

Branding Prince Edward County as a Gastronomic Niche Tourism Destination: A Case Study

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Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Communication

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Abstract

Increasingly, gastronomy is playing a role in people's motivation for travel, and destinations are making food and beverages their main attraction. This study explored the growing field of gastronomic tourism, a type of niche tourism, through the theoretical framework of destination branding theory. Using a qualitative case study research design, this research examined the branding of the emergent region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada as a gastronomic niche tourism destination from the perspective of tourism industry players. Findings indicated that the region turned to gastronomic tourism due to its agricultural history and need for economic development. It was also found that tourism industry players utilized the processes of brand identity, product development, collaboration, support and communication to brand the region. This study contributes scholarly and practical knowledge to the areas of tourism and branding, by providing insight into the development, management and promotion of destination brands.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism, niche tourism, destination branding, qualitative research, case study, Prince Edward County

Acknowledgements

I first want to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Rocci Luppicini, for his guidance, advice and support throughout this entire process. I am fortunate to have been able to work with someone so well versed in the research design adopted for this thesis, and with whom I share both a work ethic and personal interest in the food and beverage industry. It has truly been a privilege and a pleasure to work with him.

Thank you also to my committee members, Professor Jenefer Lennox Terrior and Professor Mark Lowes, for their sincere counsel and their contributions to this thesis.

Thank you to my proofreader, Campbell Inwood, for his time.

Finally, thank you to all the individuals who participated in this research by allowing me an interview. I am very appreciative of them for having generously shared their time and their insight into Prince Edward County's gastronomic tourism industry with me.

This thesis is dedicated to the burgeoning Canadian gastronomic tourism industry. As a young communication professional, researcher and tourist, I am excited to see what the future will bring for this industry, and I hope to be able to contribute to it in some way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Tourism is an industry of growing complexity. Over the last decades, tourism has experienced sustained growth and increasing diversification in order to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2011c). In fact, tourism activities have witnessed an upward trend in the number of participants and revenues over the past half-century (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2002), and tourism worldwide is currently showing a healthy growth after it declined in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis (UNWTO, 2011a). Furthermore, the Government of Canada considers tourism to be an important economic driver across all regions of the country (Industry Canada, 2011). In 2008, tourism activities in Canada generated over \$74 billion in revenues – on par with agriculture, fisheries and forestry activities combined – and employed over 660,000 Canadians (Industry Canada, 2011).

Within the industry, niche tourism has been regarded as a relatively new form of tourism that has emerged, in part, as a result of a progressively more segmented and specialized market (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005). Novelli (2005) has viewed consumers' current tourism practices as increasingly based on selective and informed choices of destinations in line with particular needs and interests. Niche tourism can be defined as a specialized “form of tourism which involves consumers whose holiday choice is inspired by specific motivations and whose level of satisfaction is determined by the experience they pursue” (Novelli, 2005, p. 13). Specifically, niche tourism takes place “when the traveller's motivation and decision-making are primarily determined by a particular special interest” (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b, p. 5). In other words, niche tourism occurs when individuals choose to travel somewhere because they have a

particular interest that they are looking to pursue at a certain destination (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b).

While nourishment has always been and will always be a necessary part of travel – given that everyone has to eat, whether at home or away – C. M. Hall and Mitchell (2005) have asserted that food and wine are increasingly becoming a central part of people's decision-making when it comes to where to travel and what to do while on vacation. In addition, a growing number of places around the world are working to make food and wine their main attraction (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). With gastronomy having started to come to the forefront of the tourism experience and tourism research in recent years (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005), it can be said that gastronomic tourism, as a type of niche tourism, is currently a contemporary and practical topic of study. Gastronomic tourism can be described as a type of niche tourism where food and wine are the main or major motivations for travel, and thus influence travel behaviour and decision-making (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Consumers who engage in gastronomic tourism have a high interest in food and wine, which also tends to be related to an interest in the cultures and landscapes that produce them (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

The region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada was used as a case study to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of branding a place as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. While Prince Edward County has long been known for the natural beaches and sand dunes of the Sandbanks Provincial Park (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006), the region has started to reinvent itself around food and wine offerings. This trend can be observed in the exponential growth in the number of wineries in the last decade: from only one winery in 2000, there are over 30 today (Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association [PECWA], 2010c; Phillips,

2006). Prince Edward County has also been declared Ontario's newest wine region and a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts (Government of Ontario, 2010).

This study was necessary to capture a fast growing area of public interest in both academic and industry circles, i.e., niche tourism and, more specifically, gastronomic niche tourism. The emergent nature of niche tourism (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b), coupled with the very recent interest in gastronomy in the context of the tourism experience and tourism research (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005), has revealed a dearth of literature on these issues. This study is therefore filling a gap in the field of gastronomic tourism, and breaking new ground by examining an emergent niche tourism region, Prince Edward County, for its gastronomy from a destination branding theory perspective. While a few studies on the region have been undertaken by university researchers and students in recent years (e.g., Stolarick, Denstedt, Donald, & Spencer, 2010; Wade, 2007; Wade & Jacobs, 2006; Wade & Jacobs, 2008), these have spanned a wide variety of subjects, from geography and culture to urban planning and economic development. Only one study has been conducted on culinary tourism in the region, but it focused specifically on the visitor experience using a quantitative survey method (Wade & Jacobs, 2006). No studies so far have sought an overall understanding of the reasons and processes behind the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination, from the perspective of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry, by taking a qualitative approach. As a result, the region of Prince Edward County and its emerging gastronomic niche tourism industry certainly represent an original, contemporary and relevant area of study from a Canadian perspective on a topic of public interest.

Background

A brief overview of the current food and beverage culture, as it relates to the phenomenon of gastronomic tourism, is first given. This summary is then followed by some historical background and recent statistics on the region of Prince Edward County, as the site of the case study.

Food and beverage culture. The popularity of food and beverage in western world culture has grown over the past few decades, as witnessed by the increasingly large number of cookbooks, cooking shows and networks, celebrity chefs and restaurants, food magazines, cooking and tasting classes, foodstuff websites and blogs, as well as culinary tour packages, festivals and events (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Government of Ontario, 2005; LeBesco & Naccarato, 2008; Rubin, 2008). This growing interest in food and food culture has led to the explosion of the food and beverage industry (Government of Ontario, 2005; LeBesco & Naccarato, 2008). C. M. Hall and Mitchell (2005) claimed that food and drinks have become major components of contemporary western lifestyle and that, as a result, specific food and beverage consumption habits have also become a significant part of tourism (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2000, as cited in C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

Prince Edward County. Prince Edward County – the County, as it is known locally – is an area located in the province of Ontario, Canada, at the eastern end of Lake Ontario (Phillips, 2006; Prince Edward County, 2011). It is in close proximity to the cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston and Montreal, being situated by car approximately two hours from Toronto, three hours from Ottawa, one hour from Kingston and four hours from Montreal (PECWA, 2011; Wine Council of Ontario, 2011). The region encompasses the towns and villages of Ameliasburg, Bloomfield, Carrying Place, Cherry Valley, Consecon, Demorestville, Hillier, Milford,

Northport, Picton, Waupoos and Wellington, with Picton, Wellington and Bloomfield representing the hubs of the area (Taste the County, 2011a, 2011b). According to the latest census data from Statistics Canada (2011), Prince Edward County has a population of approximately 25,250 and covers a land area of about 1,050 square kilometers. The region is said to attract over 100,000 visitors each year (Prince Edward County, 2011), approximately four times its population.

The region of Prince Edward County, formerly a peninsula, has technically been an island since the dredging of the Murray Canal between 1882 and 1889, and now has approximately 800 kilometres of shoreline (Aspler, 2006). Limestone soils, like those of Burgundy, France, are found in Prince Edward County and are very suitable for growing wine grapes (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006; The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a). The climate of the region is moderated by the large body of water, Lake Ontario, surrounding the area (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006). While summers are warm with relatively low rainfall, winters are known to be cold and harsh (Phillips, 2006). In order to cope with these winter conditions, winegrowers have to bury their vines as a form of protection from the elements, and some have also installed wind machines to prevent cold air from settling (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006). The region's growing season extends from approximately mid-May to mid-October (Aspler, 2006).

In the province of Ontario, Prince Edward County is known for its history of horticulture and agriculture, those industries having represented the foundation of its economy for the past centuries (Aspler, 2006; PECWA, 2010b; Phillips, 2006; The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a). Prince Edward County became a major food producer within the province in the 19th century, earning the name of Canada's Garden County (Phillips, 2006; The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a). Towards the end of the 19th century,

during what became known as the Barley Days, the region was an important producer of barley, supplying the American brewing industry, until the United States introduced tariffs against the product in 1890 and put an end to the barley industry in Prince Edward County (The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a).

After the Barley Days, farmers turned to dairy farming, which led to the establishment of approximately 20 cheese factories in the region, before these small producers were purchased and amalgamated as a result of industrialization, leaving only one cheese factory in existence (Aspler, 2006; The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a). From the end of the 19th century until the mid-20th century, Prince Edward County played a dominant role in Canada's canning industry (Hubbs, 2011). Canned fruits and vegetables from the area, including tomatoes, peas, cherries and apples, represented one quarter of Canadian production in 1930, making Prince Edward County the country's second largest canning region (Hubbs, 2011; The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a). Today, the major agricultural industries in the region consist of dairy, poultry, cash crops, and viticulture (PECWA, 2010b).

The history of viticulture and winegrowing in Prince Edward County goes back as early as the 1800s, when a winery in Hillier, at the western end of the region, won a gold medal for its wines at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia (Aspler, 2006; Heinrichs, 2004). In contemporary history, the first grape growing experiments in the area began in the 1980s, before a surge in vine planting occurred the late 1990s (Heinrichs, 2001; Phillips, 2006). A mix of vinifera and hybrid grape varieties are now planted in Prince Edward County; vinifera varieties include Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gamay and Cabernet Franc, while hybrid varieties count Baco Noir and Vidal amongst the most popular (PECWA, 2010b). The region has recently witnessed an exponential growth in the number of commercial wineries: from only one

winery in 2000 to over 30 today (PECWA, 2010c; Phillips, 2006). Prince Edward County became recognized as Ontario's fourth Designated Viticultural Area (DVA) in 2007 by VQA Ontario, after the areas of Niagara Peninsula, Lake Erie North Shore and Pelee Island (PECWA, 2010b; VQA Ontario, 2011).

Prince Edward County has been said to be Canada's fastest growing wine region (The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a), and the Government of Ontario (2010) has declared the area to be Ontario's newest wine region. This government also asserted that in the past decade, Prince Edward County has become a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts, and a place where "families with impeccable agricultural lineage work cooperatively with acclaimed chefs and winemakers with a common appreciation for the freshest regional ingredients and a passion to showcase the best the land has to offer" (Government of Ontario, 2010, para. 1).

Purpose of the Study

As niche tourism has become an emergent form of tourism within the industry in recent years, more interest and focus has started to be given to the various types of niche tourism in existence, along with the particular issues and trends associated with each of them (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005). C. M. Hall and Mitchell (2005) have stated that, as a type of niche tourism, gastronomic tourism has recently begun to come to the forefront of the tourism experience and tourism research, adding that people are now putting more and more importance on food and wine when it comes to travel decision-making, and that an increasing number of destinations are making food and wine their feature attraction.

Given the relevance and importance of these areas of research, this study explored the concepts of niche tourism and, more specifically, gastronomic tourism as a form of niche tourism

through the lens of destination branding theory. Using a qualitative case study approach, the purpose of this study was to understand and describe how the region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada – proclaimed as Ontario’s newest wine region and a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts by the Government of Ontario (2010) – was branded as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. The study sought the perspective of players in the industry, that is, individuals and organizations involved in the development, management and/or promotion of gastronomic tourism in the region, in order to comprehend how they build, enact, convey and perceive the region’s gastronomic tourism brand. The ultimate objective of the study was therefore to investigate the regional tourism industry’s concerted efforts to brand Prince Edward County as an identifiable and desirable region for gastronomic tourism.

Overview of the Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Destination branding theory, as a specific area of study that emerged from branding theory, was the main theoretical framework employed in this study. Destinations are defined as the countries, regions, provinces or states, and cities that people visit within the context of travel and tourism (de Chernatony, 2010; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004; UNWTO & European Travel Commission [ETC], 2009). The concept of destination branding therefore deals with the specificities that destinations face throughout the branding process, including the particular opportunities, benefits and challenges (Morgan et al., 2004). In light of the changing nature of the tourism industry and an increasing competition between tourism destinations, destination brands have become a central element of tourism (de Chernatony, 2010).

Successful destination brands are said to have the ability to promise, convey and deliver unique and memorable travel experiences to visitors (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; de Chernatony, 2010). In fact, destination branding is seen as an exercise in identification and

differentiation for regions, and as a way for places to establish a unique selling proposition for themselves based on their core characteristics, values and assets (Blain et al., 2005; UNWTO & ETC, 2009). Some believe that, in the context of tourism, every region should develop a destination brand (Kerr, 2006; UNWTO & ETC, 2009). Lastly, Morgan et al. (2004) have claimed that it is especially important for niche tourism destinations to focus on branding opportunities.

With regards to methodology, this thesis made use of a qualitative case study research design in order to examine the region of Prince Edward County as an example of the phenomenon of branding gastronomic niche tourism destinations. A single case design was selected as the best way to thoroughly study the uniqueness and complexity of the situation in its natural settings, as deemed by Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995). Data selection was made using a purposeful sampling approach, which is considered the method of choice in qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The prominent role and influence of the researcher in the study was not minimized, given that it constitutes an essential component of qualitative research (Eisner, 1991; Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995). Nevertheless, the role of the researcher in the study was acknowledged and efforts were made by the researcher to attain adequate distance from the data, both of which are strategies endorsed by Denzin (1978).

Multiple methods of data collection, specifically interviews, documents and an observation, were employed in an intensive manner in this study in order to achieve the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that is sought in case study research (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Data analysis, an ongoing process in qualitative case study research, made use of descriptive coding and pattern coding methods to produce both a description and an interpretation of the case (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Saldaña, 2009; Stake,

1995). Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, notably the identification of the researcher's biases, triangulation, and thick description (Denzin, 1978; Eisner, 1991; Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995). Finally, importance was given to ethical considerations throughout the study.

Research Questions

This study sought an understanding of the phenomenon of branding Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. A central research question, along with several subquestions, anchored the study.

Central question.

- How have individuals and organizations in the tourism industry branded Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination?

Subquestions.

- Why was gastronomic tourism selected as part of the brand of the region?
- How is the identity of the region defined and described by individuals and organizations in its tourism industry when it comes to gastronomic tourism?
- What strategies and tactics have been used as part of the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination?
- What have been the main resources and elements involved in the process of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination?
- What has been the role of internal and external communication in the development, management and promotion of the gastronomic tourism brand of the region?
- How has the gastronomic tourism brand of the region evolved since its inception?

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has been organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction – This chapter gave an overview of several significant issues currently arising in the tourism industry, specifically for niche tourism and gastronomic niche tourism. It also provided some background on key elements of the study, notably the food and beverage culture and the region of Prince Edward County. The purpose of the study was explained, followed by a summary of the theoretical framework and methodology. The chapter ended with the research questions that guided the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – This chapter explores the concepts of tourism, niche tourism and gastronomic tourism, as well as the theoretical framework of branding theory and, in particular, destination branding theory. The chapter ends with the rationale for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology – This section describes the qualitative case study research design used for the study. It also provides a summary and justification of the data selection, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethics of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings – This chapter presents the general findings of the study through a contextual description and an account of the five categories identified during the data analysis process, specifically (1) brand identity, (2) product development, (3) collaboration, (4) support, and (5) communication. An advanced analysis and interpretation of the findings is also put forward.

Chapter 5: Conclusion – This section provides a brief summary of the key findings before moving on to a discussion of the significance and contribution of the study. The chapter also provides a reflection on the limitations of the study as well as some possibilities and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The pertinent literature for this study can be divided into the following themes: tourism, niche tourism, and more specifically gastronomic tourism as a form of niche tourism, as well as branding theory, and in particular destination branding theory, which represents the theoretical underpinning of the study. The literature review is followed by the rationale for the study.

Tourism

Over the last few decades, tourism has been experiencing a sustained growth and a greater than ever diversification (UNWTO, 2011c). This contemporary trend can in part be attributed to the rapid growth and declining cost of transportation systems, and to an unprecedented amount of disposable income for leisure and recreational pursuits, creating a world of increasing mobilities and dissolving boundaries where travel and tourism has become easier and more accessible (Maitland, 2009; Mugerauer, 2009). The nature of tourism has also changed as a result of an expanding flow of images and information between people and places which has in turn become more interactive (Maitland, 2009).

The World Tourism Organization (2011b) has defined tourism as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes” (para. 1). Tourism has to do with the activities of these people, which can be called visitors or tourists, regardless if they are residents or non-residents (UNWTO, 2011b). An upward trend in the number of participants and revenues related to tourism activities has been occurring over the past half-century (Cook et al., 2002), with the result that tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world (UNWTO, 2011c). In fact, Cook et al. (2002) noted that tourism has developed into an important component of the economic foundation of numerous countries. In Canada, for

instance, tourism is considered a key economic driver across the country (Industry Canada, 2011). The Government of Canada has found that tourism activities in the country generated over \$74 billion in revenues in 2008 – on par with agriculture, fisheries and forestry activities combined – and employed over 660,000 citizens (Industry Canada, 2011).

Robinson and Jamal (2009) have described tourism as a complex system of intertwined components that includes travel, accommodation, services, facilities, attractions, activities, sites, and characteristics of the destination, in addition to the economic, environmental, social, technological, and political structures that necessarily come into play. In the view of these scholars, tourism's multifaceted network of structures, relationships, arrangements, and histories must come together in order for enjoyable tourism experiences to be created (Robinson & Jamal, 2009). Accordingly, Robinson and Jamal (2009) have deemed the study of tourism as a way to “gain a deeper understanding of a highly complex phenomenon which increasingly touches the lives and environments of millions” (p. 693).

Niche Tourism

The development of niche tourism has been said to be a major trajectory of contemporary tourism; in effect, the niche tourism phenomenon has surfaced in opposition to mass tourism in recent years (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Mass tourism has been described as a feature of the modern world and capitalist economies, as it relates to mass production and consumption, whereby the “production, structure and organisation of tourism [is] akin to an industrial process” (Robinson & Novelli, 2005, p. 2). It has been associated with large-scale, standardised and packaged itineraries, tours, accommodations, means of transportation, and attractions in response to an increasing volume of tourists over the last half-century, and has often been criticized for its negative environmental, social and cultural impacts (Cook et al., 2002; Robinson & Novelli,

2005). Robinson and Novelli (2005) have stated that, while mass tourism has continued to dominate tourism patterns and flows, a large number of specialized forms of tourism have started to emerge.

