Employing ‘someone to be your voice’ in an artisanal gastronomic tourism business: Authenticity, cultural capital and human resources

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Employing 'someone to be your voice' in an artisanal gastronomic tourism business: Authenticity, cultural capital and human resources

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Abstract

The difficulty of hiring suitable staff in rural areas has been particularly challenging for small gastronomic family businesses involved in tourism. Their human resources needs may include the ability of employees to tell stories about the business, including the family history, and to assist in maintaining its authentic image for visitors. This article explores the experiences of artisanal food or beverage tourism businesses with respect to employment of staff and draws on qualitative data from case studies of South Gippsland, Victoria in Australia and the UK's Peak District. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders. Findings suggest that familiness played an important role in the way that many of these artisanal gastronomic businesses made their decisions to employ staff, linked to issues of authenticity and cultural capital. While employing non-family members to interact with visitors in public-facing roles was generally not a preferred option, these businesses may need to train and empower non-family staff to tell the family story in a convincing and acceptable way or pursue collaborations with other artisanal businesses to overcome the problem of staff shortages.

Keywords: authenticity; cultural capital; family; employ; staff

Introduction

There are distinctive challenges for human resources management within tourism that set it apart from many other industries. These include the often seasonal nature of visitor demand,

the difficulty of finding skilled labour and the predominance of a casualised workforce, with many tourism jobs requiring long and unsocial hours for low rates of pay (Baum, 2018; Baum & Hai, 2019). These issues are heightened in a rural context, as the location of the business in remote or rural areas can make hiring staff problematic (Jolliffe & Farnsworth, 2003). Seasonality is particularly pertinent (Iorio & Corsale, 2010) and 'labor resources are usually obtained from within the family' (Fotiadis, Nuryyev, Achyldurdyyeva & Spyridou, 2019, p. 3). The Covid-19 pandemic then added another layer of complexity with respect to tourism employment (Lindsay-Smith, Pyke, Gamage, Nguyen and de Lacy, 2022). These staffing issues have played a major role in making a business recovery post-Covid extremely difficult for many tourism operators.

While research has been conducted on human resources management (HRM) within tourism, emphasising the importance of staff to this people-centric industry and the sustainability of tourism (Baum, 2018), as well as the vital economic role played by the tourism industry within many countries, there has been lesser academic focus placed on HRM challenges within the rural tourism sector, particularly with respect to small family-run tourism enterprises. For example, it may be difficult for family businesses to use non-family employees for the purpose of interacting with tourists. The first reason relates to staff turnover, as these individuals might be likely to leave the business within a short time. They may lack the sense of obligation imparted by family ties to keep them loyal to a job, particularly in areas that are far from urban centres and infrastructure and where locals see them as "outsiders" (Jones, Rahman & Jiaqing, 2019). They might also see a tourism job as ephemeral; something to assist in obtaining a working visa with a view to seeking permanent residency, or a means to fund extended travel or education, but not a long-term career option (Kossen, McDonald & McIlveen, 2021; Wang & Connell, 2021). Second, there has

traditionally been a shortage of suitable staff in rural areas, a state of affairs which is exacerbated by the reduction of numbers of backpackers and international students in many Western countries post-Covid (Barry & Iaquinto, 2023; Elton, 2023). Third, the lack of the requisite in-depth knowledge of the family's history or vision is a barrier to employing non-family members. Families may feel that employing non-family members could prevent the delivery of tacit knowledge to tourists and may thus have a negative impact on tourists' feelings of authenticity, unless these non-family employees are viewed as 'credible family proxies' (Smith Maguire, 2013, p. 123). Presas *et al.* (2013) suggest that the latter might be achieved through appropriate recruitment, training and employee reward strategies, but does not consider whether a family business has the capacity and will to do this, nor whether this is the best or most appropriate way to achieve delivery of familiness by a business. Further research is therefore needed to understand the human resources implications of familiness for small businesses, especially in a rural tourism context.

The economies of many rural or regional places have traditionally been grounded on food production, which may also help to build regional or national identity (Fountain, 2022). In recent times, there has been a greater focus on small-scale agricultural production, often with high-quality niche products, organic methods and direct sales to customers (Autio, Collins, Wahlen & Antilla, 2013) in order to remain viable in a competitive world and small-scale or craft production of beverages such as gin or beer has become popular. This rise in artisanal production has also occurred in parallel with changes in consumer preferences for buying local (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Lingham, Hill & Manning, 2022). It is now the case that 'Many consumers have reoriented themselves towards local food, i.e. food that has traveled only short distances or towards food that is marketed directly by the producer' (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015, p. 153). However, faced with declining revenue, many artisanal farmers are

augmenting their production of food and/or beverages with tourism, focussing on direct sales rather than dealing with supermarkets and wholesalers, with the aim of diversifying their business and achieving higher returns. Though widely touted as the best possible direction for small farmers, there is a need for further research that considers the human resources implications of this business model, which requires producers to engage with visitors or tourists, either at their farms through farm tours or the development of a farm shop or café or at special events such as farmers markets or festivals.

This research therefore aims to explore these HRM challenges, through a qualitative case study of primary producers that have branched into artisanal food or beverage tourism (collectively referred to in this article as gastronomic tourism) and their experiences of employing staff. Two case study regions have been selected – the Peak District in the United Kingdom and South Gippsland in Victoria, Australia. Both are centres of important artisanal industries of gastronomic production and gastronomic tourism, although there are differences that could offer a potential basis for comparison, which are discussed in the Methodology section. We discuss some of the controversies involved with using the term artisanal in the Literature Review section, but clarify here that it has been defined as 'small-scale producers who emphasise the traditions inherent in the production process and prize human involvement over technology'.

