of the annual harvest festival on the island of Öland, Sweden (Ölands Skördefest). This festival seeks the promotion of local cuisine, innovative culinary products and rural culture. We argue that it even fosters feelings of belonging amongst community members by generating an atmosphere of cooperation and social participation. Participation in Ölands Skördefest can strengthen new residents' feeling of belonging to a special place. Moreover, the event facilitates stable business networks on Öland as different stakeholders work together to organize an attractive event. The work of these individuals reinforces a sense of belonging to a special place during the organization of the event. Memories of the festival amongst community-members also cultivate the continuity of positive social relationships on the island.

Introduction

Food festivals are common events taking place in rural communities where local produce, traditions, and modes of production are displayed and celebrated for community members and visitors alike to enjoy. Arguably, food events are a form of neolocalism, where the efforts of local stakeholders promote a sense of place based on attributes of their community (Holtkamp et al., 2016; Schnell, 2013). Local foods have gained prominence in the past years due to growing popular concerns over sustainable food production and feelings of alienation from these modes of production (Mason & Paggiaro, 2009; Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010; Sims, 2009). In many rural communities, local foods and food production are significant markers of place-identity (Caplan, 1997; Cook & Crang, 1996). As Timothy and Ron (2013) argue, local gastronomies have developed in different ways in different places, making foods a significant component of place uniqueness, and subsequently, of the sense of place it fosters among community members. We propose that food events, as neolocalism, foster residents' sense of place, and thus contribute to the social sustainability of rural communities.

To build the aforementioned argument, we explore the case of the annual harvest festival on the island of Öland, Sweden (Ölands Skördefest). This festival not only revives old farming traditions, it also promotes and supports local cuisine, innovative culinary products, and rural culture (<https://www.skordefest.nu/english/>). Besides extending Öland's summer tourist season, the local businesses co-organising the festival directly state that they seek to achieve a sense of community across Öland with this particular event. That is, they seek to foster a sense of place based on foods and crafts related to the attributes of local villages. Ölands Skördefest is, thus, a prime example to study the emergence of neolocalism in tourist destinations through community-based events. The results of this study come from in-depth interviews conducted with different participants involved in Ölands Skördefest, including event organisers, tourism officers, hospitality workers, farmers, and restaurant owners.

We identified two themes that outline the formation of a sense of place through a neolocal event and their relationship to community social sustainability. First, the unique character of Ölands Skördefest fosters feelings of belonging amongst community members in the light of, not only the distinct products and produce put on offer during the event, but

also of the atmosphere of cooperation and social participation it generates. Moreover, participation in Ölands Skördefest can strengthen new residents' feelings of belonging to a place with a special culture. Second, the event facilitates stable business networks on Öland as different stakeholders work together to organise a cohesive and attractive food festival that will benefit all players involved. The hard work of these individuals, based in solidarity and pride, reinforces a sense of belonging to a special place during the organisation of the event. Moreover, memories of the festival amongst community members cultivate the continuity of positive social relationships on the island. The emergence of neolocalism through food events is, thus, significant to the social sustainability of this rural community.

Identity and place in social sustainability

For a long time, the social components of sustainability were mostly disregarded in discourses of sustainable development (Dempsey et al., 2011; Vallance et al., 2011), which is why the term 'social sustainability' emerged to resolve the imbalance and provide a lens through which to focus on social goals. Social sustainability embraces social behaviours, cultural values, lifestyles, and even modes of production and technological advancements, as well as other social constructions (Pol, 2002). Social sustainability, thus, usually relates to topics as diverse as health and social equity, human rights, labour rights, practices, and decent working conditions, social responsibility and justice, community development and wellbeing, product responsibility, community resilience, and cultural competence (Balaman, 2018). Correspondingly, Choi and Turk (2011) argue that scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners should focus more on social and community realms when discussing sustainability issues.

Theorists have offered a plethora of approaches in an effort to gain greater insight into the diverse nature of community processes, often framing the community in terms of place, interaction, and affective bonds, all of which are manifestations of social relations. Following Wilkinson (1991) and Theodori (2005), we embrace an interactional approach to study rural communities and social sustainability. We view a rural community as a dynamic interactional phenomenon, which emerges from interactions between local interest groups involved in matters such as education, environmental protection, governance, and tourism, within