In the context of a highly competitive modern tourism industry (Kraus, 2001; Sims, 2009), niche tourism has recently gained prominence to become a growing segment of the industry (Novelli, 2005). Rather than attempting to meet the needs of the masses or to appeal to all visitors, niche tourism has entailed a sophisticated process of distinguishing and differentiating tourists (Robinson & Novelli, 2005), which can also be referred to as market segmentation. In the context of tourism, market segmentation is the process of researching, understanding and ultimately targeting a specific audience or subgroup of tourists amongst the entire tourist population according to their particular demographic, socioeconomic, cultural, geographical, and/or psychographic variables (Cook et al., 2002; Kraus, 2001; Mazanec, 1997). For tourism purposes, emphasis is often put on the psychographic characteristics, which include tourists' personality, interests, motivations, attitudes, behaviours, and/or lifestyles (Mazanec, 1997; Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Robinson and Novelli (2005) have maintained that niche tourism is based on very precise markets of visitors. The act of targeting a specific segment of visitors is therefore analogous to focusing efforts on a niche market.

Consequently, niche tourism has been regarded as a relatively new form of tourism that has emerged, in part, due to a progressively more segmented and specialized market (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005). Moreover, Novelli (2005) has viewed consumers' current tourism practices as increasingly based on selective and informed choices of destinations in line with particular needs and interests. Individuals who engage in niche tourism have been described as having a highly specific individual interest, need, desire, or preference that they seek to pursue

through an experience or activity at a particular destination, and it is this logic that first and foremost makes up their motivation for travel and influences decision-making during the trip (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992a, 1992b; Novelli, 2005; Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Niche tourism can therefore be defined as a specialized “form of tourism which involves consumers whose holiday choice is inspired by specific motivations and whose level of satisfaction is determined by the experience they pursue” (Novelli, 2005, p. 13). In fact, C. M. Hall and Weiler (1992b) considered that satisfaction has emerged as the main criterion in the selection of travel destinations. Niche tourism has also been said to allow for the development and expression of tourists’ identity through the pursuit of particular activities that align with their interests at a destination (Robinson & Novelli, 2005).

While the interests of travellers remain an important consideration in the development and practice of niche tourism, Robinson and Novelli (2005) have noted that the discourse around niche tourism is constructed by the producers of tourism rather than by the consumers. Furthermore, while niche tourism experiences can appear aimed at tourists’ specific individual interests and needs, they are often delivered to a very large number of individual tourists with similar interests and needs, and may thus not be as intimate or individualized as they seemed to be in the first place (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Nevertheless, Robinson and Novelli (2005) have mentioned that the World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council consider niche tourism as providing more benefits to host communities as compared to traditional mass tourism. It is also believed to be a more environmentally and socially sustainable form of tourism (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Finally, niche tourism has been said to be a more elite and sophisticated form of tourism as compared to mass tourism, which thus tends to attract higher income tourists (Robinson & Novelli, 2005).

C. M. Hall and Weiler (1992b) have suggested that niche tourism is “characterized by the tourist’s search for novel, authentic, and quality tourist experiences; and by the tourism industry’s provision of such experiences” (p. 4). In effect, experience-oriented travel (Helber, 1988, as cited in C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b) has emerged as a recent tourism trend, in line with tourism becoming known as a form of commoditization of experience (Graburn, 1983, as cited in Singh, 2004). With niche tourism, travel is no longer simply about relaxation, indulgence or entertainment, but rather about the opportunity to participate in, study, learn, and experience a region (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Singh, 2004). According to Goeldner et al. (2000, as cited in Singh, 2004), this trend has ushered in a change from a service economy to an experience economy of tourism. In order to cater to travellers’ specific interests, Singh (2004) has contended that a focus on quality experiences at destinations requires “knowledgeable, imaginative and innovative entrepreneurs” (p. 5) within the tourism industry.

Finally, niche tourism has been said to revolve not only around the specific activities available to tourists, but also on the geographical elements of a destination (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). In other words, a region can define and position itself as a niche tourism destination by offering a particular activity in a particular location. In turn, niche tourism occurs when individuals choose to travel somewhere because they have a particular interest that they are looking to pursue at a certain destination (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b). Travellers who engage in niche tourism can be defined according to their specific interests as it relates to an activity and/or a destination (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b).

Gastronomic Tourism

People have a wide variety of interests and motivations that guide their choice of travel destinations, as well as activities and experiences in which they engage once in these places. One

of these interests is food and beverages. Accordingly, when individuals travel to a destination specifically to pursue an interest in food and beverages, they can be said to engage in gastronomic tourism, which is a form of niche tourism. It must be noted that, for the purposes of this study, the term *gastronomic* tourism has been retained – in preference to *culinary*, *cuisine*, or *gourmet* tourism, which are all expressions fundamentally employed in a synonymous manner to *gastronomic* tourism in the literature – as it is the academic wording used by prominent tourism scholars in the field, Colin Michael Hall and Richard Mitchell (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). However, the phrase *culinary* tourism was employed in this study during correspondence and interviews with participants, given that it is the expression most familiar and commonly employed in the industry, and is consistent with the term used by the not-for-profit organization working in food and beverage tourism in Ontario, the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance [OCTA], 2011).

Growth of gastronomic tourism. Food and wine have historically been considered as just another element amongst the range of hospitality services offered to visitors at a destination (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). While nourishment, in the form of food and drinks, has always been and will always be a necessary part of travel – given that everyone has to eat, whether at home or away – C. M. Hall and Mitchell (2005) have asserted that it was not until the early to mid-nineteenth century that food and wine became a travel product in their own right. However, gastronomic tourism only began to grow on a notable scale during the 1970s (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Improvements in transport technology, both in terms of the movement of people and food; changes in consumers' tastes and lifestyles; and, the start of an agricultural reform in the Western world were chiefly responsible for this development (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). The agricultural reform had left producers looking for new ways of doing business, such as

through the diversification of products, direct sales to customers, and a focus on artisanal production of small-scale, high-value products (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). This development opened up a whole new market of customers for producers, from residents to regional, national and international visitors, as tourism intensified worldwide (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

Today, food and wine are increasingly becoming a central part of people's decision-making when it comes to where to travel and what to do while on vacation (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). In addition, a growing number of places around the world are working to make food and wine their main attraction (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). It should be noted that for a particular destination, gastronomic tourism could either be known as the primary attraction or as one of multiple attractions. At present, gastronomy is viewed as central to the tourism experience, such that it can become a stand-alone reason for travel to a destination (Fox, 2007; Wight, 2008).

Gastronomic tourism has seen a rapid growth in the past few decades (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005), and has been characterised as "an interesting, brand new and unique industry" (International Culinary Tourism Association [ICTA], 2011, as cited in Wight, 2008). With gastronomy having begun to come to the forefront of the tourism experience and tourism research in recent years (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005), it can be said that gastronomic tourism, as a type of niche tourism, is currently a contemporary and practical topic of study. Kivela and Crotts (2006) have contended that gastronomy has become an important characteristic in the development of niche tourism destinations. In fact, for those scholars, gastronomy and tourism destinations live in a symbiotic relationship (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). The importance of gastronomic tourism, on a worldwide scale and in particular in the province of Ontario, can be witnessed in the existence of organizations working specifically at the intersection of tourism

and gastronomy, such as the International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA, 2011) and, in Ontario, the Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance (OCTA, 2011). Moreover, Ignatov (2003, as cited in Stewart, Bramble, & Ziraldo, 2008) has asserted that gastronomic tourism represents about 45 percent of all Canadian travel.

Definition of gastronomic tourism. In the framework of this study, *gastronomic tourism* is being defined as a type of niche tourism where food and wine are the main or major motivations for travel, and thus influence travel behaviour and decision-making (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Consumers who engage in gastronomic tourism have a high interest in food and wine, which also tends to be related to an interest in the cultures and landscapes that produce them (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). For these individuals, food and beverages are regarded as a form of ‘serious leisure’ and all, or almost all, of their activities as tourists are food and/or drink related (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Gastronomy, in the context of tourism, is thus considered as the food and drinks on offer for visitors at a particular destination (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Sims, 2009). In terms of drink, while wine has usually obtained the most focus in the literature (e.g., C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; C. M. Hall & Sharples, 2008; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Stewart et al., 2008) and is the beverage of highest prominence in the case study of Prince Edward County, other beverages such as beer, distilled liquors, and even non-alcoholic beverages like coffee, tea and fruit juices can also be part of the gastronomic tourism offering.

The Government of Ontario, in its *2001 Ontario Wine and Culinary Tourism Strategy*, has defined gastronomic tourism as “tourism in which the opportunity for wine and/or culinary related experiences contributes significantly to the reason for travel to the destination or to itinerary planning while at the destination” (Government of Ontario, 2001, p. 1). This definition

is in line with C. M. Hall and Mitchell's (2005) own description, whereby food and wine influence travel behaviour and decision-making. The provincial government further refined its definition of gastronomic tourism in its *Culinary Tourism in Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005 – 2015*, where gastronomic tourism was characterized as “any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition, or culinary techniques” (Government of Ontario, 2005, p. 12). Here, the emphasis on the tourism experience clearly illustrates how gastronomic tourism inserts itself within the realm of niche tourism, which is characterized by experience-oriented travel (Helber, 1988, as cited in C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b) in which the visitor strives to study, learn and experience a region (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Singh, 2004).

Others have described gastronomic tourism in slightly different ways. Long (2003) has viewed gastronomic tourism as an encounter with the food, ingredients, recipes, food preparation styles, or food service of other cultures, which are part of a gastronomic system different from one's own. On the other hand, Smith and Xiao (2008) have considered this last definition restrictive in its explanation that food experiences must belong to another culture. Rather, these scholars considered gastronomic tourism as an intentional and reflective encounter with any culture in which one learns about, appreciates or consumes gastronomic resources (Smith & Xiao, 2008). Wight (2008) has added that, while gastronomic tourism can describe the discovery of new or exotic food from certain particular cultures or regions, it can also refer to the exploration of food that is familiar or comforting to the tourist in foreign milieus.

Characteristics of gastronomic tourism. The consumption of food in the context of gastronomic tourism consists of more than simply physical sustenance (Henderson, 2009; Kalkstein-Silkes, Cai, & Lehto, 2008). In effect, it is when food moves beyond being a

superficial, necessary component of travel in order to become a prominent element of a travel itinerary, or the primary or sole purpose of travel, that gastronomic tourism is said to take place (Henderson, 2009; Wight, 2008). Experiences and interactions with food and beverages are a central feature of gastronomic tourism (Kalkstein-Silkes et al., 2008; Kivela & Crofts, 2006), in line with the experience-oriented travel that characterizes niche tourism (Helber, 1988, as cited in C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b). However, not all food and drink related encounters during a trip are a form of gastronomic tourism; rather, the “desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region or even to taste the dishes of a particular chef must be the major motivation for such travel” (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005, p. 74).

Cook et al. (2002) have contended that food and beverages consumed as part of travel are remembered more often than any other part of the travel experience. Unlike other travel souvenirs, food and beverages engage and affect all five human senses, so that visitors engaging in gastronomic tourism are left with sensory and emotive memories of their experiences, which then frequently linger and can be easily invoked and revisited through the consumption of food and drink products (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Henderson, 2009; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011; Sims, 2009; Wight, 2008). Gastronomic tourism experiences also have the ability to modify visitors’ eating and drinking preferences and tastes through encounters with new food and beverages as well as new culinary habits (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Wight, 2008).

Components of gastronomic tourism. Kivela and Crofts (2006) have asserted that destinations that already possess valuable culinary resources are the ones with the best chances of developing a gastronomic tourism industry. López and Martín (2006) added that the advent of quality designations has helped certain culinary tourism products reach new levels of recognition and appreciation in recent years. Gastronomic tourism is certainly composed of several elements

that can be experienced as part of travel. While gastronomic tourism includes both food tourism and wine tourism, these two types of tourism can also be studied as separate disciplines.

Definitions of food and wine tourism can help to outline the different components involved in a gastronomic tourism experience.

Food tourism has been defined by C. M. Hall and Mitchell (2001, p. 308, as cited in C. M. Hall & Sharples, 2008) as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are the primary motivating factor for travel.”

Wine tourism has been described as “visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors” (C. M. Hall, 1996, as cited in C. M. Hall & Sharples, 2008, p. 5). In addition to food producers, restaurants, vineyards, wineries, as well as food and wine events such as festivals and shows, which are listed above, other elements of gastronomic tourism include: food and/or wine tours, food and/or wine trails, cooking classes and schools, wine tasting and appreciation classes, culinary seminars, food shops, cafés, farms, farm stands, and farmers’ markets (Carmichael, 2005; C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; C. M. Hall & Sharples, 2008; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Henderson, 2009; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Lin et al., 2011; Wight, 2008).

Smith and Xiao (2008) also created a typology of gastronomic tourism resources, which they classified by facilities, activities, events and organizations. Although there is some overlap between their categories, facilities include buildings and land associated with food and drink production, preparation and/or distribution, as well as designated routes through gastronomic landscapes; activities consist of consumption, touring and educational opportunities around food

and drink; events refer to festivals and consumer shows with a gastronomic focus; and, organizations include those that support the development of gastronomic tourism and those that serve culinary tourists (Smith & Xiao, 2008). Ultimately, at the core of all these gastronomic tourism components and resources are a region's typical and/or unique products and ingredients, recipes, dishes, food preparation styles, as well as culinary customs and traditions (C. M. Hall & Sharples, 2008; Fox, 2007; Kivela & Crotts, 2006).

Gastronomic tourism and other tourism offerings. Henderson (2009) has noted that only a small number of destinations can rely exclusively on the appeal of their gastronomy and that, as a result, food and wine are usually best presented as one element of a broader product offering. Gastronomy can therefore be combined with non-gastronomic tourism products, such as culture, heritage and/or nature, which then carries the possibility of attracting a larger audience, increasing sales, diversifying the inventory of attractions, and strengthening the competitiveness of the destination (Henderson, 2009). In effect, the gastronomy of a region is inextricably linked to many other of the area's attributes, notably its culture as well as its geography and agriculture.

First, in terms of the relationship between the gastronomy and the culture of a particular region, the International Culinary Tourism Association (2006, as cited in Kivela & Crotts, 2006) has found a high positive correlation between tourists with an interest in gastronomy and those with an interest in cultural attractions. Moreover, Lin et al. (2011) have noted that gastronomy is intertwined with the cultural characteristics of a specific region. According to Fox (2007), food is an important basis of the cultural identity of a region. Fox (2007) has asserted that every culture has characteristic products and dishes that are consumed regularly and attributed to that culture in popular imagination, so that food remains one of the main forms of cultural differentiation

amongst regions worldwide. In fact, food and wine are said to have the potential to be instilled with symbolic meanings of culture (Kalkstein-Silkes et al., 2008). In other words, food and wine can become symbols of the culture of a destination, thus making gastronomic tourism a medium for cultural exchange between a particular region and its visitors. Gastronomic tourism, perhaps more so than other types of tourism, is about the authenticity of the region: it is by experiencing the authentic and true food and wine products of a region that visitors are then able to connect with the culture of the place.

Furthermore, exposure to and discovery of food and beverages allow individuals to expand their own understanding and appreciation of cultures along with its people, territories and traditions (Cook et al., 2002; López & Martín, 2006). López and Martín (2006) have added that gastronomy lets individuals approach culture not simply in a contemplative way, but in one that is experiential and participative. For Kivela and Crofts (2006), the link between gastronomy and culture in a region is a significant one, so much so that “the role of gastronomy is also one of cultural tourism” (p. 359). As noted in the definition of gastronomic tourism retained as part of this study, individuals who engage in gastronomic tourism have a high interest in food and wine, which also tends to be related to an interest in the cultures and landscapes that produce them (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

Landscapes, in the context of food and wine, have also been referred to as foodscapes and winescapes (Bell, 2009; Peters, 1997, as cited in Carmichael, 2005), with these having a direct link to the agriculture and geography of a region. The connection between the gastronomy and the natural characteristics of a place is an important one, in that a region’s food and wine products, styles and varieties are inextricably linked to its physical geography, including the climate, soil and topography (Carmichael, 2005; Lin et al., 2011; Povey, 2006). In fact,

Carmichael (2005) has considered gastronomic tourism as a form of agritourism, where agricultural and tourism production and consumption come together.

Benefits and challenges of gastronomic tourism. Gastronomic tourism can produce a number of advantages for a particular region, but it can also pose some challenges. On the one hand, the benefits of gastronomic tourism for a destination can include establishing positive relationships with customers; increasing sales and profit margins; generating positive economic impacts; producing new business opportunities; increasing consumer exposure to gastronomic products; building the region's brand awareness and loyalty as a gastronomic destination; gaining marketing intelligence on products and customers; and, creating educational opportunities around an awareness and appreciation of gastronomy (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Gastronomy also has the potential to produce strong feelings of involvement and attachment to a place in residents and tourists (Henderson, 2009).

On the other hand, there exist certain challenges to the successful development and establishment of gastronomic tourism in a particular region. These challenges can include a lack of industry research; scarce financial, human and technological capital; issues of sustainability and seasonality; competition; and, poor service quality (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Fox, 2007; Henderson, 2009; Stewart et al., 2008). Both the benefits and challenges enumerated above carry considerable implications for the tourism industry and its players in any given region that engages in gastronomic tourism.

It must be remembered that, while food and beverages can drive travel choices and decisions, tourism can also drive the development of food and beverages (e.g., Cook et al., 2002; López & Martín, 2006). The type of activity or activities on which a destination chooses to focus its efforts, whether in the form of mass tourism or niche tourism, will necessarily have a

considerable impact on the way that players in its tourism industry undertake the branding of the region. In the context of this study, the phenomenon at hand is the branding of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada as a gastronomic niche tourism destination.

Theoretical Framework

A qualitative research design, such as the one used for this study, is based on an approach that is anchored in exploration and discovery (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). As a result, a particular theoretical framework has the role of guiding and focusing the phenomenon under study, including the research design and the data collection and analysis, without forcing itself onto the study. Anfara and Mertz (2006b) have held the belief that a useful theory is one that tells an informative and insightful story about the phenomenon under study, and that broadens people's understanding of the phenomenon, by adding "subtlety and complexity to what appears at first glance to be a simple phenomenon" (Anfara & Mertz, 2006a, p. 190). These scholars also considered that a theoretical framework can be used to focus the research and situate it in a scholarly conversation (Anfara & Mertz, 2006a).