Literature Review

Previous studies on tourism have tended to focus on the owner-operator as an entrepreneur or influencer, being the one who has shaped the imagery and values of their business. Accordingly, television chef Rick Stein is the driving force behind his restaurant and tourism

operations in Padstow, Cornwall (Busby, Huang & Jarman, 2012) and in a study of Irish rural businesses, the focus is on owners as dynamic entrepreneurs (Ryan, Mottiar & Quinn, 2012). A second research approach is to study the *families* behind these entrepreneurial businesses. The family structure is common in a farming context, such as in the current study, where the farm is handed down across the generations and different family members own or manage it. Thurnell-Read (2021) identifies the familial ties that characterise many entrepreneurial craft ventures in a study of craft gin distilleries, and explores 'how working together provides situations and experiences through which personal relationships with spouses and siblings become experienced and enriched, but also commodified as a resource within the operations of the enterprise' (p. 38). These studies have not considered the influence of staff on the tourist experience beyond these owners or family members. This raises the question, are these entrepreneurs and influencers only as good as the people they employ?

Familiness

The term *familiness* has been applied to 'the idiosyncratic bundle of resources and capabilities that family firms possess' (Presas, Jaume Guia & Dolors Muñoz, 2014, p. 148). Familiness may form an integral part of the business branding, sometimes manifesting itself in a heritage brand, depending on the longevity of the family business. As Spielmann, Cruz, Tyler and Beukel note, 'When a firm chooses to use heritage as a marketing cue, it creates a corporate heritage identity' (2021, p. 827). This adds value, as this heritage is attractive in the eyes of consumers (Presas *et al*., 2014; Smith Maguire, Strickland & Frost, 2013). This is in part because family-run tourism businesses are often seen as highly authentic, particularly if there is a common ethnicity or culture that is being presented to the visitor (Laing & Frost, 2013; Presas *et al*., 2014; Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013). Familiness may also engender positive

perceptions of solidity, quality, passion and commitment amongst consumers (Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013), as well as a sense of hospitality, of the consumer feeling 'at home' with the family (Presas *et al*., 2014). It should however be acknowledged that in some instances, familiness is simply a social construction, which can exist in the eyes of consumers even though there is in actuality a minimal involvement or interaction of family members with the public (Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013).

Storytelling plays an important role in the delivery of familiness to tourists (Frost, Laing, Strickland & Smith Maguire, 2020; Presas *et al*., 2014; Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013), with personal family history shared, often as intimate anecdotes or vignettes that only a member of the family would know, or product information that is linked to the history of the business. Addae-Boateng, Xiao and Brew (2014, p. 238) refer to 'the private language of relatives', 'a lifelong common history' and 'shared identity' as hallmarks of the family business. This type of knowledge can be characterised as *tacit*; where it can only be learned through close or personal interaction or experience (Presas *et al*., 2014), if at all. An example is the relating of family narratives at the cellar door to tourists engaged in wine tasting (Frost, Frost, Strickland & Smith Maguire, 2022; Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013).

Artisanality and Artisanal Gastronomic Enterprises

The focus of this study is on artisanal gastronomic tourism businesses. There is no official legal meaning of the terms *artisan* or *artisanal* in the case study regions and its colloquial meaning has changed over time (Lingham, Hill & Manning, 2022). This has meant that there is now less emphasis on the product being completely 'hand-made' and a greater acceptance that artisans can be innovative in their use of technology or in adopting new ideas (Lingham,

Hill & Manning, 2022). The hallmark of an artisanal product is in essence the small scale of its production and its connection with traditions and customs of the region. In a gastronomic context, Quinn and Seaman (2019, p. 455) define artisan food as 'food that forms part of the established tradition of its local area, usually produced on a relatively small scale', while Farrelly and Makkar (2023, p. 1537) place more emphasis on the production process: 'artisanal food involves specialized production practices and working with local ingredients to produce a high-quality food offering, as well as production practices that are closely tied to land, landscape, and local culture'. Granton and Vanclay (2009) consider artisanal products to be 'the expression/ representation/ embodiment of the food processor's values and beliefs' (p. 195), which do not need to be completely manually produced, although they argue that the artisan should be involved in or have an oversight over almost every step of the production process. Innovation and creativity are essential elements of artisanality and can be manifested through the use of the latest cutting-edge technology in stages of the production process (Lingham, Hill & Manning, 2022). This study therefore focuses on small family-owned businesses that can be characterised as artisanal in a broad sense, where 'the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product' (Granton & Vanclay, 2009, p. 195) and there is a direct connection between the product, the culture, heritage, traditions or values of the producer and the location or destination in which they operate.

