



The Swedish Fika culture as a touristic experience and value-creating resource

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ABSTRACT

Swedish fika, an everyday ritual of meeting over coffee and pastries - in the home, the workplace or at a café - is a deep-rooted part of Swedish culinary culture and a bearer of culture and national identity. Thus, fika would seem to offer just what tourists typically are looking for. However, so far it appears the tourism industry has not taken full advantage of what fika can offer, an experience for tourists and a resource for the tourism sector. As part of destination development and place branding, private and public actors strive to emphasise the identity and uniqueness of a place. They often do this through region specific foods and beverages, which come naturally loaded with identity. The primary purpose of this conceptual discussion is to examine how the Swedish fika culture, seen from an experience and value-creating perspective, could help serve the tourism sector to a greater extent than has hitherto been the case. A secondary purpose is to identify and highlight the need for research in this field.

1. Introduction

The Swedish Fika culture has long been an institution and a bearer of culture and identity in Sweden. The word Fika appeared in the Swedish language in the first decade of the 20th century. The word is a reversal of the word “ka-ffi” (dialect for coffee) and thus the word “Fi-ka” was created. The tradition of coffee breaks began in the home and was a way of hospitably welcoming visitors, but also part of the breaks during agricultural work and later in the factories for rest and recuperation. Afternoon fika is today a common feature in many workplaces in Sweden (Almroth, 2020).

Besides the fika edibles and drinkables, other factors such as social interaction, site relations, and design and destination creation, combine to create a value-added product. The social factor in this context is particularly important to highlight. This is also emphasized by Mäkelä (2000) who says that fika is a social construction that in various ways creates, conveys and reinforces the relationship between people, regardless of whether they have or have not previously had a social relationship. Fika in its various forms can thus both strengthen the relationship between people and strengthen the relationship between people and place (Blom, 2023). One example of this is when Swedish Speaker Andreas Norlén held talks with the parliamentary party groups in connection with the formation of the government in 2018. The Speaker invited the party leaders to a classic “Swedish fika” with coffee

and cookies. Another example where fika was used both as a social phenomenon and from a marketing perspective was when Swedish astronaut Marcus Wandt invited his astronaut colleagues to “Swedish fika” on the International Space Station (ISS) in January 2024 (<https://www.kth.se/om/nyheter/centrala-nyheter/marcus-wandt-landade-pa-kth-1.1317986> 2024).

In the tourism industry, both private and public actors are constantly working to emphasise the advantages of their own place or region in various ways in order to attract visitors. An important factor in this work is to emphasise and market the specific identity and authenticity of the place from the point of view of tourism producers (Blom and Nilsson, 2000). At the same time, there is a demand from tourism consumers to experience what they feel is unique and has a clear connection to the place. Food and drink “charged” with identity through its place- and region-specific profile have therefore become increasingly important for attracting visitors and thus creating something of a “meeting place” between producer and consumer (Blom, 2003, 2022 & Hall et al., 2004). The commercial location of fika, in the form of pastry shops and cafés, thus constitutes an important meeting point for both the urban and rural tourism experience.

However, there is still relatively little written about the commercial part of fika and its importance in creating a unique identity and thus developing a tourist attraction on this theme. This discussion touches to some extent on the reasoning of Caprioli et al. (2021) about fika and

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what in Denmark is referred to as Hygge, which are important parts of the destination brand for Sweden and Denmark respectively to assert the unique character of these countries. However, [Scander et al. \(2023\)](#) discuss the importance of conceptualising the meaning of fika and how it as a complex, cultural phenomenon can be marketed and thus establish a cultural tradition where sensory tastes with destination carrying values such as fika have significance in the marketing of Sweden.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a conceptual discussion on the importance of Swedish fika culture being able to contribute to a greater extent to the design of a place, seen from an experience and value-creating perspective. A further purpose of this discussion is to highlight the importance of more research in this field.