Amongst the various theoretical frameworks explored during the conception and design of this study, branding theory, and specifically destination branding theory, was found to be most relevant to the exploration of the phenomenon of gastronomic niche tourism using the region of Prince Edward County as a case study. Most of the scholarly literature on branding has focused on products and services from a corporate perceptive. While many of these concepts can be extrapolated and applied to destinations, a specific area of study known as destination branding has emerged, developing its own specificities around the notion of branding. Given that a destination, the region of Prince Edwards County, is the case under study for this thesis, the

subsequent section will start with a brief overview of general branding theory, before focusing on branding in the context of destinations, that is, destination branding theory.

Branding theory. Branding theory, in its general form, looks at the way in which corporations, organizations, products and services brand themselves (Aaker, 1996). According to Aaker (1996), a leading scholar and pioneer in the field, branding is the idea of adding value to a product or service. Hankinson and Cowking (1993) have defined a brand as “a product or service made distinctive by its positioning [...] and by its personality” (p. 1). Positioning situates a brand relative to its competition according to particular characteristics (Aaker, 1996; Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Hankinson & Cowking, 1993), while personality refers to a brand’s unique combination of functional and symbolic attributes (Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Hankinson & Cowking, 1993). A strong brand is said to be one that is able to generate and sustain a competitive advantage and profitability for an organization (Aaker, 1996). Strong brands can build success, while ineffective brands have the ability to undermine success (Wheeler, 2006). Hankinson and Cowking (1993) added that the key to successful branding is the strength of the relationship between the consumer and the brand, in terms of the fit between the consumer’s wants and needs and the brand’s attributes.

Brand identity is understood as “what the organization wants the brand to stand for in the customer’s mind” (Aaker, 1996, p. 25). Brand identity therefore originates from the organization, as opposed to brand image, which is described as a consumer’s perception of a particular brand (Nandan, 2005, as cited in Lin et al., 2011). Suggestions that brand identity is best understood from the viewpoint of the supply-side (Kapferer, 2004, as cited in Lin et al., 2011; Nandan, 2005, as cited in Lin et al., 2011) are relevant to this study, given that it sought the perspective of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry. A brand identity, defined according to an

organization's vision and objectives, is a unique set of attributes that provides direction, purpose and meaning for a brand (Aaker, 1996; Hankinson, 2004). It is a promise to consumers from the organization (Aaker, 1996). Aaker (1996) has described brand identity as consisting of a core and extended identity. The core identity is the "central, timeless essence of the brand" that makes the brand unique, valuable and meaningful (p. 68). The extended identity is comprised of "brand identity elements, organized into cohesive and meaningful groupings, that provide texture and completeness" (Aaker, 1996, p. 69). Finally, Wheeler (2006) has viewed the most successful brand identities as those that are "memorable, authentic, meaningful, differentiated, sustainable, flexible, and [that] add value" (p. 6). In addition, the role of brand management is described as one of defining and overseeing the brand identity in order to achieve competitive advantage (Hankinson, 2004) and to create meaning for consumers. As noted by de Chernatony (2010), "[b]rand management is promise management" (p. 17).

Going back to the notion of brand positioning, which is used to define a brand and advantageously distinguish it from its competition (Aaker, 1996; Duncan & Moriarty, 1997; Hankinson & Cowking, 1993), Aaker (1996) has asserted that a brand position should be actively communicated to the target market. Ries and Trout (1986) saw positioning as a solution to the problems associated with communicating in an "overcommunicated" society (p. 1). These scholars affirmed that an organization must create and establish a position in consumers' minds, and that this position should take into consideration its own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of its competition (Ries & Trout, 1986). Positioning is seen as an approach to communication that strives to secure a favourable position for a product or service in a consumer's mind, rather than to change the product or service (Ries & Trout, 1986).

Trout and Rivkin (2010) have spoken of repositioning as a process that must take place when changes in society occur and markets evolve. The practice associated with repositioning is one of changing people's minds "so as to match or fit" their perceptions (p. 150), meaning that it is a question of readjusting, not simply altering, consumers' perceptions of a product or service (Trout & Rivkin, 2010). This idea of repositioning is pertinent to the study, which looked at how Prince Edward County, long known for its nature and landscapes (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006), has now started to reinvent itself around food and wine offerings.

Nevertheless, the focus of this study is not on general branding, as it is not about the ways in which products, services, corporations and organizations brand themselves (Aaker, 1996). Rather, the practice of branding in the context of this study revolves around destinations. The concepts which make up destination branding theory will therefore be explored next, and connections will be drawn between the notion of destination branding and the one of gastronomic niche tourism, in order to demonstrate the relevance of the theoretical framework of destination branding theory to the current study.

Destination branding theory. Destination branding theory was the main theoretical framework employed in this study. In essence, destination branding theory is a specific framework that has emerged from branding theory. It takes the concepts which make up branding theory – and which are traditionally applied to corporations, organizations, products and services – and uses them to look at destinations. Destinations can be anything from countries, regions, provinces or states, and cities that people visit within the context of travel and tourism (de Chernatony, 2010; Morgan et al., 2004; UNWTO & ETC, 2009).

The term *destination branding* is sometimes referred to synonymously, or with slight variations, as *place branding*, *place marketing* or *destination marketing*. *Destination branding*

was the expression retained for the purposes of this study, since it is the wording employed by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO & ETC, 2009). It is also the phrasing used in the first book to be published specifically on the topic, in 2002 and titled *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, which was edited by major tourism scholars Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard as well as tourism professional Roger Pride (Morgan et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Hospers (2007, as cited in Skinner, 2009) has noted that destination branding is “an act by the place itself and tells the outside world what it is or how it wants to be seen (inside-out-approach)” whereas destination marketing consists of “the image outsiders have of a place (outside-in-approach)” (p. 31). Given that this study was conducted from the perspective of players in the tourism industry, and that destination branding theory is also said to lately have witnessed a shift in focus from product brands to the organizations and people that support the brands (Hankinson, 2007), it can be concluded that destination branding is the appropriate terminology to employ and the correct concept to explore as part of this study.

Destination branding is an important element of tourism for countries, regions, provinces or states, and cities. As tourism witnessed a change from a service economy to an experience economy (Goeldner et al., 2000, as cited in Singh, 2004), destination brands became a central aspect of tourism with their ability to “deliver unique and welcomed experiences” (de Chernatony, 2010, p. 17). In other words, destination brands have the potential to succeed if they are able to convey and add to customers’ experiences while on travel (de Chernatony, 2010). Furthermore, in a highly competitive marketplace with ever-increasing competition between tourism destinations, regions have sought to develop brands to attract prospective visitors and even residents (Bell, 2009; Lin et al., 2011; UNWTO & ETC, 2009). In effect, Anholt (2007) has asserted that every destination must now compete with every other destination for share of mind,

share of income, share of talent and share of voice. Morgan et al. (2004) claimed that focusing on branding opportunities is particularly important for niche tourism destinations, especially considering that “most destinations will at best be niche players competing on the margins” (Piggott, 2001, as cited in Morgan et al., 2004, p. 14).

Destination branding is seen as an exercise in identification and differentiation for a particular region (Blain et al., 2005), given that destinations must be able to compete and ultimately be selected by consumers as the place of choice for travel (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). As a result, it is believed that, in the context of tourism, every geographic location should develop a destination brand (Kerr, 2006; UNWTO & ETC, 2009). Blain et al. (2005) have claimed that effective destination branding provides potential and actual consumers with the promise of a quality and memorable travel experience. Branding is also a way for destinations to establish a unique selling proposition (Blain et al., 2005), meaning that it is a way to create and reinforce a unique personality and position for themselves that should be “focused, recognizable, coherent and attractive” (Olins, 2007, as cited in UNWTO & ETC, 2009, p. 10). This unique selling proposition should also represent the “core and enduring characteristics of a destination” (UNWTO & ETC, 2009, p. xvii), anchored in the true values and best assets that the destination possesses and, in turn, wishes to project to the world (UNWTO & ETC, 2009). Olins (2007, as cited in UNWTO & ETC, 2009) has added that a destination brand must be based on real substance and current reality. Accordingly, it cannot be invented; rather, it must be “organic and self-developing” (Olins, 2007, as cited in UNWTO & ETC, 2009, p. 10).

Elaborating on the destination branding functions of identification and differentiation, Gnoth (2002) and Skinner (2008) noted that a region’s unique and distinct brand identity, also known as its “sense of place” (UNWTO & ETC, 2009, p. 15), ought to be developed and

supported through a brand management process that results in the production of a strategic plan for the destination. D. Hall (1999) added that such a strategic plan should then be translated into a consistent and focused communication strategy. Next, brand management is viewed as an ongoing process (Povey, 2006) that makes use of positioning. This positioning process is based on a destination's features, services or benefits – whether tangible or intangible, functional or symbolic – aligned with the interests or needs of potential visitors, and is meant to help consumers differentiate between various destinations in their minds (Balakrishnan, 2009; Kolb, 2006). The brand identity of a destination is therefore a way of communicating a promise to potential consumers, as well as a means of facilitating their choice of location for travel (de Chernatony, 2010; Kolb, 2006).

There exist many benefits to branding destinations. As previously outlined, destination branding can assist a place in becoming associated with a unique identity as well as help it deliver memorable experiences to travelers, thus allowing it to better compete with other destinations. Branding can also build awareness for a destination, reduce consumer anxiety and risk about undertaking travel, and encourage repeat visits by building loyalty (Kolb, 2006). Other advantages of destination branding for places could include more effective tourism promotion, a larger profile in the media, and the development of an atmosphere where innovation and investment is prized (Anholt, 2007).

Nevertheless, the complexity associated with branding destinations can produce many challenges. First, destinations have to consider a wide variety of stakeholders, each with different interests and degrees of influence, when it comes to brand decision-making and implementation (Balakrishnan, 2009; Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; Pike, 2005). These stakeholders can include politicians, the media, potential investors, members of the community, and individuals in charge

of destination branding. External and internal political pressures can also represent especially large challenges for destinations engaging in tourism and branding activities (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). Next, destinations have to contend with a volatile external environment that can be comprised of factors such as politics; economic conditions; currency fluctuations; terrorism, violence and war; disease outbreaks; and, weather and natural disasters (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; Pike, 2005). Destinations also hold, and can become associated with, some inherent elements of their history and heritage, which cannot be easily modified and which can evolve over time (Balakrishnan, 2009). The geography of a region can also affect its weather, resources, and accessibility, as well as its human and infrastructure characteristics (Balakrishnan, 2009).

Furthermore, individuals responsible for branding a destination usually have to struggle with a paucity of resources, particularly small budgets and little management control, in addition to having to try to remain objective, contemporary and fresh with the brand (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; UNWTO & ETC, 2009). It is also difficult for a destination to maintain control over the perception of its brand, which can be influenced by many different actors, both inside and outside of the region (Pike, 2005). Lastly, the multidimensional aspect of destinations makes them a complex entity to brand in the context of tourism (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004; Pike, 2005), an issue which can be partially addressed by focusing on specific experiences as part of a niche tourism approach.

In the context of this study, branding theory, and more specifically destination branding theory, served as the theoretical framework, and predominantly guided the purpose of the study and the research questions. In terms of the purpose of the study, the ultimate objective of the thesis became to investigate the regional tourism industry's efforts to brand Prince Edward County as an identifiable and desirable region for gastronomic tourism. The study therefore

sought an understanding of the phenomenon of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. Regarding the research questions, the framework of branding theory and destination branding theory had an influence on the elaboration of the central research question as well as several of the subquestions. As a result, the interview questions, along with the interview responses from participants, were also guided by the theoretical framework.

In conclusion, the relevance of the destination branding theoretical framework to this study is seen in the numerous connections that can be drawn between the concepts of destination branding and gastronomic niche tourism. In fact, a number of studies have established a connection between these two concepts, meaning that destination branding theory has already been used to explore and explain various gastronomic tourism phenomena. Lin et al. (2011) have claimed that food and drinks can be used as a type of destination brand identity and become a powerful way to develop a destination brand, given that these products have such a strong connection to a place. In effect, food and drinks are said to be directly or indirectly connected with specific destinations, on top of being able to encourage individuals engaging in tourism to experience the gastronomy of a place (Lin et al., 2011). Kivela and Crofts (2006) have claimed that there is evidence of numerous tourism industry players using gastronomy in the creation and development of niche tourism market segments for their destinations. Hashimoto and Telfer (2006) have gone as far as to say that the food and beverages of a particular place are a necessity to the development of a destination brand for itself, and to its success as a tourism destination. Moreover, many scholars have stressed the importance of ensuring that the food and drinks of a particular place are utilized to brand it with a distinct gastronomic identity that will ultimately contribute to its competitiveness as a destination (Fox, 2007; Henderson, 2009; Lin et al., 2011; Stewart et al., 2008). Consequently, this study of Prince Edward County as an identifiable and

desirable region for gastronomic niche tourism is a continuation of the exploration of the link between destination branding and gastronomic niche tourism.

Rationale

Tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world over the past decades (UNWTO, 2011c). This original research was undertaken to explore a recent type of tourism within the industry known as niche tourism and, more specifically, gastronomic tourism as a category of niche tourism (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005). Niche tourism has been identified as an emergent and fast growing area of public interest in academia and business (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b). Gastronomic tourism, as a type of niche tourism, has only just begun to come to the forefront of the tourism experience and tourism research in recent years (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). People have recently been putting more importance on food and wine when it comes to travel decision-making, and an increasing number of destinations are now making food and wine their feature attraction (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005).

Even though food and beverages are now a major component of contemporary lifestyles and have always been an integral part of tourism, they had not received a great deal attention within the context of tourism until very recently (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; van Keken & Go, 2006). As a result, there is a dearth of literature and research on the topics of niche tourism and especially gastronomic tourism at this time. Moreover, the Government of Ontario (2005), in its report entitled *Culinary Tourism in Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005 – 2015*, had stressed the importance of academic research and the role of university researchers in the development and implementation of a solid plan for culinary tourism in the province.

This study looked at the concepts of niche tourism and, more specifically, gastronomic tourism through the lens of destination branding theory. Blain et al. (2005) have explained that, while branding theory has been applied extensively to products and services, destination branding is still a fairly recent phenomenon. A paucity of academic and pragmatic research on destination branding, particularly in the tourism literature, has consequently been acknowledged by numerous scholars (e.g., Balakrishnan, 2009; Blain et al., 2005; Pike, 2005). Pike (2005) added that this lack of literature does not appear to align with suggestions that destinations are the tourism industry's leading brands, and that the future will be a battle of brands. If indeed destination branding is presently "one of the hottest topics amongst [...] professionals and politicians" and that "places currently offer the greatest untapped branding opportunities" (Morgan et al., 2004, p. 3-4), then it appears that contributions to the destination branding literature would be welcomed by tourism scholars and practitioners. Furthermore, Skinner (2009) noted that a large amount of the literature on destination branding focuses on the idea of branding nations, and that little has been written on branding regions, towns and cities.

This original study is therefore a continuation of the research that has begun to take place in the areas of gastronomic niche tourism and destination branding. The study not only fills a gap in gastronomic tourism and destination branding literature, but it also breaks new ground by examining an emergent niche tourism region for its gastronomy from a destination branding theory perspective. In effect, the region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada is a new and interesting area of research from a Canadian perspective, having recently started to reinvent itself around food and wine offerings. Prince Edward County is said to be Canada's fastest growing wine region (The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a), a statement which can be observed in the exponential growth in the number of wineries over the last decade in the region,

from one in 2000 to over 30 today (PECWA, 2010c; Phillips, 2006). The Government of Ontario (2010) has also declared Prince Edward County as Ontario's newest wine region and a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts. Accordingly, as a case study done from a Canadian context, this research is relevant and important to the development of a deeper understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

The purpose of this research was to understand and describe how the region of Prince Edward County was branded as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. The study sought the perspective of players in the tourism industry, that is, individuals and organizations involved in the development, management and/or promotion of gastronomic tourism in the region, in order to gain an appreciation of how they built, enacted, conveyed and perceived Prince Edward County's destination brand centered on gastronomy. The ultimate objective of the study was therefore to investigate the regional tourism industry's concerted efforts to brand Prince Edward County as an identifiable and desirable region for gastronomic tourism. As a result, the central research question and the subquestions were designed to contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon under study and to capture a fast growing area of public interest in both academic and industry circles, that is, the branding of gastronomic niche tourism destinations. The research questions also helped to go beyond what is already known on the phenomenon by conducting a novel qualitative case study of an emergent food and wine region in Canada from the perspective of tourism industry players, thus adding to the small amount of literature on the topics under study.

It must be acknowledged that, in recent years, some university scholars and students have undertaken a few studies on gastronomic tourism and destination branding in Canada (e.g., Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006), Ontario (e.g., Carmichael, 2005; Smith & Xiao, 2008; Stewart et al.,

2008) and the region of Prince Edward County (e.g., Stolarick et al., 2010; Wade, 2007; Wade & Jacobs, 2006; Wade & Jacobs, 2008). However, these studies were not inclusive or directly relevant to the phenomenon at hand and/or place under study. Hashimoto and Telfer (2006) reflected on culinary tourism destination branding in the context of the entire country. Carmichael (2005) and Stewart et al. (2008) both conducted their studies on the larger, older and more established wine region of Niagara in Ontario, respectively examining the tourism experience of winery visitors and the challenges of culinary tourism. Smith and Xiao (2008) examined culinary tourism using the supply chain theory for the province of Ontario as a whole. As for the studies on Prince Edward County (Stolarick et al., 2010; Wade, 2007; Wade & Jacobs, 2006; Wade & Jacobs, 2008), they touched upon a wide variety of subjects not entirely pertinent to both gastronomic tourism and destination branding, including geography, culture, creativity, urban planning, and economic development. Only one study has been done specifically on culinary tourism in the region (Wade & Jacobs, 2006), but it focused exclusively on the tourism experience of visitors to Prince Edward County and it employed a quantitative survey method. Thus far, no studies have sought the perspective of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry of Prince Edward County, and none have taken a qualitative approach to gain an overall understanding of the reasons and processes behind its branding as a gastronomic niche tourism destination.

To conclude, the lack of literature on destination branding, in addition to the very few studies on gastronomic tourism that have been undertaken to date from a Canadian context, point to the timeliness, suitability and value of this research. In effect, the branding of Prince Edward County as an emergent gastronomic niche tourism destination is an original, contemporary and relevant area of study on a topic of public interest.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a summary and justification of the methods adopted for this study, addressing the aspects of the qualitative case study research design, selection of data, role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethics.