Authenticity

While Smith Maguire et al. (2013) argue that authenticity is only one element of familiness, the context of the current study – gastronomic tourism – necessitates taking a closer look at the literature on authenticity, given that the connection between authenticity and gastronomy

is well acknowledged and researched. For example, food authenticity is an important part of the food tourism experience (Ellis, Park, Kim & Yeoman, 2018; Levitt & DiPietro, 2021); one of the major reasons for attending gastronomic events (Xu, Ng, Tan & Wu, 2022), and an antecedent of destination attachment (Li, Su & Ma, 2022). This authenticity may be objectively based on a tourist having 'direct access to the true nature not only of what they eat but also of the people that produce, cook, and serve food to them' (Parasecoli, 2022, pp. 88-89); which Cavanaugh (2023) argues is encapsulated in the artisanal food producer. Of course, authenticity may lie in the eye of the beholder (perceived or constructive authenticity) and be a contested ideal rather than objective truth (Sims, 2009; Zhang & Pin, 2020). Daugstad and Kirchengast (2013, p. 187) discuss the phenomenon of the *pseudo-backstage* of farm tourism, using examples such as cellars or dairies, being 'a temporal frontstage that is presented as an 'actual' backstage and through which virtues such as intimacy, rareness, and privacy are transmitted'.

Another form of authenticity – existential authenticity – may be present where an individual seeks their authentic self through engaging in tourism or the tourist experience (Wang, 1999). Most of the extant (and burgeoning) body of tourism literature on existential authenticity focuses on the tourist rather than the tourism provider (e.g. Atzeni, Del Chiappa & Mei Pung, 2022; Kirillova, Lehto & Cai, 2017) and there is a paucity of research that explicitly examines a family business. Similarly, there is a lack of research on existential authenticity from a gastronomic provider's perspective, with most studies concentrating on the tourist. For example, Hsu, Agyeiwaah, Lynn and Chen (2021) have studied existential authenticity in a food festival setting and found a significant and negative effect on the satisfaction of festival attendees. They attributed this finding as potentially due to the fact that 'a food festival, unlike other festival types, reflects a human's basic need [for food] which clashes with the

central idea of existential authenticity' – being true to oneself (p. 271). More recently, a study of food tourism experiences of international visitors to Iran by Prayag, Le, Pourfakhimi and Nadim (2022) found that 'the positive emotions associated with having authentic food experiences contribute to existential authenticity … [and] object-based authenticity positively affects existential authenticity' (p. 17). It would be useful to explore whether the 'inside' knowledge that family members are able to impart to consumers constitutes a form of existential authenticity from the *provider's perspective*, linked to a family member's identity and sense of self, particularly where the existence of existential authenticity might affect the human resources decisions of these family businesses.

Cultural Capital

Another way to examine the importance of familiness in this study context is to apply the theoretical framing of *cultural capital*. Bourdieu (1979) argues that there are three forms of cultural capital that are amassed and exchanged by individuals throughout their lives – embodied, objectified and institutionalised – and contends that this cultural capital is a form of social power that may confer status on its owner. *Embodied* cultural capital refers to a person's knowledge or understanding that is acquired through socialisation, for example within the family group. Cultural capital is *objectified* where the cultural capital is present materially, such as in the form of works of art or literature, and *institutionalised*, where it is acknowledged through the likes of academic qualifications or professional recognition. Within a family business, it is likely that embodied cultural capital will be developed within the family unit, in the sense of 'the application of resources to building skills and habits in children by parents' (Tramonte & Willms, p. 201). Allied concepts to that of cultural capital, which help our understanding of its creation and exchange, are the field and habitus

(Bourdieu, 1979). The 'field is a social space in which players (individuals or groups) are positioned with given resources [e.g. cultural capital]' and 'provides a structure (and rules of the game)' (Glover, 2015, p. 132) allowing forms of capital to be transformed or exchanged, while habitus refers to 'dispositions to act' (Sutherland & Darnhofer, 2012, p. 233) which flow through to an individual's choices and tastes, including lifestyles and ways of working (Glover, 2015). Habitus in an employment context might include an individual's disposition, manifested in human resources decisions, to employ staff (or not) and on what terms.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been extended over the years beyond a narrow emphasis on high culture and '"beaux arts" participation', e.g. museums and galleries (Sullivan, 2008, p. 92) to other types of knowledge and skills that have a value, such as cultural insights or traditions. Ray's work (2006) on rural development is pertinent to the current study. He observes: 'Cultural capital can be thought of as territorial intellectual property or place-specific factors of production' (p. 283), and in respect to the latter, notes that 'consumption and production become imbued with the culture of the producing territory' (p. 284). Ray (1998) uses the example of gastronomy to discuss the connection between food and cultural traditions and regional identity; a way of differentiating regions. Gralton and Vanclay (2009), consistent with the work of Ray (1998; 2006) and also of high relevance to our study, argue that 'artisanality is also a manifestation of cultural capital, and can create territorial differentiation and offer potentialities for regional development'.

In the case of a family business, cultural capital may stems from personal knowledge acquired from being a family member. Khatami, Ferraris, De Bernardi and Cantino (2021) refer to this as *clan culture*, which 'allows family firms to successfully build a robust competitive community and connections' (p. 338) and in an artisanal gastronomic business

often involves heritage and traditions. Glover's (2013) study of farming families suggested that 'knowledge transfer is crucial to successful succession in the family business and as such cultural capital (knowledge, skills, qualifications, etc.) is retained within the business' (p. 136), rather than being transferred to non-family members.

A non-family employee of a family business will of course bring their own cultural capital to their working lives (Santos, Neto & Verwaal, 2018), but this may be quite different to that of the family members. Glover (2013, p. 153) notes that 'Some farmers will pay for people with higher levels of institutional cultural capital to help with business operations, for example, accountants, solicitors and consultants'. Key to the conceptualisation of this operational knowledge as cultural capital is the value it has in potential exchange with others e.g. the family members of the business and the power and status that can be held in the hands of a few non-family employees who are possessed of the 'right' sort of knowledge i.e. knowledge that the family members do not possess. It was therefore felt that cultural capital, alongside authenticity, would be useful theoretical frames for the current study.