1.1. Place as an arena for tourism-related synergies

A significant factor in designing a place that attracts visitors is to create an experience space where the social and physical environment in close cooperation can generate positive synergy effects ([Mossberg, 2015](#)). A similar argument is made by [Stedman et al. \(2004\)](#) who emphasizing the importance of the various psychological processes that take place in the individual and which in symbiosis create meaning and satisfaction. Likewise, [Tuan \(1977\)](#) and [Brandenburg and Carroll \(1995\)](#) highlight the importance of how our experiences, feelings and thoughts contribute to how we perceive a specific place. In addition, the story of the place, the people and the product can also function as an “identity charger” and thus animate the place ([Blom, 2023](#)).

The importance of identity in creating an attraction value has long been discussed in tourism research in relation to the geographical location (see e.g., [Everett, S., & Aitchison, C. 2008](#) & [Ellis et al., 2018](#)). A central aspect in this context is the extent to which the tourist product can obtain added value by creating, maintaining and to some extent also developing a narrative (see e.g., [Mossberg, 2008, 2015](#); [Woodside, 2010](#)). This can happen even if there is a realization by the tourist consumer that the place relation to the product is actually weak or even missing.

When we take on the role of a tourist, we often look for places and experiences that we do not have access to in our everyday lives. We often look for the extraordinary where our senses work together to give us a holistic experience, which is why tourism as a phenomenon can be perceived as a multi-sensory practice ([Edensor, 2018](#)). This experience often has a clear geographical relationship that also creates associations for us. Since our experiences often correspond to previous experiences and memories, we thus obtain an individual-specific relationship to the place and to the activity that takes place there ([Tung and Ritchie, 2011](#)). From a place and tourism producer’s perspective, it is important that the experience we receive as consumers is positive. In this context, the Swedish fika culture, with its various value-added factors, is an important part of the tourism industry.

1.2. Swedish fika - worth a special journey

From a private, public and commercial perspective, the Swedish fika culture is an institution that has recently developed into an important part of the tourism industry in Sweden. This also helps to create added value for the place and its inhabitants as well as for visitors. From a tourism perspective, perhaps the lure of visiting an attractive place that also serves traditional Swedish fika might be “worth a special journey”, to relate to Guide Michelin’s definition for three stars?

[Yngve et al. \(2023\)](#) highlight the importance of the Swedish fika break as an everyday ritual both at home and in the workplace. The authors also ask how the understanding of fika can be transferred to other cultures around the world and mention as a comparison the Japanese tea ceremony and the English Afternoon Tea ([Yngve et al., 2023](#)). In the light of this comparison, fika is partly a social act that provides an opportunity for community, and partly a mental act seen from the ritual of preparing fika by picking out the utensils and presenting cakes or

similar snacks ([Löfgren and Ehn, 2012](#)). Fika is thus a form of meal where cultural aspects and local traditions can be related to both the place and to aesthetic experiences, which together are expected to give the customer satisfaction.

From this perspective, it is possible to relate fika, with its various practices, to “The Five Aspects Meal Model” which analyzes factors that contribute to meeting the guest’s requirements during a restaurant visit. The five aspects of the model consist of the Room, Meeting, Product, Atmosphere and Management Control system, where each aspect plays an important role in achieving an overall experience ([Gustafsson et al., 2006](#)). The aspects of the model can also be related to what should be considered in the development and maintenance of a place-related tourist attraction.

[Fig. 1](#) is an elaboration inspired by the five aspects of the meal model. Based on the above reasoning, I would therefore like to reflect on some factors that are particularly important in the relationship between coffee, place, identity and tourism and which together constitute important ingredients for designing a place in order to attract visitors and create a positive experience for the visitor. The factors highlighted in the figure aim to illustrate different factors that can contribute to designing a place for visitors that provides a positive overall experience.

However, the design of the space does not have to be limited to walls, ceilings and floors, but should instead be seen in a broader sense where the place is central and where storytelling, social relations, economic activities and aesthetic design generate added value from the activity fika. Fika is thus not just a simple break to drink coffee, tea and eat cookies. It is a cultural ritual that promotes community and well-being ([Blom, 2023](#)). Fika can be expressed as a “gap” in the activities that take place in our everyday life where the opportunity is given to slow down, relax and also share the moment with friends, family or colleagues where inclusion is a key ingredient. Regular social interaction and relaxation through fika can also help to reduce stress and thus improve our well-being ([Stroebeak, 2013](#)).