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was employed for this study. Qualitative research is considered by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as having a long and distinctive history in the field of social sciences and humanities. Qualitative research, as a type of research design, can be defined as an intensive, interpretive and naturalistic approach with a concern for uniqueness and particulars, which has the goal of rendering a situation in all its complexity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). In qualitative research, the purpose of inquiry is based on insight, discovery, understanding and interpretation of complex interrelationships, rather than on explanation, hypothesis testing, or cause and effect relationships (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). The focus is on the study of a phenomenon in its natural settings (Stake, 1995). Importance is given to the meanings that individuals bring to the phenomenon, and to a wide range of contexts, including temporal and spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, and personal contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Erickson, 1986; Stake, 1995). Qualitative researchers therefore tend to view the world as socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Finally, the researcher constitutes a key instrument in data collection and analysis in a qualitative study, thus denoting the essential role that subjectivity and reflexivity play throughout the research process (Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995).

The case study approach that was used as part of the research design of this study was principally informed by Merriam (1988) and Stake (1988, 1994, 1995). A case study is a

qualitative research approach that examines a specific phenomenon as an instance of some concern or issue (Merriam, 1988). Stake (1988) views a case as an entity that is worthy of close watch, adding that “[i]t has character, it has totality, it has boundaries” (p. 256). The case study researcher is interested in the uniqueness and particularity of a specific case and strives to discover, understand, describe, and interpret its components and characteristics in-depth and in all their complexity (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1988, 1994, 1995). The researcher, who has a sincere interest in learning how a case functions in its natural settings and pursuits, takes into account the many contexts in which the case operates (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995).

A wide variety of data from multiple information sources are also collected in an intensive manner over a sustained period of time (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976; Stake, 1995), in order to “uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1988, p. 10). Smith (1978, as cited in Stake, 1988, 1994) coined the term *bounded system* when referring to a case study, meaning that cases are systems restricted by a particular time, site and activity (Stake, 1995). As a functioning and dynamic entity, the bounded system, or case, is considered as having a unity or totality along with some kind of outlines or boundaries (Stake, 1988). A case therefore has working parts and a boundary (Stake, 1995).

As with any research approach, case studies have their strengths and weaknesses, but Merriam (1988) contends that a case study’s strengths outweigh its limitations. In terms of strengths, a case study allows for the exploration of complex phenomena containing multiple components; it provides a dynamic understanding of human experiences in their natural contexts; it offers a rich and holistic account of situations; and, it presents insights that can contribute to expanding people’s experiences (Merriam, 1988). As for limitations, a case study can demand a large amount of time or money from the researcher; it is subject to the biases of the investigator;

and, it risks oversimplifying or exaggerating a particular situation given that it is not feasible to study every component of a case (Merriam, 1988). On this last point, Stake (1988) asserts, “[o]f course a case study doesn’t tell the whole story. But it does deal with the unity of the case, the unity of the experience, in ways other research methods do not” (p. 258).

The type of case study that was employed for this research was a single, instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). First, only one case was chosen as the object of study. One of the main reasons behind this particular choice, which has been defended by Stake (1995), was the researcher’s limited time and resources for conducting the study. A single case design is also deemed by Merriam (1988) as the best way to address the uniqueness of a situation. Next, an instrumental case study was selected as the approach to inquiry. With this particular approach, an issue, whether emanating from puzzlement or a need for general understanding, is decided upon and a particular case is then examined to provide insight into this issue (Stake, 1994, 1995). The case study is therefore an instrument used to arrive at an understanding of something other than the particular case (Stake, 1995). As Stake (1994) observes, “[t]he choice of case is made because it is expected to advance our understanding of that other interest” (p. 237). In the context of this research, the case study design was chosen to understand the issue of the branding of gastronomic niche tourism destinations, and the region of Prince Edward County served as the case to explore this specific issue in-depth.

Justification for the research design. The rationale behind the choice of a qualitative case study research design for this thesis lies in the suitability of the approach for the phenomenon under study. This study lent itself to a qualitative research design, given that it focused on the unique phenomenon of branding a niche tourism destination around gastronomy, and on the region of Prince Edward County where this situation was taking place. As a result, the

study necessarily needed to occur in its natural setting and to take into consideration all contexts and interrelationships. Since the study strived to learn about the phenomenon from the perspective of individuals in the tourism industry by using interviews as the principal method of data collection, this research design also proved to be a good fit as a result of the importance that qualitative research places on the discovery of the meanings that individuals bring to a situation.

A case study approach was then chosen because it allowed the researcher to examine the specific experience of Prince Edward County as an instance of the issue of the branding of gastronomic niche tourism destinations. A region with a tourism industry is also a complex, dynamic system; as a result, it was appropriate to make use of a case study approach to research this particular bounded system. Consistent with the intensive gathering of multiple information sources typical of a case study, this research made use of interviews, documents and an observation for data collection. A case study can also offer a rich account that is able to contribute to the understanding of situations, which is why the researcher strived to seek out the complexities of the case and to present the study's findings using thick description in order to contribute to the expansion of knowledge.

Data Selection

As part of data selection, sampling in qualitative research is needed to set boundaries for a study and to create a frame for it (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In other words, it is a way of delimiting the study. Purposeful, or purposive, sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling that is considered as the method of choice for tackling issues in qualitative research and, specifically, in qualitative case studies (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was consequently used as the sampling strategy for this study. This type of sampling is employed

when the researcher aims to discover and understand an issue, and selects a sample from which it is believed that most can be learned (Merriam, 1988).

For the selection of the case, intensity and convenience strategies were used as part of a purposeful sampling approach. Firstly, intensity as a sampling strategy means that the researcher selects an information-rich case that manifests the particular phenomenon or issue under study in an intensive, but not extreme, manner (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, Prince Edward County was chosen as the case, since it portrayed the phenomenon of gastronomic niche tourism destination branding in a rich and intense way. Amongst the few regions in the province of Ontario where a gastronomic niche tourism industry exists, and hence where this phenomenon could be studied by the researcher, this case was chosen for its novelty and for the emergent nature of its industry. Wine and culinary regions in the province of Ontario include Niagara; Ottawa; Windsor, Essex, and Pelee Island; Prince Edward County; Stratford; and, Cottage Country (Government of Ontario, 2011b). Amid these areas, Prince Edward County has been declared Ontario's newest wine region and a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts (Government of Ontario, 2010). It has also been home to a rapidly growing wine industry over the last decade: in 2000, there was only winery in Prince Edward County (Phillips, 2006), whereas today there are over 30 wineries, with more set to open in the near future. The case of Prince Edward County can thus be described as "unprecedented and important, in other words, a critical uniqueness" (Stake, 1995, p. 44). Uniqueness is an important element of case study research, and it was the researcher's belief that this distinctive case would best help to understand the phenomenon under study.

Secondly, convenience was employed as a sampling strategy for the case, with the intention of saving time, money and effort (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As part of this strategy,

Stake (1994, 1995) argues that consideration be given to ease of access and hospitality in the choice of the case, since researchers are almost always faced with limitations. Accordingly, Prince Edward County was chosen for its accessibility and relative proximity, being situated three hours away by car from the researcher's home in Ottawa. Furthermore, following an initial contact with some key players in the region before the start of the study, the researcher established that there existed an interest and willingness on their part to participate in the study, and thus knew that it would be a welcoming environment in which to conduct the research.

In terms of the selection of the data for the study, specifically interview participants, documents and an event, the researcher made use of criterion, snowball and intensity strategies as part of a purposeful sampling approach. First, criterion and snowball strategies were employed in the selection of interview participants. These participants were first and foremost recruited on the basis that they all met the criteria set out by the researcher, which is deemed by Miles and Huberman (1994) to be a valuable strategy for quality assurance of the study. The criteria were that individuals needed to have played or currently be playing a role in the development, management and/or promotion of the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County, and that they had worked for a minimum of two years in the gastronomic tourism industry of the region. Potential participants were identified by the researcher after an online search of tourism associations working in or with Prince Edward County, and of businesses operating in Prince Edward County. From an initial list of individuals, a snowball strategy was subsequently utilized to identify additional prospective participants, in that interview participants identified and recommended other information-rich individuals that could take part in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Potential participants were recruited with an email message sent to their publicly available email addresses that briefly explained the study and invited them to participate in a voluntary interview. Follow-ups were done by email and telephone. The researcher included a variety of individuals from the gastronomic tourism industry of Prince Edward County as interview participants, selecting a minimum of one individual from each of the following five categories: (1) a tourism association in Prince Edward County, (2) a tourism association in Ontario, (3) a restaurant in Prince Edward County licensed to sell and serve alcohol, (4) a winery, brewery or cidery in Prince Edward County, and (5) a farm or specialty food or beverage shop in Prince Edward County. While it had been the original intention of the researcher to contact all the individuals, associations and businesses found during the thorough online search, this approach was modified in order to conduct a quicker and more efficient data collection, owing to the time and resource constraints imposed on the researcher by the timeline and scope of a Master's thesis. The online search was limited in time in order to subsequently allow for a period of recruitment, follow-ups and scheduling of interviews, and it was also reduced in scope to include only a fixed number of individuals, associations and businesses to be contacted for interviews in each of the five identified categories. The best possible choice of participants was made by the researcher using the criterion and snowball strategies, as well as the availabilities of both researcher and potential participants, within the constraints of a Master's thesis study.

Second, documents were identified through the use of criterion and snowball strategies. The first criterion that the researcher put in place for the documents was that they had to be written in the English language, since Prince Edward County is an English municipality, with 98% of the population stating English as the language most often spoken at home (Statistics Canada, 2006). English was also the language used to conduct this study. Furthermore,

documents had to be publicly available, so that any document used in the study could be consulted by interested parties, and so that the study could be replicated with relative straightforwardness. In addition, documents that pertained specifically to the topic of gastronomic tourism and to concepts directly related to gastronomic tourism in Prince Edward County or in Ontario, and not to other tourism offerings, were included, since this was the topic under study in this research. In order to locate these documents, the researcher looked to the websites of regional and provincial tourism organizations; these included Taste the County, the Economic Development Office of The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, and the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association at the regional level, as well as the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport of the Government of Ontario and the Wine Council of Ontario at the provincial level. The criteria outlined above were then employed to select the documents to be used as part of the research. Most of these documents took the form of studies, reports, strategies, and plans. They were all written by or for individuals or organizations in Prince Edward County's tourism industry, or the municipal or provincial government.

A snowball strategy was also employed in the selection of the documents. This means that elements of interest, here documents, were identified by knowledgeable people during the interviews or were referenced in key documents, leading to new and additional information-rich sources, or source leads, to be included in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The majority of documents identified using this approach were those mentioned by participants during the interviews, and these principally took the form of tourism guides and maps. The researcher was able to obtain a hard copy of these tourism documents either from participants during the interviews or from brochure racks at various businesses and organizations in the region, and to afterwards locate an electronic copy of them online.

Third, the event for observation was chosen using criterion and intensity strategies. The criteria were that the event needed to have a dominant culinary component, and not another type of tourism focus, and be part of the gastronomic tourism offering of Prince Edward County on a recurrent basis. An intensity approach was then used to select an information-rich event that manifested the gastronomic tourism phenomenon in an intensive manner.

Role of the Researcher

A key component of qualitative research, and specifically qualitative case study research, is the prominent role of the researcher in the study (Stake, 1995). Eisner (1991) refers to the researcher as “the self as an instrument” (p. 33), and Merriam (1988) adds that “the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data” (p. 36). By engaging in the phenomenon in an ongoing manner, the researcher plays an interpretative role in the study. Stake (1995) notes that, “[o]f all the roles, the role of interpreter, and gatherer of interpretations, is central” (p. 99). In fact, Erickson (1986) claims that the primary characteristic of qualitative research is the centrality of interpretation. In the end, the researcher comes to offer a personal view of the phenomenon under study (Erickson, 1986).

Through his or her own personal views, biases, values, and background, a researcher influences the topic of study, the research questions, the data collection and analysis, and the writing of the study. It is believed that the role of the researcher in the study should not be minimized, since it constitutes an essential component of qualitative research (Eisner, 1991; Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995). The use of a qualitative research design therefore necessarily involves the public acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in the study (Denzin, 1978).

The position of the researcher in the present study was that of an outsider. The researcher is not a resident of the region of Prince Edward County, nor has she had any involvement in the emergence, development, management or promotion of gastronomic tourism in the region. Even so, she does have some familiarity with the research site and phenomenon under study. The researcher had travelled to Prince Edward County prior to the start of the research to engage in gastronomic tourism, and the choice of the topic of study was made on the basis of her own personal interest, knowledge and passion for the issues at hand, notably gastronomy and tourism. Consequently, her past experience as a visitor to Prince Edward County as well as her interest in the food and wine offerings of various regions, and more specifically those of Ontario as her own province of residence, have necessarily played a role in her interpretation of the phenomenon.

Nevertheless, the researcher made efforts to achieve adequate distance from the topic and the data as well as to gain awareness of her biases and values as a researcher. Accordingly, a researcher journal was used for the duration of the study, a technique suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to help the investigator reflect on the research by recording a variety of information about the self and the methods. Saldaña (2009) adds that the journal can be organized using observational, methodological, theoretical and analytic notes and memos. Additionally, Anfara and Mertz (2006a) contend that the use of a theoretical framework helps researchers control their subjectivity, by providing them with a constant reminder of the particular perspective and theory utilized in the study. The researcher's use of branding theory, and more specifically destination branding theory, as the theoretical framework for this study was thus helpful to keep personal biases in check. Finally, the researcher strived to imbue the main qualities of a qualitative case study researcher throughout the process, especially those of sensitivity and perceptivity (Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 1988). In effect, the researcher was sensitive to the setting and contexts of the

study, to the participants and to the information that was collected, and sought understanding throughout the research process by being inquisitive, by listening and observing, and by empathizing with participants (Merriam, 1988).

On a final note, it is important to be reminded of the pervasive role of the researcher throughout the study:

Even though the competent researcher will be guided by what the case may indicate is most important, [...] what is necessary for an understanding of the case will be decided by the researcher. It may be the case's own story, but it is the researcher's dressing of the case's own story. This is not to dismiss the aim of finding the story that best represents the case, but to remind that the criteria of representation ultimately are decided by the researcher. (Stake, 1994, p. 240)

Data Collection

In qualitative case studies, there is no fixed moment when the data collection process begins; it starts even before an official commitment to conduct the study, as the researcher becomes acquainted with the background of the case and starts to form initial impressions around it (Stake, 1995). One of the main characteristics and strengths of case study research is the use of multiple methods of data collection, which is necessary to achieve the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that is sought by this type of research (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). This study thus drew on a variety of data collection methods, specifically interviews, documents and an observation.

First, interviews are a central pillar of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). They serve to portray the multiple views and realities of a case study (Stake, 1995). They also allow a researcher to capture an individual's point of view, description or interpretation of the

phenomenon under study when it cannot be directly observed or witnessed by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995). In other words, one of the purposes of interviews is “to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 1980, p. 186, as cited in Merriam, 1988). Interviews were necessary for this study. First, because it sought to understand situations that occurred prior to the start of the research, and could thus not be witnessed directly by the researcher, and second, because it focused on the points of view of individuals in the tourism industry, which can most easily and accurately be obtained through the conduct of interviews.

For the study, interviews were chosen as the main source of data collection, since they allowed the researcher to be immersed in the region, the individuals and the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) mention that qualitative researchers tend to work with small samples of individuals, who are then studied comprehensively and in context. As a result, the researcher conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with twelve individuals who had played or were currently playing a significant role in the development, management and/or promotion of the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County. These interviews with participants were conducted either face-to-face, over the telephone or via Skype video calling. The researcher privileged the conduct of interviews in person, and only carried out interviews over the telephone or via Skype when undue constraints imposed by geography or schedules arose. In total, eight interviews were held in person, three were done over the telephone, and one was conducted using Skype video calling. The interviews had a semi-structured, open-ended format, and aimed to be of an approximate duration of one hour. The average length of the interviews was one hour, six minutes and 34 seconds. Interviews were conducted over a period of approximately one month, between August 29 and September 30, 2011.

Carrying out the interviews involved the development of an interview protocol (see Appendix A: Interview Protocol), which contained eleven open-ended questions, accompanied by probes as needed, which helped guide the researcher-interviewer. The interview questions, which were driven by the research questions, as recommended by Stake (1995), were refined for relevance, comprehension and clarity through an informal pilot testing conducted with five colleagues and acquaintances of the researcher prior to the start of the interview sessions. The conduct of the interviews also involved building a rapport with participants, audio-recording the interviews, observing, making notes of participants' responses, and making complete and accurate transcripts of the entire interviews. Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts for the accuracy of the information given during the interview sessions. Three out of the twelve participants chose to review and approve the content of their interview transcripts, and were given the chance to do so.

Second, documents are another form of data collection that can be used when certain elements of the case cannot be witnessed directly by the researcher, since documents that record and contain such information can then be sought out by the researcher (Stake, 1994). For instance, documents can provide a historical perspective and some background on the issue at hand (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976). Documents are also typically produced independently of the research study, making them "non-reactive and grounded in the context under study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 118). Gathering a type of data created for reasons other than research, and thus untainted by the study or the researcher, can be considered an important component to an investigation (Merriam, 1988). Documents also tend to be a convenient source of data that is easily accessible to the inquisitive researcher (Merriam, 1988).

For this study, documents were used as a secondary source of data collection, and were therefore used minimally when compared to the interviews. The documents were gathered predominantly prior to the start of the interviews, with a few additional ones identified during the data collection period. More specifically, they were collected as data between the dates of November 2010 and December 2011. Merriam (1988) points out that, while the search for documents as part of data collection is systematic, it is also directed by hunches, leads and the appearance of new insights, allowing for the accidental discovery of significant data during the process.

Relevant documents amassed during the data collection process included tourism guides and maps; tourism plans, strategies, reports and studies; requests for proposal; a summary of governmental initiatives; a tool kit; and, a media kit (see Appendix B: Documents List). These documents were obtained through various ways. First, the tourism guides and maps were identified by interview participants, who are the experts in the industry, and subsequently obtained from participants, picked up by the researcher from brochure racks at businesses and organizations in Prince Edward County and/or located online. The tourism plans, strategies, reports and studies as well as the governmental summary, the tool kit and the media kit were identified either by interview participants, or by the researcher upon visiting the websites of organizations and governments doing work in, or with, Prince Edward County, including Taste the County, the Economic Development Office of The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association, the Wine Council of Ontario as well as the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport of the Government of Ontario. The researcher made use of a personal data filing and storage system as well as a list of documents as methods of organizing the multiple document sources in different formats.

Observations provide a firsthand account of the situation under study when circumstances can be directly seen and examined (Merriam, 1988). Merriam (1988) claims that observations can lead to a holistic interpretation of a phenomenon when combined with interviews and documents. Observations are also of importance when the researcher aims to describe the contexts of the situation under study, including the economic, political, historical, cultural, aesthetic and/or physical contexts (Stake, 1995).