Our review of the literature therefore suggests that further research is needed to understand the employment challenges of delivering gastronomic tourism to visitors within rural areas, and that authenticity and cultural capital might be valuable theoretical frameworks to study the experience of family businesses which provide gastronomic tourism to visitors. This gap in knowledge has led to the development of the following research questions: (1) *Does familiness affect how rural gastronomic tourism businesses recruit and organise their workforce?; (2) Does authenticity play a part in decisions to employ human resources within a rural gastronomic tourism business?; and (3) Does cultural capital play a part in decisions to employ human resources within a rural gastronomic tourism business?*

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was selected as it allowed the research team to uncover rich, nuanced data on a topic of which little is currently known (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The research was undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm, a worldview which facilitates the discovery of embedded meaning, by seeking to understand people's feelings and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Neuman, 2006). A case study methodological approach was used to explore human resources challenges in a regional gastronomic tourism context, using two specific geographical locations to illustrate the issues (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A case study often involves the collection of a range of data, rather than reliance on one source (Yin, 2018). However, the primary source of data in this comparative case study came from semi-structured interviews with sixteen stakeholders, which offered the chance for deep and rich analysis. In addition, the researchers spent time in the field, gathering tacit knowledge such as an understanding of the case study locations, including the governance structures of each region and the range of gastronomic tourism experiences that were offered to visitors.

Through a purposive sampling approach (Bryman, 2016), participants were selected based on their direct involvement with an artisanal gastronomic tourism business (food and/or or beverage) or connections to promoting gastronomic tourism to assist with economic development within these regions. Contact details of participants were obtained via publicly available information on the Internet; the researchers' personal networks or the participant contacting the research team after being advised about the project by a colleague or acquaintance. The researchers' knowledge of the regions and the businesses that operated within them assisted in the selection of artisanal enterprises that were invited to form part of

the study sample. Potential participants were then emailed about their willingness to take part in the study. If agreeable, they were provided with more information about the study and a consent form, to be signed electronically before each interview commenced. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants in the study across both case studies.

Table 1: Overview of Participants in the Study

Pseudonym	**Location**	**Role of Participant**
Kim	Peak District, UK	Business Owner
Caroline and Ella (2)	Peak District, UK	Business Owner
Mark	Peak District, UK	Business Owner
Zadie	Peak District, UK	Manager
Quinn	Peak District, UK	Business Owner
Dale	Peak District, UK	Business Owner
Peter	Peak District, UK	Business Owner
Stephen	Gippsland, Australia	Business Owner
Lorraine	Gippsland, Australia	Economic Development
Alex	Gippsland, Australia	Business Owner
Tom	Gippsland, Australia	Business Owner
Cathy	Gippsland, Australia	Economic Development
Janet	Gippsland, Australia	Industry Engagement
David	Gippsland, Australia	Business Owner
Louis	Gippsland, Australia	Chef

Pseudonyms have been given to each participant, to maintain their anonymity. Further details of the participants and any organisation with which they are involved have been withheld from Table 1, as they are connected to small geographic regions and adding these details would make it potentially possible for some readers to identify the specific enterprises and

individuals. Thirteen of the participants were either business owners or employees of a gastronomic tourism business and the remaining three participants were employees of destination marketing and management bodies, with remits to encourage industry engagement, economic development and regional or national marketing. Participants were asked about a range of challenges and influences connected to human resources within their business or the gastronomic tourism sector within their region in general. Another line of inquiry focused on the history and development of their business to understand the role that familiness, authenticity and cultural capital potentially play in their human resources decisions.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, followed by an analysis process whereby the researchers manually coded the data (Saldana, 2016). The first cycle of codes was then revisited and refined, allowing for new emergent themes to arise (Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003). These themes were then retrospectively analysed alongside the key concepts identified in the literature review, which are subsequently presented in the findings section of this paper. A thematic analysis of the data was then undertaken, following Miles and Huberman (1994), where codes were created by the researchers, working separately and then comparing the results, again as a form of triangulation. These categories were then conflated into overarching themes. In writing up the study, 'thick description' through quotes from the participants has been provided as much as possible, allowing their voices to be heard and giving credibility to the research findings, as a marker of trustworthiness (Tracy, 2010).

Case study context

The first case study region is the Peak District National Park (PDNP), in central England, which covers an area of 555 square miles and was designated in 1951 (Peak District National Park Authority, 2018). This area includes a variety of topography including, open moorlands, the gritstone formations of the Dark Peak and dales and gorges of the White Peak (Peak District National Park 2018). Within these landscapes are farmlands, wooded valleys as well as small towns, villages and hamlets. The population is approximately 38,000 residents (PDNPA, 2018). The central location of the Peak District within England means that 16 million people live within an hour's drive of the boundary, including the two major cities of Sheffield located to the east of the park, and Manchester located to the west. The location of the PDNP makes it an accessible tourist destination for short stay visitors, as around 48% make visits lasting less than 3 hours (PDNPA 2018a). The economy of the PDNP is made up of several industries including farming, manufacturing and the accommodation and retail sector (PDNPA, 2018a). However traditional industries such as farming and land management have been in decline, whilst sectors such as tourism and artisanal food or beverage producers have seen growth in their contribution to the economy (PDNPA, 2018).