To summarise, in [Fig. 1](#) I intend to illustrate and highlight various factors that are important for giving the visitor a positive overall experience in the activity of coffee. However, the factors should be seen as examples of what can affect an experience for the consumer, but also what may be important to highlight from a producer perspective in order for the meeting between consumer and producer to be positive. The fika activity is thus nuanced as we all have different preferences for our experiences.

A significant aspect of fika as an attraction is also its diversity. With a wide range of coffee, tea, pastries and sandwiches, visitors can experience a rich variety of flavors and traditions that often have a clear relevance to tradition, culture and history.

Increasingly, fika has become part of the experience for many tourists, both from a national and international perspective. Cafés have become destinations in themselves, where the choice of destination is based on having a fika in a specific place. To further relate to the Michelin Guide, the classification system used there can also be related



Fig. 1. Aspects of placedesign creation with Fika in focus.

to tourism and the different attraction values of destinations where one star means worth a visit, two stars worth a detour and three stars worth a trip (<https://guide.michelin.com/en> 2024).

Fika can thus be seen as an important factor in the work of designing a place, both from a primary perspective in the sense that fika is the main attraction, and secondarily to create added value to another existing attraction in the local environment. Fika can thus constitute an incentive to visit a place and thus contribute to creating a tourism industry and at the same time contribute to place-related branding.

2. Concluding remarks

The fika culture is an important part of Swedish culture that has also developed over time to become a significant tourist attraction. At the same time, there is considerable potential to develop this resource further, with the aim of attracting visitors, particularly to places that currently lack a clear tourism-related attraction and which can thus contribute to the local economy.

An important factor in this context is to emphasise more the local culture with its specific history and traditions. In this way, the unique character of the place can also be emphasised, with food and drink being important components. This can be done more concretely through, for example, storytelling, but also by giving visitors the opportunity to try baking cakes or cooking a meal that has a local connection. This activity allows for an active social interaction that is expected to create a positive synergy between the producer and consumer perspective, providing added value for both parties. Further examples of how fika can be further developed, and thus attract visitors, are the creation of events such as 'fika festivals' where, for example, local bakeries and cafés showcase their specific products, thereby raising awareness of the region's cultural and culinary heritage. In the same way that wine tasting events are organised, coffee tasting events can be part of this tourism-related concept.

There are thus a number of challenges in designing the specific site so that it can be charged with an identity that attracts visitors and at the same time is rooted and accepted by the local population.

Given that the commercial aspect of fika is extensive and directly and indirectly creates many jobs and thus contributes to local and regional development, there is still a relatively modest amount of research on its importance from the perspectives I highlight in this article. In addition to further research in the fields of tourism, business administration and culinary arts and meal science, I see the importance of studying fika from a sociological and psychological perspective that focuses on well-being. As fika is multifaceted, I see the importance of illuminating this institution from several different perspectives.

Implication for gastronomy

Swedish Fika is an important carrier of culture and identity in Sweden that is also of importance to the tourism industry. Usually, it is food and drink that is highlighted in the marketing of regions and countries where "fine dining" is often in focus when attracting visitors to "taste" the region or country. The instead often casual and everyday meeting over a cup of coffee or tea does not get the attention it deserves. The article therefore emphasises the importance of Swedish Fika as a significant starting point for "charging" a place with identity, which can thereby create an attraction and provide a basis for economic activity as well as for local and regional development. An important aspect of Fika as an attraction is also its diversity. With a wide range of coffee, tea, pastries and sandwiches, visitors can experience a rich variety of flavours and traditions that often have a clear local relevance linked to tradition, culture and storytelling.

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Thomas Blom: Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no financial or personal interests or beliefs that could influence the objectivity of this article.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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