A tertiary source of data in this study consisted of the observation of the event called *Taste! A Celebration of Regional Cuisine* on September 24, 2011. This is an annual, one-day wine and culinary event that takes place in the fall, and showcases regional food and beverages along with chefs, growers, winemakers and brewers from Prince Edward County. In addition to food and drink sampling, the event features cooking demonstrations, wine seminars and live music. For the first time in 2011, a farm and artisan market was also part of the line-up of activities. The event marked its 10th anniversary in the year 2011 (Taste the County, 2007, 2008). Each year, it takes place in a historic building in Picton, at the heart of Prince Edward County (Taste the County, 2008).

This event was chosen for observation by the researcher because it detains a dominant culinary component and is a definite part of Prince Edward County's gastronomic tourism offering. It takes place on a recurrent basis, and is one of the longest running culinary events in Prince Edward County. The event is now being attended by over 2,000 people each year, both visitors and residents. Moreover, the researcher decided to include an observation as part of data collection in order to become further immersed in the region.

The observation was used by the researcher to examine how the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County functions in a natural setting and to observe the way in which,

on the one hand, organizations and businesses in the tourism industry define and portray the brand, and, on the other hand, how visitors and residents experience and interact with the brand. The observation was of a total duration of approximately five hours, and took place towards the end of the interview data collection process. The researcher took on a “participant as observer” role, in which the observation role is secondary to the participant role (Junker, 1960, as cited in Merriam, 1988), in order to become immersed in the event. An observational protocol was utilized by the researcher to record information in the form of descriptive and reflective notes, which could then be used as part of the data analysis process (see Appendix C: Observational Protocol). To get a sense of the brand, particular attention was paid to the event’s setting, communication and promotion, activities, vendors, and attendees.

Data Analysis

Data analysis can be defined as the process a researcher embarks on in order to make sense of data (Merriam, 1988). In a qualitative case study research design, data analysis is considered as a truly ongoing process, with no specific beginning or end (Stake, 1995). Additionally, there is always more data collected than can be analyzed in a case study (Stake, 1995). As Stake (1995) contends, “[f]ull coverage is impossible, equal attention to all data is not a civil right. The case and the key issues need to be kept in focus” (p. 84). The researcher therefore has the task of identifying the best and most relevant data within the context of the study and set the rest aside. The data analysis procedures for this case study research were principally informed by Saldaña (2009), Stake (1995), Merriam (1988), and Huberman and Miles (1994).

To start, the researcher organized the collected data for analysis, and then went through it to gain a broad sense of the information. Subsequently, the researcher employed coding methods

in order to ultimately arrive at both a description and an interpretation of the phenomenon under study. The first cycle coding method of descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009) was first employed by the researcher. Descriptive coding uses a word or short phrase to summarize the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data (Saldaña, 2009). It is also said to be an especially appropriate method for beginning qualitative researchers who are learning how to code data (Saldaña, 2009), which was the case for the researcher in this study. Faithful to one of the main characteristics and strengths of case study research, multiple sources of data were employed as part of the data analysis process of this research (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995), specifically interviews, documents and an observation. Nevertheless, the primary source of data consisted of the interviews. As a result, descriptive coding was employed to identify a total of 85 themes in the interview data as part of the first cycle coding process.

Out of the multiple ways recommended by Saldaña (2009) to further analyze descriptive codes, the second cycle coding method of pattern coding emerged as the most appropriate for this study. Pattern coding has been described as being able to organize a large amount of material into a smaller number of major themes in order to produce explanatory codes (Saldaña, 2009). This coding method can be linked to an approach that Stake (1995) refers to as categorical aggregation, whereby instances of meaningfulness are aggregated until patterns in the data start to emerge and ultimately become identifiable. While significant meaning may be found in a single instance, Stake (1995) says that “usually the important meanings will come from reappearance over and over” (p. 78). The search for patterns of meaning is described as a search for repetition, regularity, correspondence and consistency in the data (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1988, 1995). Patterns are said to emerge in various ways. At times, patterns will be drawn from

the research questions or the theoretical framework (Anfara, & Mertz, 2006a; Stake, 1995) and other times, patterns will emerge unexpectedly during analysis (Stake, 1995).

For this study, the initial list of descriptive themes from the interview data was then reduced to five categories, each containing two subcategories, through the process of pattern coding. A coding scheme, with the list of categories and subcategories, was developed to aid the research in this data analysis process. The categories were identified during a search for repetition and frequency as well as for saliency in the interview data. While efforts were taken to ensure that the interview data was left to speak – by placing importance on that which participants said to the researcher, that is to say, on the perspectives of the individuals – the search for meaning during the data analysis process was also guided by the researcher, the research questions, and the theoretical framework of branding theory and destination branding theory. The researcher tried to ensure that the categories were heterogeneous and mutually exclusive (Merriam, 1988).

The documents and the observation served as supplementary sources of data for the analysis, representing secondary and tertiary data sources respectively, and were analyzed after the completion of the interview data analysis. A total of 19 documents and one observation were retained for the data analysis process. Both the documents and the observation were specifically analyzed for their relevance to, and ability to support, the themes and categories that emerged from the interview data, thus helping to delineate the scope of their analysis and to examine this data in a selective way. This approach also helped to reveal and draw connections, primarily in the form of similarities, between the interviews, the documents and the observation.

In this study, the coding was completed in an individual and manual manner by the researcher. It is important to reiterate, at this point, the impact of the researcher in the data

analysis process of a qualitative case study research. For instance, this case study contained both the researcher's interpretations and those of the interview participants; according to Stake (1995), it has to be up to the researcher to determine whose interpretations are presented and emphasized in the findings. Stake (1995) views case study research as greatly subjective, asserting that an "ongoing interpretive role of the researcher is prominent in qualitative case study" (p. 43).

After the completion of the coding process, the researcher was able to produce a description of the case, which is described as a detailed account of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988) or "a sense-making construction of a 'scenario'" (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p. 432). The description can include elements such as the history, context, setting, time, participants, chronology of events, and day-to-day activities of the case findings (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Merriam, 1988). For this study, the researcher first presented the context of the case, which looked at the reasons behind the selection of gastronomic tourism as part of the brand of Prince Edward County, by highlighting certain significant themes uncovered in the interviews. The researcher then outlined the five categories that provided an explanation as to the processes and approaches taken by individuals and organizations in the tourism industry in order to brand Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. The categories were ordered chronologically, starting with the most general ones that also constitute the first steps in the branding process, and moving on to the most specific ones that represent the last steps in the process.

Afterwards, an advanced analysis and interpretation was presented by the researcher, by linking the findings of the study to academic literature and to tourism reports and studies. Kaplan (1964, as cited in Huberman & Miles, 1994) suggests that interpretation is in effect the act of

putting pieces of information in relation to one another, and therefore of making description intelligible. In this case study research, the advanced analysis and interpretation was employed to explain, and to help move forwards the understanding of, the phenomenon under study. This is also where the researcher outlined the meaning of the case as well as some lessons learned and best practices that could be drawn from it.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research studies are concerned with matters of trustworthiness rather than those of validity or reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The basic issue when it comes to trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is for the researcher to convince audiences that the findings of a study are worth their attention and consideration. Multiple strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative case study research and to contribute to the accuracy of its findings, notably the identification of the researcher's biases, triangulation, and thick description.

Firstly, regarding the identification of a researcher's biases, Merriam (1988) notes the importance for researchers of clarifying their personal assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study. For this study, the issue of bias identification was addressed with the inclusion of a self-disclosure on the role of the researcher, above in this chapter, in which the researcher outlined her position in the study as well as her efforts to achieve sufficient distance from the topic and data, and to gain awareness of her biases and values as a researcher.

Secondly, triangulation is a strategy that consists of employing different methods of data collection in the study of a phenomenon (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). Consistent with this strategy, multiple data collection methods were used in this study, notably interviews, documents and an observation. The technique of triangulation also contributes to the

credibility of a study, and particularly to the one of its findings and interpretations (Eisner, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the combination of methods, a redundancy of data collection may occur on some fronts, which in turn reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation and helps to better make sense of the elements of the phenomenon under study (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 1992, as cited in Stake, 1994). Flick (1992, as cited in Stake, 1994) notes that:

Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But, acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen. (p. 241)

Another reason for the use of triangulation in a study is that, with this strategy, the deficiencies of one data collection methodology are often the strengths of another, which makes the combination of methods a valuable contributor to the trustworthiness of a study (Denzin, 1978). Lastly, Denzin (1978) comments that studies tend to stress one dominant method of data collection and use others as additional dimensions in triangulation. In this study, the main methodology employed as part of triangulation was interviews, with documents and an observation serving as supplementary methods.

Thirdly, what Geertz (1973) calls *thick description* was used to contribute to the trustworthiness of this study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative researchers hold the belief that rich descriptions of the social world are valuable. Stake (1995) views thick description in case study research as not simply a commonplace description, but rather a “description of things that readers ordinarily pay attention to, particularly places, events, and people” using “the interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case” (p. 102).

With this approach, the writing of the case tends to contain elements similar to those in narrative accounts, stories, chronological reports, and personal descriptions, with an emphasis on the experiences of time, place and person (Stake, 1995). As a result, the researcher has strived to make use of thick description in the writing of this study, especially for the findings, in order to help create an empathetic understanding of the phenomenon under study for audiences by conveying the particulars of it in all its contexts (Stake, 1995). Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that thick description in case studies is necessary for any judgments of transferability to be made by readers.

When it comes to trustworthiness, generalization does not constitute an essential component of qualitative case study research. Case studies focus on understanding the particular elements of one single phenomenon, rather than the general elements of many situations (Merriam, 1988). Generalizations are not relevant to particulars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), making it clear that “single cases are not as strong a base for generalizing to a population of cases as other research designs” (Stake, 1995, p. 85). Whereas other research designs are concerned with generalizations, which can constitute claims of enduring value, case studies are focused on the uniqueness of a particular situation in context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). In case study research, the emphasis is on understanding the case itself (Stake, 1995), so that the “purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (Stake, 1994, p. 245).

Rather than speaking of *generalizability*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that the focus of qualitative research is on the *transferability* of findings. They describe *transferability* as the degree of similarity, or fittingness, between various contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Individuals can thus learn from a single case study by transferring its findings to another

situation and then making appropriate inferences (Eisner, 1991; Stake, 1995). When speaking of transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) remark that “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298). The responsibility of the case study researcher is therefore to provide sufficient thick description of the case so that audiences can make their own judgments of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given that situations are never identical, there is richness in looking at a single case in qualitative research, and allowing individuals to find similarities between situations through the technique of transferability (Eisner, 1991).

Ethics

Importance was given to ethical considerations throughout this qualitative case study research. First and foremost, an ethics application was submitted for review in June 2011 to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board of the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity of the University of Ottawa, and subsequently given final approval in July 2011. In particular, ethical consideration was given to the various means of data collection, that is to say the interviews, documents and observation. Documents raised no ethical concerns, given that the sources were all publicly available and obtained without any obstacles by the researcher. As for the observation of the event, it was undertaken in a publicly accessible space where there is no expectation of privacy. This form of data collection was of a nonintrusive nature, was not staged by the researcher, did not collect personal information, and did not allow for the identification of participants or individuals in the dissemination of the results.

The interviews were all conducted on a voluntary basis with researcher participants. An informed consent form was developed and given to participants for them to read and sign prior to

engaging in the study. This consent form explained the purpose of the study to participants, the details of their participation, and gave them the liberty to withdraw from the study at any time without suffering any negative consequences. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcript for the accuracy of the information and to approve it for inclusion in the study. As mentioned earlier, three out of the twelve participants chose to review their transcript, and no modifications were made.

The anonymity of the participants was not guaranteed in this study, as a result of the relatively small number of businesses, organizations and associations operating in Prince Edward County's gastronomic niche tourism industry, which made identification a possibility. It was also acknowledged that participants may want to be identified in the study as a way to promote their business, organization or association, their products or services, and/or themselves, and/or to help raise public understanding of the best practices and successes involved in the development, management and promotion of gastronomic tourism in Prince Edward County. Participants were made aware of the non-anonymity of the study, and that their name and/or the name of their business, organization or association might appear in the thesis and any related reports and publications. Nevertheless, confidentiality was of utmost importance, and consideration was given to ensure the confidentiality of the information shared by participants throughout the study. In fact, only the researcher and the supervisor had access to participants' interview responses.

The benefits of the research for participants outweighed any risks; in fact, there were no known risks and/or discomforts associated with the study, since participants were simply asked to volunteer their knowledge, experience, views, perceptions and opinions on the topic under study. Benefits included the chance to take part in a qualitative case study research. Participants also had the opportunity to reflect on their role in the gastronomic tourism industry of Prince

Edward County and to openly share their knowledge, experience, views, perceptions and opinions on the branding of the region during in-depth interviews, which may have lead them to think about the topic in new ways. By taking part in the study, participants may have developed a new, profound sense of prestige and pride at having their personal and their region's efforts and strategic processes recognized and investigated as a model of successful gastronomic tourism branding of a region. The results of the study also hold the potential of framing Prince Edward County as a leader in the gastronomic tourism industry of Ontario and Canada. Finally, participants in the research were informed that they would be receiving a preliminary copy of the thesis in an electronic format prior to any form of dissemination or publication.

Chapter 4: Findings

Faithful to one of the main characteristics and strengths of case study research, multiple sources of data were employed as part of the data analysis process of this research (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995), specifically interviews, documents and an observation. The principal data source consisted of interviews with individuals who had played or were currently playing a significant role in the development, management and/or promotion of the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County. The documents and the observation served as supplementary sources of data for the analysis, representing secondary and tertiary data sources respectively.

General Findings

A contextual description of the case study, which looks at the reasons behind the selection of gastronomic tourism as part of the brand of Prince Edward County by highlighting some significant themes uncovered in the interviews, is first presented. Using the data analysis strategies outlined in the methodology chapter, five main categories were then formed out of the interview themes and each divided into two subcategories. These categories, which are introduced and discussed below, explore the processes and approaches taken by individuals and organizations in the tourism industry to brand Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism region. The categories are ordered chronologically, starting with the most general ones that also constitute the first steps in the branding process, and moving on to the most specific ones that represent the last steps in the process. The contextual description and the categories are then linked to the scholarly literature and to tourism reports and studies in order to generate an advanced analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Contextual description. Based on the data analysis, the following contextual description of the case study provides a response to one of the study's research subquestions – why was

gastronomic tourism selected as part of the brand of the region? – as it seeks to understand the reasons behind the choice of gastronomic tourism as a brand for Prince Edward County. By highlighting some important themes uncovered in the interviews, it offers an explanation for the presence of the gastronomic niche tourism phenomenon occurring in the region. The most common reasons for the selection and development of gastronomic tourism as part of the brand of Prince Edward County that emerged from the interviews are the continuation of the agricultural history of the region and the need for economic development.

Agricultural history. First, the history of agriculture in the region was mentioned by the majority of participants as a reason for the presence of a gastronomic tourism brand in Prince Edward County. Interview participants stressed how agriculture and farming are, and have always been, part of the history and heritage of the region, with one participant emphasizing, “there's a deep history in agriculture” (K. Desveaux) and another saying, “it was always an agricultural area, so it had been an agricultural area for 200 years” (D. Taylor). An agricultural region like the one of Prince Edward County thus implies the presence of culinary products, in this case wine grapes and foods, or as one individual characterized them, the “raw assets” (D. Taylor). Another participant was of the opinion that “the product base I think has been the biggest asset” in the development of gastronomic tourism in the region (K. Kennedy).

One participant spoke extensively about how a focus on food and wine was a good fit for Prince Edward County, saying that it is “a match for our area. It makes sense here.” (K. Kennedy). On the topic of gastronomic tourism, she added, “I think it was pretty specifically this area is that kind of a destination and it evolved from there. [...] I think that it was just a given [...] here. It didn't need to be artificial. [...] This is... it is what it is.” (K. Kennedy), as a way of explaining the emergence and development of this form of tourism. To further explicate the

choice of a tourism industry centered on gastronomy, this participant described how industry players came to the conclusion that “we don't really have anything else. [...] that's what we have. So, that's what we're going to use.” (K. Kennedy). Another participant added, “the culinary has sort of just fallen into place.” (J. Sharpe). Finally, one individual noted how Prince Edward County's gastronomic tourism industry was identified in a Premier Ranked Tourist Destination study done through the province of Ontario, and added, “what came up unequivocally was that our strength was in our agricultural roots and our potential was in this intriguing new industry, an agritourism industry” (C. Granger).

Geography, including landscape, soil and climate, is another element that is linked to the agricultural history of Prince Edward County, and thus figures into the reasons why gastronomic tourism was selected as part of the brand of the region. A participant mentioned that, in the area, “there's just this unique geography that's a little different than most of Ontario with the limestone and the rocks and the sand beaches and the 800 kilometres of shoreline, flat rolling agricultural lands” (D. Taylor). Another participant considered that “land is iconic here” and that “the soil and the terroir is definitely a big part of that part [the wine aspect] of the experience” (K. Kennedy). One individual's comment highlights the role that nature plays in the agriculture and geography of the region: “We were blessed with the limestone soil and the lake effect. You know, nature made us a good place to grow wine” (K. Desveaux). Such claims were substantiated by another participant's remark that the wine industry grew once the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) declared land in Prince Edward County suitable for growing grapes (J. Sharpe). This same participant later pointed out that, while “it's a good soil for growing wine [...], it's always been a good soil for growing different, various things. I mean, there were a lot of orchards here before the vines came in.” (J. Sharpe), meaning that a variety of foodstuffs grows

well in the region in addition to wine grapes. Likewise, a study noted the “ability of the region’s soils and microclimate to grow a wide variety of fruit and vegetables” and the “wealth of agricultur[al] produce” in Prince Edward County (Wade & Jacobs, 2006, p. 10-11).

Economic development. Second, a number of interview participants brought up economic development as a reason behind the choice and development of gastronomic tourism as a brand for Prince Edward County. Participants spoke of a region that has struggled economically in the past and that did not have an economic competitive advantage (K. Desveaux; K. Kennedy). As a result, the theme of sustainability was frequently mentioned by participants. Not only did they talk about the fact that tourism was recognized as a way of building the economy of the region, with statements such as, “you had a community that was open and willing and wanting to grow their economy” (D. Taylor), but also that tourism was a means of developing a sustainable economy. One participant spoke about how, with the development of Prince Edward County as a tourism destination built around gastronomy, “the objective has been year-round sustainable employment” (K. Desveaux). Another individual acknowledged that “visitors are core to our sustainability” (C. Granger), while a different participant saw the establishment of a destination marketing organization in the region as a way “to help build a more sustainable economy in the community” (R. LeHeup).