The second case study location, South Gippsland, is a region in the far south-eastern corner of Australia. Part of the state of Victoria, it comprises the shires of Bass Coast and South Gippsland. Its main industries are agriculture and tourism and it has a population of approximately 70,000, spread across a range of small towns (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). From the 1870s onwards, it was settled by Europeans, who cleared its dense forests to establish small family farms. With unusually high rainfall for Australia, the land was primarily used for dairying, with some cropping and beef cattle. Since World War Two, there has been a tendency towards the consolidation of farms. Tourism is centered on the coast, with Philip Island and Wilsons Promontory National Park renowned for their natural

attractions, but there is an emerging gastronomic tourism sector centred on artisanal cheese production, farm visits, brewery, distillery and cidery tours and winery cellar doors.

The two case study locations were selected on the basis that they are both established agricultural regions where artisanal farmers have needed to engage in tourism to survive and include large areas of national park, which adds issues of environmental sustainability for these farmers as tourism operators. The rural locations were important to the production process and the way the gastronomic products were marketed. They differed however in several respects, which were felt to offer a potential basis for comparison between the two regions. The Peak District has an older history of Western farming, is much closer to large industrial urban settlements and much of the farming land is overlaid by management by the relevant national park authority.

Findings

Employee shortages

The backdrop to a discussion of human resources connected to the gastronomic tourism businesses that were studied, in both the UK and Australia, was a severe shortage of staff, in line with previous literature (e.g. Barry & Iaquinto, 2023; Elton, 2023). This state of affairs was exemplified by *Lorraine*'s comment about South Gippsland: 'In hospitality and right now, this is the worst I've seen it ever, [in the time] that I've been working. From hospitality to the cafés, to wineries, everybody's looking for staff'. *Lorraine* explained the factors that she felt have led to this dearth of suitable employees for food businesses:

> It's probably a mix of a lot of things … people have left the industry [during Covid], so if you were working in hospitality and you don't have a secure job, you find a

> secure job. Or another part of it was people getting paid more to not do anything. And another part of it is not having the international migration … A big issue down here [Gippsland] is the cost of housing, or the lack of availability … You couldn't really bring somebody to work down here because there's no place to stay. It's almost impossible to find a rental and to find an affordable rental will be even harder.

The lack of international visitors to Australia in particular, stemming to a large degree from its strict border closures, had far reaching consequences for the food production process, which then flows through to gastronomic tourism. These Australian farms were often heavily reliant on international students and backpackers helping with the harvest, notably fruit picking (Barry & Iaquinto, 2023; Elton, 2023). As *Louis* noted: 'the farmers, the producers, they have been very busy producing and supplying for the local markets. On the downside of things, there haven't been people available to pick those products as well'. Interestingly, a few participants felt that the lack of an itinerant workforce was a positive thing, as it led to what they saw as a more *ethical* approach to employment within the industry. For example, *Stephen* voiced concerns about an over-reliance on seasonal work, as he felt it led to good staff getting frustrated and leaving the industry and was not good business practice:

> And every year, regardless of whether there's Covid … they all say, 'Oh, isn't it hard to get good staff in summer?' And we just shake our heads and say, 'Well, but it would be because you're wanting people to come down and just work for your peak period. What about the rest of the time?' And that's a real criticism I have with a lot of the operators; they're so short-sighted and say all our staff are full time or permanent casuals or permanent part-timers. But this job is for 12 months of the year, not just three months of the year.

Participants also discussed how they felt the pandemic has changed the *way* that some people work. During Covid, the incidence of social engagement was reduced or in some cases removed altogether, which eliminated what they saw as an important part of the enjoyment of work and potentially opportunities to amass embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979). It could also be argued that these workers missed the presence of a 'social space' or field that provides a structure for developing or exchanging cultural capital (Glover, 2015). *Quinn*'s

grandfather, for example, in the Peak District, had traditionally liked to spend a lot of time interacting with visitors at the family dairy farm: 'He'd just potter around and he'd always be talking to somebody'. Post-Covid, some of the participants' businesses that were struggling to employ enough staff felt that they could not justify previous high levels of staff/customer engagement, as they were concerned that this would lead to staff burnout (Lindsay-Smith *et al*., 2022). Three Australian examples arose in this study. *Stephen* commented: 'There are only a certain amount of months or weeks or years that you can work seven days a week, 20-odd hours a day. It does wear you down'. *Tom* also referred to the risk of staff burnout: 'I think our biggest issues are just going to be operational, having enough staff, because if you use your existing staff too hard, you burn them and you lose them'. This has led to concerns over reigniting face to face visitation too quickly. As *Alex* noted: 'We're in a bit of a different position to what we were two years ago as well when we had more staff to actually help run the cellar door, and we no longer have any of those staff, so we're starting from scratch again'.

Issues with staffing were heightened where gastronomic tourism businesses had not availed themselves of opportunities to establish an online arm, which is an example of the *absence* of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979) relating to business knowledge in the family setting. As *Cathy* observed: 'One of the great challenges that businesses have always had in Gippsland is they haven't had a digital presence. There's been a very low uptake of digital presence, which is crazy because the more remote you are, the more you need one, but it costs money'. In contrast, stakeholders of gastronomic businesses that had moved online were pleased that this left them more resilient. *Janet* explained with respect to South Gippsland:

> I think that a lot of the producers found alternative ways to market. So either they were still producing their wine or their cider or their beer or whatever and just selling it through normal channels and we all know that sales of alcohol went up [during the pandemic]. So as long as they had some database that they were talking to or they had

channels into other distributers, I think they would've been probably okay.