Participants also brought up the fact that tourism and agriculture were each identified as one of four pillars on which to develop the economy of Prince Edward County, the other two being arts, culture and heritage, and commerce and industry. A participant explained that, while the region “focused on those four areas, there just happened to be the most traction, the most marketability and the most interest in the culinary tourism realm” (D. Taylor). He also specified

that this interest in gastronomic tourism took the form of both most investor interest as well as market, or visitor, interest (D. Taylor).

In terms of investor interest, it is possible to link the investments made by entrepreneurs to a sense of urgency and to the land prices in Prince Edward County. One participant conveyed the urgency associated with an emerging industry by saying, “I think it was one of those ‘get in quick’ while it's growing, so you can have your foot in the door. So I think that's helped quite a bit.” (J. Sharpe). Next, land prices may also have played a role in the development and growth of gastronomic tourism in the region. A few individuals noted how the relatively economical prices for land had a part to play in the development of the wine industry. One individual observed that “it was a combination of sort of cheap land for wine and people that thought it might work” (K. Kennedy), while another mentioned how “there were people who had dreams of starting a vineyard, but couldn't afford the land prices in Niagara which is what drove a lot of them out here” (K. Desveaux).

As for the market, or visitor, interest that helps to explain the selection and development of a gastronomic tourism brand in the region of Prince Edward County, some participants attributed this phenomenon to an increased awareness of the importance of local food in recent years. One participant stated how “For so long, things had gotten away from local and now it's coming back,” later adding, “now that it's becoming talked about a lot more, people are realizing the implications” (V. Emlaw). Another participant observed that “There’s been a big push for [...] eating locally, and supporting local farmers' and all that” (J. Sharpe). A different individual declared how “local [has become] more important to Ontarians and Canadians for a number of reasons,” subsequently naming “economic impact” and “sustainability” as some of these reasons (C. Granger).

Categories. The subsequent five categories provide some answers to the central research question of the study, i.e.: how have individuals and organizations in the tourism industry branded Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination? In other words, these categories strive to present an understanding of the processes and approaches taken by players in the tourism industry when it comes to the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. These five categories consist of brand identity, product development, collaboration, support, and communication.

Category I: Brand identity. The first category, *brand identity*, explores the decision and approach taken by players in Prince Edward County's tourism industry in developing a brand identity around gastronomy for the destination. This category also directly answers two of the research subquestions. First, it addresses the question of how the gastronomic tourism identity of the region is defined and described by individuals and organizations in its tourism industry, and second, it provides a response to the question of how the gastronomic tourism brand of the region has evolved since its inception. For this category, the themes that emerged from the interview data were grouped into two subcategories, those of *repositioning* and *characteristics*.

Repositioning. This first subcategory looks at how the brand identity of Prince Edward County underwent a repositioning in order to become focused on gastronomy, as well as how this process was undertaken by tourism industry players. This subcategory also explores the evolution of the gastronomic tourism brand of the region from the perspective of industry players. Themes that are related specifically to the construction of a brand identity as part of the repositioning process include those of the branding approach and the differentiation strategy, while those that are expressly pertinent to the evolution of the brand in recent years consist of the sophistication of the brand identity and the wider tourism offering focus of the region.

To start, participants discussed the approach that was taken by industry players to brand Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination. Participants talked about how, rather than developing and promoting one specific gastronomic brand for the entire region, tourism organizations developed and promoted brands for each event or program that was put in place. For instance, the event *Taste! A Celebration of Regional Cuisine* was branded as a local food and wine festival that showcases products and producers from the region, while the Taste Trail program developed a brand as a self-guided tour to discover the region's diverse range of culinary experiences. One individual provided a justification for this approach by saying that the region initially had to develop specific events and programs in order to obtain some form of funding, hence the necessity of creating individual brands for every one of these experiences: "each event would have a separate message [...], we haven't really identified a brand image for culinary tourism as a whole" (K. Kennedy). Another individual added how, in the region, "It wasn't one specific culinary tourism brand message, it was around a variety of products." (R. LeHeup). One of the participants referred to this particular branding approach as "soft branding" meaning that "the bits and pieces made up the brand versus a hard-core gastronomy brand or culinary tourism brand" (D. Taylor).

Next, participants talked about how Prince Edward County went through a repositioning of its brand identity, from one centered on nature to one focused on gastronomy. They discussed how the region had always been a beach and camping destination for visitors as a result of the Sandbanks Provincial Park as well as a place where people would come to partake in outdoor activities such as cycling, swimming and sailing (K. Desveaux; R. LeHeup). However, some participants viewed this nature-based tourism as "a low-end brand, that's to say not a high-yield

brand” (R. Johnston), meaning that these tourists stayed in the region and left it without contributing to its economy in any significant way.

Tourism organizations, realizing that the region “actually had the makings of a truly special culinary destination” (K. Desveaux), began “trying to position [it] as something different than [it was] before” (R. LeHeup), by focusing on its food and wine offerings. Participants strongly held the belief that, over the last decade, Prince Edward County has been redefining itself in an effort to become a destination known for its gastronomy, and one capable of attracting tourists on that basis. One participant commented on the repositioning of the brand message, from one with a focus on the outdoors to one with a spotlight on gastronomy, by saying, “once we got beyond ‘A Beautiful Island Adventure’ and moved into sort of the ‘Taste Prince Edward County’, the messaging became clearer, more effective” (C. Granger). Finally, an individual declared how gastronomic tourism has helped to raise the profile of Prince Edward County as a destination (R. LeHeup).

Participants also discussed topics that fell into the theme of brand differentiation. Many strongly believed that the differentiating factor of the region, and hence one of its main competitive advantages, is the fact that it is a wine region. These participants were of the opinion that, while numerous regions can focus their tourism efforts on the food aspect, what really makes Prince Edward County different and unique as a destination is that it is a wine region. One individual stated:

In my view, the culinary can happen anywhere, especially with the growth of the slow food and local food movements. But what makes it distinctive here is that it's a wine region. So it's wine culinary, and that helps us to do something different. (R. Johnston)

Another participant also emphasized this point by saying, “we're not just a culinary region. We're a wine culinary region.” (K. Kennedy).

When it comes to the evolution of the gastronomic niche tourism brand of Prince Edward County, participants first discussed its increasing level of sophistication. They said how the region now had a greater level of sophistication, a greater number of food and wine offerings, and a greater depth of offering than when it started taking shape more than a decade ago. For instance, when it comes to the food scene, participants observed how the region had seen a more refined style for a time as Prince Edward County moved towards a fine dining food scene, and how it had recently transitioned to a greater depth of food offerings with the emergence of a café and family-oriented food scene. One participant commented on how the food and wine offering of the region has “evolved dramatically” over the last few years (K. Desveaux), while another individual remarked on the evolution of gastronomic tourism in Prince Edward County by saying, “It's evolved! We're now considered the gastronomic capital of Ontario. I guess that kind of is about as evolved as you get, right?” (R. LeHeup).

Regarding the evolution of the brand, several participants talked about how Prince Edward County, after having focused on gastronomy as part of its tourism brand for over a decade, had now started to widen the focus of its brand to include other tourism offerings. One individual, the Executive Director of the destination marketing organization Taste the County, spoke about how tourism organizations wanted to “increase the range of experiences” in the region in order to round out the tourism offering, by expanding areas such as arts and culture, history and heritage, and outdoor adventures (K. Kennedy). Another participant emphasized how all these different “layers of experiences” ought to be linked, adding, “none of the pieces exist in isolation, none could exist without the other. So they're all sort of interconnected, interwoven and

inter-reliant” (K. Desveaux). Someone also observed how “the region is very versatile and can offer a lot of different aspects” (J. Sharpe), which could help explain why Prince Edward County is now aiming to provide tourists with a wider variety of offerings and an overall experience. Finally, a report noted how it is the combination and experiential sum of different tourism components that has helped to create a “unique place effect” in the region (Queen’s University, 2008, p. 39).

Characteristics. The second subcategory explores the main characteristics of Prince Edward County’s gastronomic brand identity, as defined and described by individuals and organizations in its tourism industry. Themes in this subcategory include those of local, authenticity, geography and small-scale, which participants identified as some of the key attributes of the region’s gastronomic tourism brand.

First, all participants commented on how Prince Edward County is focusing on local products as part of its gastronomic tourism brand. Speaking of the idea of local products in general terms, some participants discussed how these products are reflective of the identity of a place (e.g., K. Desveaux). Others talked about how they believe that the notions of local and regional characterize every agricultural region in the world, and particularly wine regions, which one individual described as being “so terroir-driven” (C. Granger). Another participant explained how locally grown products in the region are “actually rooted in what these soils will give us, what our hard work out here can provide us, and then we get together and enjoy them” (R. Johnston). One individual mentioned how local food was “vertically integrated” in a wide variety of dining establishments, from high-end restaurants all the way to cafés, and how the businesses that were members of the Taste Trail program had to adhere to the criterion of providing a local food experience to visitors (K. Kennedy).

Furthermore, one participant who is a former chef spoke of moving to Prince Edward County specifically “to be closer to local food and to ingredients” as well as learning to “work with the seasons” (K. Desveaux). The importance of local products also came through during the observation of the event *Taste! A Celebration of Regional Cuisine*. As illustrated in its name, this event is designed as a local food and wine festival with growers and producers from within 100 miles of Prince Edward County (observational note 3.4). All the same, some participants did talk about some of the challenges associated with local products. Certain individuals spoke about the difficulty of providing visitors a year-long local food offering, especially in the winter (K. Kennedy; C. Pengelly). Others brought up the issue of local-washing, whereby certain businesses can be insincere about which of their products are local or not (A. Mackenzie; C. Pengelly).

Secondly, the idea of authenticity was brought forth by a large number of participants when speaking of the gastronomic brand identity of Prince Edward County, with many being of the opinion that it was one of its most significant qualifiers. Participants spoke about how the development of the gastronomic tourism industry was neither forced nor artificial, but rather done in an authentic way, in keeping with the down-to-earth and rustic nature of the region (C. Granger; K. Kennedy). One individual strongly believed that:

The only truly sustainable model is authenticity. If you are seeking to market a product based on an agricultural product, then you better make sure that your model is authentic. [...] that authenticity for culinary tourism is fundamental. Fundamental. You can't build culinary tourism around food or wine grown in other countries. It has to really be from where you are. Or the region won't survive. Culinary tourism won't survive. [...] it's the only way people will trust you. (C. Granger)

Another individual also added how authenticity, in the sense of products rooted in the agricultural reality of an area, confers validity and legitimacy to a gastronomic region (R. Johnston).

Thirdly, various elements that make up the geography of Prince Edward County were mentioned by participants as ways of characterizing its gastronomic tourism brand identity. Some participants talked about the idea that Prince Edward County is an island, and has a defined geography that encourages people to look to each other and work together. These individuals added how residents in the region can therefore be predisposed to having community ties and, in turn, to supporting other local businesses and forming partnerships (R. LeHeup; A. Mackenzie). One of these participants also declared how this situation “definitely has added to the success” of the tourism industry in the region (R. LeHeup).

The rural nature of the geography of Prince Edward County was also mentioned by several participants. The agricultural character of the area is certainly inextricably tied to the food and wine products that make up its gastronomic tourism offering, with the region being touted for its “pastoral setting” (Wine Country Ontario, 2011, p. 50). Participants spoke of the rural aspect as it relates to the history and beauty of the place, referring to Prince Edward County as a “beautiful agrarian oasis” (C. Granger) with “[o]pen rural spaces and agricultural lands” in a region that is “a farming community first and foremost” (D. Taylor). Moreover, one tourism report viewed the “charming, non-commercialized, rural environment” of Prince Edward County as one of its competitive advantages (Queen’s University, 2008, p. 39). Some individuals also discussed how the majority of people in the region wish for it to remain rural, and to not develop or become commercialized too quickly or at all, in order to “keep that rural land pristine and special” and preserve the region’s quality of place (K. Desveaux).

Lastly, the small-scale quality of the businesses in Prince Edward County was another element mentioned by participants as contributing to the gastronomic brand identity of the region. This particular characteristic was also confirmed in a report by Ryerson University, which stated how the gastronomic industry in Prince Edward County is composed of small independent businesses (Wade, 2007). One participant attributed this aspect of the region to the nature of the land and the history of the place, saying, “those influencers created a small-scale approach. And therefore artisan.” (D. Taylor). Another individual also commented on the large number of artisanal food producers and businesses that are making products from things grown in the area (L. Watts), while a document stated that the region has “incredible potential for artisan food and beverage business investment and development activity” (The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2010). However, when it comes to growth in Prince Edward County, a participant noted how the region is “not going to see massive, large scale developments” but rather “small-scale” developments, adding that the businesses have “definitely a small-scale, boutique, artisan kind of focus” (K. Desveaux). Finally, one of the participants stressed the importance of keeping the “unique, small, quaint” feel of the region, which he sees as one of the reasons why tourists like to visit the area (J. Sharpe).

Category II: Product development. The second category, *product development*, looks at an important practice in the development and management of the gastronomic brand of Prince Edward County. This category explores the focus on, and development of, the region’s core culinary products as well as the outcomes of product development through two subcategories: *value-added products and assets*, as well as *events and programs*.

Value-added products and assets. This first subcategory looks at the role that value-added products and assets have played in the product development approach and process taken by

tourism industry players when it comes to branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. Themes in this subcategory include the development of value-added products, the migration of entrepreneurs, and the emergence of a critical mass of gastronomic businesses.

Firstly, the creation and development of value-added products out of raw resources was an important element of the product development process of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. One participant spoke about how tourism industry players put a lot of effort into developing solid gastronomic products in the region (R. LeHeup). Another participant added how there was a “focus on core strengths” in the region, that is to say a “focus on the products that were evolving and emerging” (C. Granger). Yet another individual talked about how entrepreneurs transformed “raw food into value-added food and drink products” and gave the examples of “apples into cider, and grapes into wine, and lamb into beautiful foods at restaurants” (D. Taylor). This last participant added how a key element of these value-added products was that they could “both be exported and consumed through tourism” (D. Taylor).

Furthermore, the variety of gastronomic products in the region appears to be an output of small-scale food production (D. Taylor). Along the same lines, one participant qualified the majority of products, from wine and beer to cheese, as “craft”, “artisan” or “handmade” products (K. Desveaux). Another individual spoke of product development by emphasizing the importance for a region to be able to move beyond complacency in order to develop a successful tourism industry (A. Mackenzie). He added that, while Prince Edward County could have easily become complacent regarding its tourism industry with the presence of the beach in its region, it instead worked to develop a gastronomic product offering for tourism (A. Mackenzie).

Secondly, a migration of entrepreneurs to Prince Edward County that began working in the gastronomic industry has largely contributed to the development of products, and therefore to the expansion of the gastronomic brand of Prince Edward County. Participants talked about the occurrence of an influx of entrepreneurs that were attracted to the region, and settled there to run, or work at, gastronomy-focused businesses. These people included food producers, winemakers and winery owners, as well as chefs, cooks and restaurant owners. One participant referred to them as “innovative, creative individuals” (R. LeHeup), while other participants mentioned that many of them were people with an interest in food and wine that were looking to move away from the urban centres. For instance, one participant who is a former chef mentioned how, when she made the move from Toronto to Prince Edward County, she “was definitely part of the influx of people who came here for that specific reason” (K. Desveaux). Another participant who works at a winery talked about how he came back to Prince Edward County after his studies abroad because he knew it as an up-and-coming wine region (J. Sharpe).

Many of these entrepreneurs were described by participants as pioneers who made significant investments, both personal and financial, in the region. One participant stated that many of the businesses were being started by “pioneers chasing a dream” (C. Granger). Another individual declared that “there's been a whole almost pioneer entrepreneurial experience in the last ten years here, so everyone has started everything lots of times without knowing what they're doing” (K. Kennedy), while yet another participant acknowledged that this particular situation resulted in Prince Edward County being “ahead of the curve in terms of culinary tourism” (A. Mackenzie). Participants also mentioned how many of these entrepreneurs made considerable financial investments in their own businesses, and hence in the region as a whole.

Thirdly, the emergence of a critical mass of gastronomic businesses and of value-added products had a role to play in the development of Prince Edward County's product offering as part of gastronomic tourism. Some participants talked about the importance of having a critical mass, that is to say a large number, of entrepreneurs and businesses in a region for it to become successful as a tourism destination. The growth of the wineries – from one winery in 2000 to over 30 today, and with more slated to open in the near future – was given as an example by numerous participants that Prince Edward County has achieved a critical mass of gastronomy-focused businesses. One individual thought that the region was this “amazing sort of epicentre” for gastronomy (R. Johnston), while another spoke about how the area saw a “big boom” which “had a lot to do with that association between the food and wine and the excitement around what was growing in Prince Edward County” (C. Granger).

One participant talked about how having a critical mass of products and businesses can produce a self-feeding cycle of growth in a region, in terms of being able to attract more businesses to come invest in the region and more tourists to come consume its products (D. Taylor). Another participant explained how, by drawing in more businesses, a region begins:

to access what we call the clustering effect; so, when there are clusters of businesses, we understand that it becomes a destination. So a person isn't necessarily going to drive anywhere to visit one or two wineries, but they will come to visit 10 or 20, and now [over 30]. (K. Desveaux)

Another individual reiterated that, in order to get people to come visit a region in the context of tourism, “you need to have more than just one business, you have to have a destination” (J. Sharpe).

Events and programs. The second subcategory explores the ways in which events and programs, a result of product development, contributed to creating experiences built around food and wine, and thus played a part in branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. One report in particular identified wine and culinary experiences as one of the core attractors of the region (Brain Trust, 2005). Themes in this subcategory include the notion of events and programs as forms of experiences, as well as the issues surrounding seasonality.

The majority of gastronomic events and programs discussed by participants were those developed, managed and promoted by tourism organizations in the region. One participant, the former Executive Director of the region's destination marketing organization, Taste the County, talked about how this organization could be considered a best practice, since it undertook product development in addition to marketing initiatives (R. LeHeup). In other words, the organization focused on developing, and providing support for the development of, gastronomic products, businesses, events and programs, rather than simply doing marketing and promotion on behalf of the gastronomic tourism industry. For example, the Taste Trail was a program developed, and subsequently promoted, by Taste the County as a way to guide people in their discovery of the region's food and drink products.

Participants also placed a strong emphasis on the idea that events and programs should provide an experience to visitors. One individual talked about how, when developing a product for gastronomic tourism at a destination, it is important to consider its experiential component, which she described as the ability to visit, experience and taste the place where the product is produced or can be found (K. Desveaux). She then added that the strategy around gastronomic tourism in Prince Edward County has been centered around experiential aspects, like events and

programs (K. Desveaux), while another participant claimed that a large part of the success of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination was having events that brought experiences to life (D. Taylor). Other participants mentioned how many of the events had a focus on tying together and matching the food and the wine of the region in order to create an experience. For instance, it was observed that the event *Taste! A Celebration of Regional Cuisine* provides its attendees with a full sensory experience that engages the five senses, using means such as food and drink sampling as well as gastronomic workshops and seminars (observational notes 1.1 and 3.3).