Some participants stressed that improving staff/customer interactions was non-negotiable for the gastronomic tourism industry. It was acknowledged that adequate training and a skills base to deal with customers face to face was crucial, even if more of the business was transacted online than before. The rationale given in the Australian case study was customer-focused, rather than seeing benefits for employees such as their well-being and resilience (Ngoc Su *et al*., 2021). *Cathy*, for example, felt that there were systemic issues with the way that international visitors were treated in Gippsland, Australia and that they needed to be addressed:

> I will say that something else that we have a real issue with hospitality in general within Gippsland is customer service. In particular, dealing with overseas customers. Country areas can be quite White and Anglican and traditional, and so we've got capability gaps in customer service in a lot of our hospitality industry as well, which is something that we've had flagged for many, many years but have not necessarily broken through with.

Authenticity

While employee shortages were a reality, this did not mean that participants would be happy to lower their standards when seeking staff for their gastronomic tourism businesses. Part of the human resources challenges for these mostly family businesses, according to participants, was inextricably related to the importance of maintaining a sense of authenticity for visitors (Cavanaugh, 2023; Parasecoli, 2022).

Many participants across the two study locations referred to a growing trend for visitors to seek to understand the origin of their food, beyond the supermarket shelves, and authenticity was thus connected to visitors perceiving that they were at the 'coal-face' of food production (Cavanaugh, 2023; Parasecoli, 2022). For example, *Alex*, a Gippsland cheese producer,

noted: ‘I think [visitors to our dairy farm] more enjoy the idea of knowing that they’re going somewhere where it’s made, more so than actually how it’s made. They just want to feel that they’re at a place where it’s made’. For *Alex*, having to ‘actually make a living off the farm’, was a form of constructive authenticity, which he distinguished from ‘a lot of part-time farmers that have other jobs or just hobby farmers instead of hard-core dairy farmers’. He explained that ‘people who do visit here can sit and enjoy a product, consuming a product, at the place where it’s made, and they can actually look out the window and see the animals that produce the milk’. *Stephen* perceived authenticity to be connected to the small-scale, hand-crafted production of his Gippsland cheese, which conforms to traditional definitions of artisanal production (e.g. Granton &Vanclay, 2009; Quinn & Seaman, 2019). *Stephen* noted: ‘We are one of the very, very few, real artisan cheesemakers who go to the time to do small batches, do it by hand. Every piece of cheese is felt, touched. There’s no automation or mechanism involved in the making of our cheese’. *Tom* felt that his farm in South Gippsland encapsulated a narrative of authenticity for visitors: ‘You can see the grass grown, the cows eating the grass, you can see them being milked, and in the café, you can see the meat or the milk being prepared and cooked for you. We’re using the farm, if you like, to tell our story of provenance’. *Quinn* agreed: ‘You can see the cows in the field and we’ve been farming here for four generations, so it doesn’t get much more Peak District’. It could of course be argued that these visitors are in fact entering *pseudo-spaces* (Daugstad & Kirchengast, 2013), which visitors perceived as being authentic but which are in fact were specifically built for visitor egress.

Delivering a sustainability message to visitors was perceived by some participants as constructively authentic. For example, *Alex* saw his business ethos in South Gippsland as centred ‘definitely around sustainability and regeneration, regenerative agriculture, and

having a direct-from-farm product where we're in control of the quality of our product. It's coming from a clean environment and with low food miles, basically'. *Alex* referred to his business as having 'a bit of an educational role as well for a lot of customers who might not have really been on a working farm before and of being up close to live animals on a working farm'. *Dale* in the Peak District agreed:

> So, if you talk to the butchery team, they will say what the customers want is to know where that beef is coming from, where that free range pork is coming from. They want to know that and they like the fact that we've got home reared lamb. They like the fact that beef comes from the farm literally a few miles down the road. So they like to know the provenance and they absolutely want the quality and they are willing to pay for that quality, the kind of customers that we've got.

Some of this authenticity is related to familiness (Frost *et al*., 2020; Laing & Frost, 2013; Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013) – meeting the family, hearing their stories, and watching them work – and the perception of family business owners that their visitors are increasingly seeking to buy local artisanal gastronomic produce, rather than mass produced food or beverages (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). *Stephen* noted: 'Our farm here [in South Gippsland], I've been here for 60 years. I know the previous owners who bought the place in the 1930s. And I know the grandson of the first owner who came here and told us all about how his grandfather, an elderly man, selected the property and what he did and how he did it and it was absolutely amazing'. He explained how this family history gave him a platform to educate visitors on farm production:

> You can't compare a family farm to a factory farm or corporate farm. And I think there has to be a lot more education in what the real farmers are doing and how to look after the farm and the land and just not keep attacking it. And just a blanket statement that meat is so bad for the environment because of all these litres of water that it uses. When, if anything, it actually cohabitates with the environment if it's done in a regenerative, family way and not in a factory farm way.