Some participants, as tourism industry players, recognized that events provide a reason for tourists to come to the region (K. Desveaux; L. Watts). Furthermore, one participant declared how the vast majority of events and programs taking place in the region were food- or wine-related (K. Kennedy). Some of these events referred to by participants include: *Maple in the County*, a weekend-long maple festival with activities for both children and adults; *Countylicious*, a prix-fixe menu dining experience; *Terroir*, a wine celebration presented by the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association; the *Great Canadian Cheese Festival*, a new event with a focus on cheeses from across the country; *Taste! A Celebration of Regional Cuisine*, a one-day wine and culinary event showcasing “the variety and the depth and the selection of chefs, restaurants, organic growers, cheese makers, winemakers, cider makers, beer makers, all that kind of stuff” (D. Taylor) with booths, food and beverage samples, cooking demonstrations and workshops, wine seminars, and a farm and artisan market (observational note 1.1); and, *Wassail*, a celebration of the wine harvest. In addition to these events, which are organized by tourism associations in the region, one participant mentioned how some of the businesses have started to put on their own events that revolve around gastronomy (D. Taylor). For instance, Huff

Estates Winery has presented an annual event called *Six Barrels for Six Chefs* since 2007, where six wine and food stations are located throughout the vineyard, each with a different barrel sample of wine and an assigned chef that creates a dish to pair with the wine (6 Barrels for 6 Chefs, 2012).

As for the programs, the Taste Trail is a self-guided tour of over 30 establishments in the region, including restaurants, wineries, cafés and cheese factories, that is described as “a meander to educate, enlighten, and delight the palate” (Taste the County, 2011b, p. 1). The establishments need to be places where visitors can “eat, and touch, and experience, and taste” (K. Desveaux). In speaking of the Taste Trail, one individual declared that this “kind of packaging of experiences was very key in the development of Prince Edward County as a culinary tourist destination” (K. Desveaux). The Taste Trail was further described by participants as a year-round, value-added experience. Another program in the region, Harvestin’ the County, serves to identify and promote businesses that use local food to residents and visitors (Wade & Jacobs, 2006). One participant explained how the program now mostly takes the form of a map that identifies the farmers and producers as well as the products that they carry across the seasons (C. Granger).

Finally, the issue of seasonality was brought up by participants as an element that has influenced the development of events and programs in the region. Participants spoke about the fact that, when the development of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination began, the tourism season was essentially limited to the summer months. As a result, tourism organizations in the region focused on developing and promoting “the spring, the fall and the winter, because we were all busy enough in the summertime, it was the rest of the year that we were struggling” (R. LeHeup). Gastronomic events were created in the shoulder season, that is to

say, in the spring and fall, as a way to draw tourists to the region and extend the tourism season. For example, *Maple in the County* is an event held in the spring, *Taste! A Celebration of Regional Cuisine* and *Wassail* are held in the fall, and *Countylicious* takes place twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall.

Nevertheless, participants held contradicting views about the potential and future of the region when it comes to the seasonal aspect. Many participants were of the opinion that, even with the efforts made to extend the shoulder season using events and programs, “for all intents and purposes, it's still very seasonal” (K. Desveaux). One participant added that, as an entrepreneur, you “have to make all of your money in the summer [...], in four months” (J. Sharpe). Another individual was more pessimistic about the progress, saying that “everybody's been talking about making it bigger, extending the shoulder season. It hasn't happened. [...] It's a seasonal place at the moment.” (C. Pengelly).

On the other end, one participant believed that Prince Edward County is currently almost a nine-month tourism region (R. Johnston). He declared that “in a few years, the region would provide visitors with a year-long experience” and that “it's going to have to be around wine and food” (R. Johnston). This participant then added that winter “will be a lower season, but it will be a season, which it's never been before” (R. Johnston).

Category III: Collaboration. The third category, *collaboration*, was mentioned and/or discussed by all participants, who viewed it as a central component in the successful branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. The themes that emerged from the interview data were grouped into two subcategories, which together constituted the collaborative branding process: *community* and *partnerships*.

Community. This first subcategory looks at the ways in which participants depicted the nature and the spirit of the community that became engaged in the gastronomic tourism industry in Prince Edward County. First, many participants talked about the fact that the development of the gastronomic tourism industry in Prince Edward County was grassroots, meaning that it grew out of the efforts of people in the community. While support did exist from government and various regional and provincial organizations, it was the community coming together as a group that strongly emerged in the interviews as a major reason for the successful development of the industry. As one participant explained, “at the end of the day, it has to be grassroots driven to be successful. People have to have skin in the game. If you don't have anything invested, you don't value it.” (R. LeHeup).

In addition, participants stressed that the people in the community, both entrepreneurs and volunteers, recognized the need and importance of working together in order to develop, manage and promote the region as a gastronomic tourism destination. While one individual was “not sure it was evident to everyone early on that there was benefit in cooperation” (C. Granger), others were of the opinion that the region detained “a sense of community” from the beginning (A. Mackenzie) and that “collaboration has been a necessity in Prince Edward County for a long time, because of the size of the place [...]. So I think there's a culture of that.” (D. Taylor). Participants spoke of a community of stakeholders that was ready and willing to come together and cooperate at the right time in order to make their region better and build a tourism industry, with one individual adding that “everybody's really closely knit and helping build the brand of Prince Edward County” (J. Sharpe). These “willing, hardworking stakeholders” mainly consisted of “active, vocal, willing, collaborative business owners” as well as “an incredible network of

volunteers that [...] work really hard” (K. Desveaux). One participant summarized the benefits and challenges of collaboration for a community by saying:

Certainly collaboration is key. And collaboration is very difficult. So, while people do want to work together in theory, in practice it's not an easy thing. Which is sort of a double-edged sword. You need it and it's important, but it's not the easiest beast to tame.
(D. Taylor)

According to participants, the collaborative nature of the community is noticed and appreciated by visitors to the region, thus helping to prove to tourism industry players the value in collaboration. One participant remarked how “this peaceful cooperative culture [...] is engaging and welcoming for people who come” (C. Granger). Another participant believed that the region’s “biggest strength, and it's a thing that a lot of people comment on, like tourists comment on, is the fact that we do work very well together” (J. Sharpe).

Moreover, participants noted that members of the community not only worked together to brand Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination, but that they also supported each other and helped one another succeed. One participant who is a restaurant owner spoke extensively of entrepreneurs and businesses lending a hand to one another, such as by offering advice, adding, “we're all in this together. We don't want anybody to fail. We want everybody to succeed.” (C. Pengelly). Participants also talked about the fact that many entrepreneurs will tell visitors about other businesses in the region, and encourage these tourists to go visit and explore them. Furthermore, it was said that certain restaurants in Prince Edward County indicate on their menus the names of the farmers and producers within the community with whom they work, for residents and visitors to see (K. Kennedy; A. Mackenzie).

One individual commented on the supportive nature of the business community by saying, “There's very much an integrated approach to how the business operators communicate, not only to the visitors, but also to each other in terms of being one another's ambassadors, which I think is quite refreshing.” (R. LeHeup). Lastly, another participant, the owner of a food shop, emphasized how he made a point of sending tourists to other restaurants and sites that he believed provided great experiences, and how this type of practice was valuable for the community (A. Mackenzie). He also spoke at length about how his business was created to “be an example for people in the community of how much more powerful we are working together than we are separately.” (A. Mackenzie).

Membership-based organizations and programs were another example given by participants of community engagement and involvement, and of the willingness of members of the community to work in collaboration with one another. Tourism organizations in the region, such as the destination marketing organization Taste the County, were said to foster collaboration between individual businesses. One participant spoke about the fact that collaboration was a necessity in the community, because businesses “all had pretty lean operating budgets, and they certainly understood that grouping together and bringing an audience and a market to the community would be more cost-efficient if they could work together” (D. Taylor). Another individual also talked about how some businesses in Prince Edward County were engaging in collaborative promotional initiatives, mentioning that there were “a lot of co-branding, a lot of collaboration efforts to [...] brand the region” (J. Sharpe).

In addition, some participants noted that membership-based tourism organizations in the region put strong emphasis on consulting and engaging the community in its decisions. Organizations were said to seek the feedback of participants on their programs, through meetings

and consultations, and to make modifications to these programs accordingly. One participant, the current Executive Director of Taste the County, explained how listening and respecting the members of the organization was of utmost importance, since membership-based organizations such as Taste the County work on behalf of their members for the benefit of the entire community (K. Kennedy).

Partnerships. The second subcategory looks at the relationships and partnerships that were built between various individuals, businesses and organizations within the community, as part of the collaborative efforts to brand Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination. One participant was of the opinion that partnerships have been one of the main resources used in branding the region as a gastronomic destination (K. Kennedy). Another individual viewed the creation of partnerships as a reaction to the limited resources available for the development of a gastronomic tourism industry in the region, saying, “they’re doing the best that they can to associate themselves with the right strategic partners to still keep the brand ‘Prince Edward County’ out there. I think the reality is they have very limited resources to stand alone” (R. LeHeup). This same participant later commended the value of partnerships by adding, “ultimately, anybody working in partnership tends to be more successful than if they try to do something independently” (R. LeHeup).

The partnerships between tourism organizations, which provide an illustration of collaborative efforts and their inherent value, were discussed by participants. In particular, the close partnership between Taste the County and the Economic Development Office of the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward was given as an example of a positive and successful relationship by many participants. One individual, the former Economic Development Officer of the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, spoke of the nature of the

relationship between the two organizations as the gastronomic tourism industry was being developed by saying, “we were basically inseparable. We were almost one and the same, from a partnership perspective.” (D. Taylor).

Lastly, participants also talked about the relationships between different sectors of the region that are part of the gastronomic tourism offering. While some of these partnerships were facilitated by tourism organizations, others were built independently by individuals and businesses. For instance, the organization Taste the County worked on putting in place relationships between the agricultural and tourism sectors (R. LeHeup). One participant, formerly a chef, explained how her restaurant had built relationships directly with farmers for the purchasing of products (K. Desveaux). Finally, another individual who works at a winery talked about how the business had “formed some pretty key partnerships with local restaurants, cheese producers and other wineries and stuff to create an experience” (J. Sharpe).

Category IV: Support. The fourth category, *support*, emerged as an essential element in the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. Tourism industry players identified numerous resources that played a supportive role in the development, management and promotion of the brand, which were then organized into the subcategories of *governmental support* and *organizational support*.

Governmental support. The first subcategory explores the support lent by various levels of government to tourism industry players in Prince Edward County. Participants seemed to think that governmental support, which came above all from the province and the municipality, principally took the form of financial assistance. Some participants talked about how financial support, for instance Government of Ontario grants and subsidies, had been available as the gastronomic tourism industry was being developed, and accessed through individuals and

regional organizations. One participant stressed the importance of these grants to the budding industry by saying, “[t]he government definitely [...] contributed and funded which was critical” (R. LeHeup). The recent reorganization, by the province of Ontario, of tourism destinations into defined regions – Prince Edward County now being part of the Regional Tourism Organization 9, also known as The Great Waterway – was mentioned by an individual as source of funding for regional tourism initiatives (R. Johnston). However, some individuals spoke of the lack of consultation that occurred during its creation as well as the challenges associated with maintaining Prince Edward County’s identity within this new brand (C. Granger; R. Johnston).

The province of Ontario also put in place a program called Premier Ranked Tourism Destination, which provides a framework for tourism destinations in Ontario that can in turn be used to help them define their competitive position within the tourism market (Brain Trust, 2005). One participant explained this program, in which Prince Edward County participated in 2005, as “an assessment tool to determine the region's readiness to get premium supports from the province” (C. Granger). Then, this same individual spoke about how the municipal government of Prince Edward County supplied financial as well as human resources to the gastronomic tourism industry (C. Granger).

On the other hand, some participants were of the opinion that a lack of support for tourism existed at the provincial and municipal levels of government. Regarding support from the province of Ontario, one participant declared that “[t]he province doesn't help much” (C. Pengelly). Another individual lamented the fact that the municipality makes very minimal investments into the tourism industry, which in turn brings in significant amounts of money for the region (R. Johnston). This participant noted how “over time, the County has given us virtually nothing” later adding, “[i]t's actually been a very short-sighted kind of approach they've

taken” (R. Johnston). Lastly, one individual noted how the reality today, when it comes to provincial funding, is very different from the one when the gastronomic tourism industry started a little over a decade ago, saying, “Now they've pulled back completely, so I wouldn't have wanted to be starting now.” (C. Granger).

Organizational support. When it comes to organizational support, participants identified specific organizations, and certain individuals within them, as having played a central role in the development, management and promotion of Prince Edward County's gastronomic tourism brand. Even with the acknowledgment by one individual that the region has not operated in a very institutional way (K. Kennedy), particular organizations and individuals provided undeniable vision, leadership and support to the emerging gastronomic tourism industry.

First, Taste the County, the destination marketing organization for Prince Edward County, was created as the gastronomic tourism industry in the region began to emerge and develop. Taste the County is a membership-based, non-profit organization with a board of directors composed from the membership (Taste the County, 2011a). Participants described the organization as the one responsible for marketing and promoting Prince Edward County as a tourism destination, and credited it for having helped to get everybody in the region working together. One individual observed that the organization had “taken on the lion's share of the responsibility for developing collaborative strategies and delivering on marketing opportunities” in the region (C. Granger). Furthermore, the previous Executive Director of Taste the County summarized the beginnings of the organization as:

an initiative that was actually a bunch of volunteers who got together both from tourism and agriculture, and identified that there was a need to start working more cohesively and

collaboratively together to help build a more sustainable economy in the community. (R. LeHeup)

Many participants praised the work done for, and the support given to, Prince Edward County's gastronomic tourism industry by Taste the County, with statements like: "I think Taste has done an amazing job for the region" (C. Pengelly), "the role that Taste has played has been really crucial to this evolution [of a wine culinary identity]" as well as "Taste managed to get ahead of the curve in this and to really push [wine culinary tourism] hard" (R. Johnston), and "I think Taste the County is a best practice, [...] I think they're industry leaders" (R. LeHeup). Finally, Taste the County and the Economic Development Office of the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward are two organizations in the region that were said to have worked closely together to develop tourism, and were credited as one of the major reasons for the strength and success of the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County (K. Desveaux; R. Johnston).

The Economic Development Office of the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward is the organization responsible for economic development planning and investment attraction for tourism in the region (The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007b). One individual talked about the fact that the organization supported prospective entrepreneurs through the creation of guides and tool kits that served as attraction and information pieces (K. Desveaux). A participant also noted how "the Economic Development Office [was] pushing for a wine culinary identity to the County" (R. Johnston). Another individual, the former Economic Development Officer of the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, mentioned that the organization was "very much heavily involved in the promotion" of the region, along with Taste the County (D. Taylor). Ultimately, Taste the County and the Economic Development Office, as two

organizations working strongly together on many initiatives, and at times overlapping in their respective responsibilities, made one participant comment, “[s]ometimes that would work really well, sometimes they were in conflict with each other and then that caused some problems” (R. Johnston).

The individuals who were working in these organizations at the time of the emergence and development of the gastronomic tourism industry in the region – Rebecca LeHeup as the Executive Director of Taste the County and Dan Taylor as the Economic Development Officer at the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward – were also mentioned by many participants as creative people with a vision who were important forces in driving tourism. Kathleen Kennedy, the current Executive Director of Taste the County, was also often brought up by participants as a key leadership figure in the development, management and promotion of the tourism industry. Individual leadership within these organizations thus played an important role in the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination.

Moreover, certain organizations are specifically involved in supporting the development, management and promotion of the wine industry in Prince Edward County. At a regional level, the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association, a membership-based association with a board of directors, represents the region’s wineries, vineyards, and wine industry as a whole (PECWA, 2010a). One participant, who is on the board of directors of this association, described its main goals as the marketing and promotion of the wineries and vineyards, the protection of the name *Prince Edward County* for wine, as well as the provision of educational resources to winegrowers (J. Sharpe).

At the provincial level, the Wine Council of Ontario and the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) are both organizations that help the wine industry of Prince Edward County, and that

therefore support the region's gastronomic tourism brand. First, the Wine Council of Ontario represents Ontario VQA wines and vintners, and advocates on behalf of the provincial wine industry (Wine Council of Ontario, 2010). One participant, a marketing project manager at the Wine Council of Ontario, explained that the organization does government relations as well, declaring, "we work with government on behalf of the industry to ensure that their best interests are being looked after" (L. Watts). The Wine Council of Ontario, under its Wine Country Ontario brand, is also responsible for marketing on behalf of the Ontario wine industry. The same participant talked about how the Wine Country Ontario brand "basically supports the communities, products and regions. Not just the wine, it's about the whole experience of wine country. [...] it's much more tourism focused. [...] So it's much bigger than just the wines." (L. Watts). In addition, participants spoke about how the Wine Council of Ontario supports the wines and vintners through research, studies, training, education, and documentation.

Second, the Vintners Quality Alliance, who regulates the Ontario wine industry (VQA Ontario, 2011), was described by participants as instrumental in getting Prince Edward County recognized as a designated viticultural area, also known as an appellation of origin. One participant stated that this recognition "has been helpful to the region no doubt" and that it contributed to giving the region "some authenticity" (C. Granger). Another individual declared that the designation "really helps to brand the region because now it's [...] listed as an official wine region" (J. Sharpe).

Category V: Communication. The last category, *communication*, is another one of the strategies and tactics used in the process of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. This category also directly answers the research subquestion on the role of internal and external communication in the development, management and promotion of

the gastronomic tourism brand of the region, and addresses the rationale behind the use of some of these communications methods. The two subcategories that make up this final category consist of *internal communication* and *external communication*.

Internal communication. The first subcategory looks at the tools and tactics employed for internal communication purposes by players in Prince Edward County's tourism industry; in other words, it examines the ways in which communication was used by these individuals to communicate amongst themselves. One participant spoke about how the size of the region affects the communication practices of people in the tourism industry by saying, "it's a small community, so people are connected anyway. [...] you usually meet someone on the street and then they've met someone on the street earlier, so the news really travels fast here." (K. Kennedy). As a result, internal communication in the region could be described as an informal type of communication, and one that privileges face-to-face interactions rather than formal communication programs. Participants nevertheless talked about certain means, such as email newsletters as well as meetings, consultations and networking events, that were used by industry players to correspond with each other. Social media was also mentioned as a way for individuals in tourism to remain in contact, with one participant noting that Prince Edward County's tourism industry became "a big Facebook community" in the last couple of years (K. Kennedy).