Storytelling by a family member meant that the artisanal underpinnings of the business could be appreciated and the calibre of the product properly evaluated, rather than an outsider

simply referring to the basic production process to visitors. For *Kim*, a chocolate producer in the Peak District:

> It's remarkable how few people know just how long it might take to make a chocolate bar for example. People think you buy a bag of chocolate buttons and you melt them and that's it! It's a little bit more than that. So it is about the whole journey but also the journey with us as well and what we're trying to do with that … you want to know it's got a level of provenance but it's also got soul and love in there as well I think.

The family is viewed as a source of comparative advantage in a region and used as such in marketing efforts (Frost *et al*., 2020; Spielmann *et al*., 2021, Presas *et al*., 2014; Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013). For example, *Mark* in the Peak District explained that he sends out gift hampers of his products to his customers with a story about the people handcrafting the items, in the form of a 'scroll that describes the story of each product within the hamper' and that the *family* [researcher emphasis] 'make this by hand and love it. It brings a layer of authenticity to the item, it's special and it's not just churned out of the machine'.

A sustainable message could be woven into a story of family heritage and this was particularly noticeable in the Australian context. *David* owns a South Gippsland farm that primarily grows native foods to Australia, otherwise known as bushfoods or indigenous ingredients and when engaging with visitors felt that he was 'just trying to get some of those messages into the feel-good story about coming for bushfood, to me it could start a journey for people in how they think about food', while for *Janet*, the story that needed to be told was of the local quality of what was sold (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015):

> One thing that we are going to see a real shift towards is that sense of provenance and of sustainability, and people wanting to know where their food comes from and loving to know the story behind it. And wanting to feel the food that they're eating has actually done less damage than it could've done potentially.

The physical presence of family members at the farm was also seen as important in telling the family story to visitors, which is consistent with the findings of Laing and Frost (2013) in the

context of winemakers in the King Valley in Australia. It gives a level of authenticity as perceived by the family that is impossible to replace with non-family employees, and might also be argued to constitute existential authenticity (Wang, 1999), in the form of an authentic sense of self linked to the family. As *Quinn* explained in relation to their Peak District farm: 'My granddad is about. He's eighty and he's always around the yard, so it's like going back in time if you have a talk to him'.

Cultural Capital

The nuances of a local or family story could be argued to constitute cultural capital, as they were perceived as more strongly belonging to family members (Glover, 2013) and illustrated the power of the family dimensions of these businesses. For example, *Alex* explained how his detailed knowledge of the area of South Gippsland where his farm was located was of high interest to visitors and helped to flesh out what they observed:

> Most people who visit for the first time comment on how beautiful the hills are. And that then starts another discussion on how it's different and why we've got terraces along the side of the hill and all those things. We're pretty up on the history of the Great Gippsland Forest, and having people visit face to face, we can talk a bit about that, and people want to know whether our animals have one leg shorter than the other, and that sparks another conversation.

Janet agreed: 'Gippsland is in a pretty perfect position in that there are a lot of small farms, small producers out there where they can look at the concept of some farm gate and actually being able to sell directly to the consumer as part of a day trip that they've got travelling around in that area. And they can tell *their* [researcher emphasis] story which is probably the critical part of it is how they portray their story'. She expanded on the nature of the cultural capital that needed to be behind much of this storytelling:

> The person that is behind that counter, can they actually explain what's happening on the property that day or how this cheese was made, or how this wine was made. Can

> they give some sense of the story behind it? Because people will buy based on the story and feeling like particularly if they've had a connection with that person behind the bar, they don't want to walk out having not purchased anything. They might choose the cheapest thing on the list but they want to take something away.

Janet felt that this might not be a skill that a business owner might possess without external assistance: 'So it's finding the elements of the story that are unique but are appealing as well so that might require actually getting someone in'. This links to Glover's (2013) observation that family businesses may be willing to pay for the skills or advice of people with higher levels of institutional cultural capital; in this case a marketing expert. It also suggests that the family's cultural capital, embodied in family stories and values, might need to be enhanced by the assistance of non-family staff at times and thus limits the power of family members within the business.

Some participants however told us that they could not use their employees to engage with visitors about their products due to a perception that their staff lacked family knowledge or deep understanding of the traditions or values inherent in artisanal production, which the researchers interpreted as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979; Ray, 1998, 2006). These participants argued that a deep level of knowledge about the family history behind the business or product is inherent in the business owner or family member and that they found it challenging, or in some cases almost impossible, to teach these values and traditions to "outsiders". For *Caroline* in the Peak District: 'If we could afford to have somebody to help us that we could delegate to, that would be awesome … Selling's really difficult you find and to *Ella* and myself I think it comes a lot easier and maybe because it's our company but just to find someone to be your voice, that's a really hard thing'. *Stephen* similarly told us that he avoided selling his Australian product at food festivals and farmers' markets because of his concerns that staff lacked the cultural capital to properly promote his business:

> Our cheese is real. It's alive. As it ages, it gets stronger and sometimes you have to explain that to people who aren't really understanding. And a lot of our staff, really, even with training, cannot really understand or comprehend completely. So, the people you want out in the farmers market have to be pretty good. They have to understand your product.

One participant, *Mark*, was an outlier, in that he felt that it *was* possible to amass cultural capital as a non-family member. He told us that he personally understood the business of the local producers he represented when meeting visitors to the Peak District and that this was because he had made a point of absorbing their 'stories':

> I'm fascinated by people's stories. So when we have a corporate group in, sometimes they get me to come and talk about the food that they're eating, and not just about how it's made or grown, but who's doing it. So we have got people who have been in business, creating what they're creating for five generations or over 100 years. Now to me I find that fascinating and so do these people who literally pay me to go and tell those stories.

Findings suggest that cultural capital linked with authenticity of the family story can and is acting as a barrier to employing staff for the rural gastronomic tourism businesses that were studied. Participants indicated that they lacked confidence in their staff in terms of the latter's ability to deeply comprehend and appreciate stories about the business, particularly involving family history, values and traditions, to a level and in a way that is then perceived as authentic by others.

Discussion and Conclusion

Findings across the two case study locations were strikingly similar, which is perhaps to be expected, given the preponderance of small family businesses involved in gastronomic production, the importance of gastronomic tourism to these businesses and their regions, and common challenges experienced in employing staff. Differences in the data were largely the result of divergent government policies, such as the Australian experience of severe housing

shortages in Australian regional areas, which had a strong negative effect on the pool of employees available to South Gippsland businesses. Nonetheless, the central findings across the two case study locations were essentially consistent – that decisions made to employ staff in these small gastronomic tourism businesses were driven to a large degree by familiness, authenticity and cultural capital.

The family structure of the business appeared to be important in the way that the participants' businesses were run and how they staffed their business. There was strong pride in their family heritage, which flowed through to their business heritage and branding and could manifest itself in existential authenticity (Wang, 1999) – an authentic sense of self linked to their family history. Concerns were raised about employing non-family members for several reasons. Authenticity, both existential and constructive, was seen to be imparted to visitors in part through telling stories about the business or product, often through the lens of the family and in particular having them physically present in a public-facing role (Laing & Frost, 2013; Presas *et al*., 2014; Smith Maguire *et al*., 2013). This authenticity might be compromised if non-family members were used in this capacity.

A number of participants also expressed their lack of confidence in non-family members to be able to adequately convey to visitors all the nuances of their artisanal product and family business; an example of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979; Ray, 1998, 2006). This cultural capital relates to family stories, linked to family values and traditions, which the artisanal gastronomic businesses felt could not easily be transferred to 'outsiders'. These findings therefore support the work of Gralton and Vanclay (2009) and Ray (1998) in an artisanal gastronomic context and suggest that cultural capital is not limited to the beaux-arts origins described by Bourdieu (1979). Only a few instances were reported of a business being willing

to employ external parties who possessed special skills or expertise that the family could not provide, such as marketing, financial or technological assistance. This state of affairs is a concern given the shortages of employees available in the two case study regions, particularly in the Australian context, which may be the case for some time to come, if not permanently. It may hobble the growth potential of these food tourism businesses and thus the local economies that depend on them. It may also lead to burnout, given that the family owners of artisanal gastronomic businesses that were interviewed in this study often took on multiple roles within the business and may therefore need to divest themselves of some of the public-facing activities such as liaising with visitors at the farm or cellar door or at festivals or events in the local region. Thus cultural capital, while a manifestation of power (Bourdieu, 1979) – in this case of the family behind a business – may also be considered a potential weakness in this context, if it leaves a family business vulnerable to employment shortages.

The study has made a number of theoretical contributions. First, it suggests a nexus between familiness, authenticity and cultural capital for these food tourism businesses studied, which may be a more generalisable phenomenon in regional or rural areas. Further research is needed to explore this potentiality more deeply. Second, the study builds on previous work that conceptualises cultural capital beyond its beaux-arts connections (Sullivan, 2008) to a gastronomic context (Ray, 1998, 2006) and links it with family knowledge and values, in this case artisanal production. Third, it is a much-needed study of regional tourism, which adds to the small but growing body of work that is examining the tourism industry outside large metropolitan areas against a backdrop of exogenous shocks such as climate change and financial downturns. Fourth, the study acknowledges the changing view of artisanal production, which does not require a completely non-mechanised production process and

focuses more on the product encapsulating the traditions and values of a region and – in this case – a family, in characterising the production as artisanal.

On a practical level, the study findings suggest that issues of employment shortages for small family businesses may be more complex to resolve than simply removing barriers to entry of itinerant or casual workers or improving training. Family businesses may need to build rapport with and belief in non-family staff in terms of their ability to tell the family story in a convincing and acceptable way over a period of time, and see the local community as a potentially valuable employment resource for their business, rather than a liability. Providing scripts to non-family staff might potentially assist in presenting family stories to visitors and analysing the acceptability of this approach for family artisanal business owners could be a fruitful area of future research. Potential collaborations with other artisanal businesses in the area may help marketing efforts when employment resources are limited, as well as the recruitment of staff. The findings also suggest that access to a local pool of employees will be important, facilitated by government investment in infrastructure such as housing stocks in regional areas.

Limitations of the study lead to other areas where further research is warranted. Data collection occurred during Covid and in a dynamic environment, the issues covered in this paper might have altered, even in the space of a few years. Participants were not asked specifically about the management tools or human resources approaches they used in their businesses. Follow-up work may assist in understanding the human resources challenges of gastronomic tourism businesses in regional areas and the decision-making process behind their employment decisions more deeply. Future research could also interview staff as well as family business owners about their views of ‘familial’ attachment to the business and what

values they feel are instilled through these family connections. Studying different case study locations might also be useful, to garner more generalisable findings. Future studies could also consider examples of ways in which cultural capital has been amassed by non-family members working in a family tourism business and whether there are lessons to be learned that are transferable to other businesses.

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