External communication. The second subcategory explores how tourism industry players in Prince Edward County work to market and promote the region to external audiences, notably visitors. First, numerous participants discussed the region's lack of financial resources when it comes to communication initiatives. According to them, this situation resulted in a focus being placed on public relations that is aimed at the media, rather than advertising, as a way of leveraging marketing and promotional dollars. In effect, one individual declared, "[w]e had very

little in terms of advertising dollars; we spent more of our resources both in money and time on media relations.” (R. LeHeup). Others talked about how dollars were stressed through public relations, how it was the most cost-effective communication activity and, finally, how the region had an active media relations program that attempted to generate as much media coverage as possible (K. Kennedy; D. Taylor). A participant also spoke about how print, radio and television advertisements were only used when specific financial resources were able to be secured by players in the tourism industry (R. LeHeup).

Another participant attributed a large part of Prince Edward County’s success as a gastronomic tourism destination to public relations, adding that entrepreneurs, businesses and organizations working in the food and beverage sectors were “media savvy” and “did good PR” (D. Taylor). He went on to explain the logic behind the use of public relations in Prince Edward County:

So most communities never have enough money to do whatever they need to do and, if you're effective at public relations, you can turn nickels into dollars. So, that's what we did. We needed to leverage every nickel we had to make it work really hard for us. With public relations, the media tells your story for you. You know, a third party endorsement. So it's way more powerful. Plus, it's editorial, right? So they're telling the whole story versus a block with a headline and a piece of copy in it [...]. So public relations was a huge part of the success. (D. Taylor)

A tourism report also credited Prince Edward County as being “successful in gaining substantial media exposure through its media relations campaign” (the Tourism Company, 2006, p. 58). Moreover, an individual added how public relations “was a really good idea here because then others carry the message and you have more credibility” (R. Johnston). Participants also noted

how doing media tours, bringing in travel writers, putting on press events, attending travel media shows, forming relationships with journalists, and actively feeding stories about the region to the media in sustained and creative ways were all tactics used by industry players to court the media (K. Desveaux; R. Johnston; K. Kennedy).

Participants also spoke of different types of communication products employed to market and promote the region to visitors. These products include print materials, such as guides, maps and brochures; online resources, like websites and social media; outdoor advertisements, such as signage; and, events, like wine and food shows and industry symposiums that allow face-to-face interactions, and that are held in Prince Edward County or in other cities. One person spoke of product exportation as a communication tactic that can be beneficial for a region, by using the example of wine and declaring, “[w]hen [...] the wine starts getting exported outside of your community, the wine starts speaking for the community” thus “bringing awareness and knowledge and some level of promotion to your community” (D. Taylor). Finally, word-of-mouth was also mentioned by many participants as an effective way of increasing the recognition of the region.

Social media was discussed by several participants as a way of marketing and promoting the region. Some people pointed out that industry players in Prince Edward County had only recently become involved with social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, saying, “it's slow coming. [...] I mean, it is happening, it's starting to come along, but it's taking time.” (J. Sharpe). Nevertheless, industry players appeared willing to embrace social media and dedicated to increasing their use of it. For instance, one participant discussed how people in the industry attended workshops and executed a social media strategy that had been elaborated by a consultant, with the goal of “build[ing] the voice of Prince Edward County on social media” (K.

Desveaux). One participant also spoke at length about the benefits of TripAdvisor, an online review site of user-generated content, declaring that, “[t]he social media element of TripAdvisor has been absolutely stunning. We have seen huge value in ensuring that we are positioned number one” (E. Shubert). He later added that their business uses the site as a marketing tool, and that consumers who write reviews therefore become part of their marketing team.

Advanced Analysis and Interpretation

Examining and analyzing participants’ interview data as part of the coding process first allowed the researcher to build a contextual description of the case study. In turn, this description of the context, based on the data analysis, supplied an explanation for the choice of gastronomic tourism as a brand for Prince Edward County. It also provided an answer to one of the study’s research subquestions as to why gastronomic tourism was selected as part of the brand of the region. The coding process also allowed the researcher to uncover various categories that offered insight into the processes and approaches taken by players in the tourism industry when it comes to branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. These categories also allowed the researcher to put forward an answer to the central research question of the study, i.e.: how have individuals and organizations in the tourism industry branded Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination?

For the advanced analysis and interpretation, the researcher was able to draw connections, principally in the form of similarities, between the interview data and academic literature, by having the interview findings confirm and extend certain elements contained within the literature. The interview data was also corroborated by documents, thus providing linkages between the topics at hand in the findings and several existing tourism reports, plans, strategies and studies. In this section, the researcher provides an analysis and interpretation of the

contextual description and categories in the general findings of the study, using contemporary literature and documents, in order to offer some insight into the reasons and processes involved for tourism industry players when branding regions, and specifically Prince Edward County, as gastronomic niche tourism destinations. If this analysis and interpretation focuses expressly on the region of Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada, many informational elements can also be extrapolated to regions of similar nature, size, history and/or current realities.

Reasons behind the choice of gastronomic niche tourism as a brand for the region.

This section goes back to the contextual description previously presented in the general findings, by addressing one of the study's research subquestions as to why gastronomic tourism was selected as part of the brand of the region. Specifically, it reiterates the reasons behind the choice of gastronomic tourism as a brand for Prince Edward County by linking the themes of agricultural history and economic development from the findings to academic literature and industry documents.

Agricultural history. The majority of participants mentioned the history of agriculture in Prince Edward County as one of the principal reasons for the presence of the region's gastronomic tourism brand. Prince Edward County is known in the province of Ontario for its history of horticulture and agriculture, and the region became recognized as Canada's Garden County in the 19th century (Aspler, 2006; PECWA, 2010b; Phillips, 2006; The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2007a). One study stated how agriculture has always been the backbone of the economy in Prince Edward County, and how it continues to be a strong and growing sector today (Queen's University, 2008). Another study reported how the region's agricultural history has been the basis for the development of many businesses, notably viticultural ones (Wade & Jacobs, 2006). Such statements can be said to highlight the importance

of anchoring a region's tourism industry on elements inherent to its history and heritage. Ultimately, participants' interview data, which emphasized how agriculture and farming have always formed a large part of the history and heritage of Prince Edward County, was corroborated by the information contained in the above studies, thus making food and wine a good fit for the region's destination tourism brand.

Economic development. One of the most common explanations that emerged from the interview data for the selection and development of gastronomic tourism as Prince Edward County's destination brand was the need for economic development in the region. Numerous scholarly articles, in addition to tourism reports, have highlighted the economic development potential of tourism for regions and, in particular, the potential of gastronomic tourism for rural regions (e.g., Henderson, 2009; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; López & Martín, 2006; Renko, Renko, & Polonijo, 2010; Sims, 2009; Stolarick et al., 2010). As a result, this economic development theme that was identified in the data turned out to be one of the two strongest themes of the study, having also been expanded upon in a considerable way in academic literature and in tourism studies and reports. Kivela and Crotts (2006) have contended that "gastronomy, if viable, could become the driving force behind the revival of tourism for destinations that are struggling at a critical stage of the tourist-product life cycle" (p. 356), and Lin et al. (2011) added that gastronomic tourism has the ability to "strengthen the economy of a place". Meanwhile, Stewart et al. (2008) have specifically suggested that "culinary tourism in Ontario is poised as a strong economic driver" (p. 303). A recent report by the Government of Ontario (2011a), titled *Ontario's Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2015*, has also indicated how "culinary tourism [...] can be a valuable tool to boost economic, social and community development" (p. 9).

Scholarly articles and tourism reports have enumerated some of the various benefits of gastronomic tourism as an economic development activity for regions, which helps to explain why industry players in Prince Edward County turned to tourism, and in particular to gastronomic niche tourism, for the development and growth of its regional economy. Gastronomic tourism is said to contribute positively to the economy of a region by improving its economic sustainability (Sims, 2009); protecting existing jobs and generating employment (Henderson, 2009; López & Martín, 2006; Stolarick et al., 2010; the Tourism Company, 2006); creating a multiplier effect for businesses and other related industries (Henderson, 2009); encouraging product innovation and diversification (Henderson, 2009); and, promoting new business ideas and opportunities (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). In turn, some of these economic benefits are achieved, to a certain extent, through visitor spending, as tourists inject substantial revenue into a region (the Tourism Company, 2006). Moreover, Wade and Martin (2005, as cited in Government of Ontario, 2005) have contended that gastronomic tourism, when compared to other types of tourism, can produce “additional economic value to regions” given that “the economic contribution of culinary tourists [is] greater than the non-culinary tourist” (p. 22). In sum, gastronomic tourism has the ability “to rejuvenate a tired destination” (Government of Ontario, 2005, p. 24) and, particularly for rural communities, to stimulate economies in danger of decline (Henderson, 2009; Stolarick et al., 2010).

The importance that the region of Prince Edward County placed on economic development can be observed in various ways. One of the most visible ones is in the presence of an Economic Development Office within the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, and a website dedicated to attracting, supporting and promoting industries and businesses that can contribute to the regional economy (The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward, 2012).

Moreover, the creation of an Economic Development Officer position at the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward (D. Taylor), and later of an economic development position specifically focused on gastronomy as the food and wine industries expanded in the region (K. Desveaux), clearly denotes the importance that was placed on economic development by the region of Prince Edward County. Finally, Stolarick et al. (2010) have noted how Prince Edward County has been successful at revitalizing its tourism economy and creating a “vibrant regional economic development” for itself (p. 238).

Processes used in branding the region as a gastronomic niche tourism destination.

This section revisits the categories outlined above in the general findings, by speaking to the central research question of the study regarding how individuals and organizations in the tourism industry have branded the region as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. In particular, it addresses the processes utilized by these players in branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination – those of brand identity, product development, collaboration, support, and communication – in light of scholarly literature and industry documents.

Brand identity. Brand identity was the other of the two strongest themes of the study, as a result of having been developed extensively in the scholarly literature and in tourism studies and reports. Some of the ways in which individuals and organizations in the tourism industry proceeded to branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination were through a repositioning of its brand identity and a focus on the region’s core characteristics. First, brand identity has been said to originate directly from the organization, and is therefore separate from consumers’ perceptions of a brand (Nandan, 2005, as cited in Lin et al., 2011). In other words, brand identity is best understood from the viewpoint of the supply-side of the

industry (Kapferer, 2004, as cited in Lin et al., 2011; Nandan, 2005, as cited in Lin et al., 2011), making it a relevant concept to explore as part of this study, given that it sought the perspective of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry to generate the bulk of the data corpus.

The approach of repositioning a region according to a new identity can be linked back to the general theoretical framework of this study, that is, branding theory. Within the context of this study, the repositioning process, as defined by Trout and Rivkin (2010), would be described as the practice of changing the identity of the region and of subsequently readjusting potential visitors' perceptions of Prince Edward County as a destination. This idea of repositioning is indeed very relevant to the study, which looked at how Prince Edward County, which has long been known for its nature and landscapes (Aspler, 2006; Phillips, 2006), reinvented itself around food and wine offerings and focused its new brand identity on gastronomy.

The topic of differentiation, which came up in the findings, is connected to the main theoretical framework of the study, i.e., destination branding theory. Blain et al. (2005) have described destination branding as an exercise in identification and differentiation for a particular region, and Qu et al. (2011) added that these particular elements come into play when destinations compete to be selected as consumers' place of choice for travel. In the findings of the study, many participants discussed the idea that the differentiating factor of Prince Edward County, and hence one of its main competitive advantages, is the fact that it is a wine region. In the context of destination branding theory, it could therefore be understood that the region's unique selling proposition, which is seen as a way for destinations to create and reinforce a unique personality and position for themselves (Blain et al., 2005), is that it is a wine region.

Focusing on the region's brand identity by highlighting a few of its core characteristics was another way in which the tourism industry in Prince Edward County utilized some of the

principles contained in destination branding theory. In effect, this theory discusses how a region's unique selling proposition ought to represent the "core and enduring characteristics of a destination" (UNWTO & ETC, 2009, p. xvii), which are connected to its values and assets. Most of the main characteristics of Prince Edward County's gastronomic brand identity, specifically those of local, authentic and rural, were also mentioned and discussed in the tourism and branding literature as well as in reports and studies.

In the findings, participants emphasized how Prince Edward County has focused on local products as part of its tourism efforts. As a result, this particular practice can be said to have shaped its gastronomic tourism brand identity. The notion of *local* as a key characteristic of gastronomic tourism destinations is mentioned extensively in the scholarly literature and in reports and studies. Much like interview participants discussed the current awareness and popularity of local food in the findings, some authors have pointed to the growing interest in the locality of food (Wight, 2008), saying that this may be a reaction to the "globalization, homogenization, and standardization" of the food system (van Keken & Go, 2006, p. 59). Local food and drink have been described by scholars as symbols of place and culture, as the specialities or typical products of a place (Sims, 2009), and as icons that portray the regional uniqueness of a specific geographical area (Lin et al., 2011; Wight, 2008). Sims (2009) has added that local products can give visitors "an insight into the nature of a place and its people" (p. 329).

Scholarly literature and industry reports have also identified some of the numerous benefits for gastronomic tourism destinations of placing importance on the *local* facet. First, a growing interest in local food and drink on the part of tourists means that destinations that choose to focus on that aspect as part of their gastronomic tourism brand identity have the

potential of attracting an increasingly large base of visitors. This notion aligns with the statement made by the Government of Ontario (2005), when it identified the “idea of ‘local’ as one of the potential drivers of culinary tourism” in Ontario (p. 21), as well as Lin et al.’s (2011) argument that local food can help in the development of a tourism destination brand. Some of the other benefits of the *local* aspect are said to include: encouraging farming and agriculture; contributing to the regional economy by keeping money in the community; reducing a region’s carbon footprint, as a result of less transportation of produce; and, producing overall economic, environmental and social sustainability in a region (Henderson, 2009; Sims, 2009).

The notion of authenticity was another characteristic discussed by participants in the findings as having a role to play in Prince Edward County’s gastronomic tourism brand identity. Authenticity has been defined as a search for the genuine, the traditional and the real (Fox, 2007; Henderson, 2009; Sims, 2009). Some authors have viewed tourists’ desire and quest for authenticity at a destination as a reaction to the increasing commodification, homogenization and inauthenticity of culture and gastronomy in the modern world, which in turn creates a longing for authentic experiences (López & Martín, 2006; Sims, 2009; Wight, 2008). LeBesco and Naccarato (2008) have described authenticity as “the driving aim behind the touristic experience” adding that tourists “want to be certain that when they claim ownership of a new experience, that experience is a genuine reflection of the original” (p. 3).

In the context of tourism, authenticity has been considered by some authors as “an essential competitive marketing skill that is quite necessary to grow the appeal of national and regional tourism products and experiences” (Yeoman, Brass, & McMahon-Beattie, 2007, as cited in Wight, 2008, p. 155). Furthermore, authentic tourism experiences have been said to allow tourists “to connect with the place and culture of their destination” (Sims, 2009, p. 329). Many

scholars also established a link between gastronomic tourism and authenticity, believing that food and drinks, and particularly local food and drinks, have the ability to enhance the authenticity of destinations and to create a marketable and attractive brand identity (Henderson, 2009; Lin et al., 2011; Wight, 2008). As a result, the fact that tourism players in Prince Edward County focused on authenticity as part of the brand identity of the region, and that the experience provided was indeed authentic and true, could be said to have helped in the success of its tourism industry and gastronomic niche tourism brand.

As for the rural character of the geography of Prince Edward County that was discussed by several participants in the findings, many articles have also centered around rural regions in the context of tourism (e.g., Carmichael, 2005; Karafolas, 2007; Renko et al., 2010; Sims, 2009; Stolarick et al., 2010; Wight, 2008). Most of these articles have focused on the economic development opportunities provided by tourism in rural areas, by looking at how tourism, and specifically gastronomic tourism, can be beneficial for rural destinations that are looking to expand their economy. For instance, Sims (2009) has spoken about how the link between local food and authenticity can help the development of tourism in rural regions. One report noted how gastronomic tourism can tell the story of the landscape of a geographic area and reflect its sense of place to visitors (Government of Ontario, 2011a), which can in turn be beneficial for a rural area. Another study has suggested that the rural landscape of a place is considered as an important factor for wine tourism experiences (Carmichael, 2005), such as those available in Prince Edward County. Finally, Wight (2008) mentioned that there is presently a growing interest in the rural aspect of gastronomic tourism destinations.

Product development. As outlined in various reports and studies, the tourism industry considers product development as an essential component in the successful development,

delivery and promotion of tourism products. In fact, a report by the Tourism Company (2006) outlined product development and delivery as one of the main functions of tourism destinations. The Government of Ontario (2005), in its report titled *Culinary Tourism in Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005 – 2015*, saw the availability of market-ready products as vital to the successful marketing of gastronomic tourism destinations. Prince Edward County, with its variety of gastronomic value-added products and assets, could therefore be said to have been well positioned to build on, and develop, its burgeoning gastronomic tourism industry starting in the early 2000s. One report also remarked how the region's "core products have niche appeal as opposed to mass appeal which is not necessarily a negative" (Brain Trust, 2005). This statement can be taken to mean that Prince Edward County's branding as a gastronomic niche tourism destination was a well-founded endeavour.

The idea brought forth by participants that events and programs should provide an experience to visitors can be linked to the literature on niche tourism. In effect, C. M. Hall and Weiler (1992b) have put forward the notion that niche tourism is "characterized by the tourist's search for novel, authentic, and quality tourist experiences; and by the tourism industry's provision of such experiences" (p. 4). Moreover, experience-oriented travel (Helber, 1988, as cited in C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b) has been identified as an emerging trend in tourism. The focus placed by Prince Edward County's tourism industry on creating experiences for visitors could thus be understood as a response to this experiential trend for niche tourism destinations.

Collaboration. In the findings, participants identified collaboration, which was reflected in the nature of the community and the partnerships within the region, as an important element in the process of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. The importance of collaboration has been highlighted by the Government of Ontario (2011a) in its

recent report titled *Ontario's Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2015*.

It is there that the government identified collaboration as one of the underpinning values of its overall strategy, and went on to list partnership- and community-based collaboration as one of ten success criteria that can be used to identify the potential of gastronomic tourism regions in Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2011a). The Government of Ontario (2005) further defined such collaboration as an 'all-for-one and one-for-all' approach that fosters a sense of shared responsibility and shared benefits.

Moreover, Kivela and Crofts (2006) have asserted that the very nature of gastronomic tourism can foster cooperative marketing and cross-marketing opportunities for a destination. Lastly, Molloy (2002) identified a positive correlation between community support and community isolation, in that smaller and more isolated regions enjoy a stronger level of community support and involvement. Remembering that Prince Edward County is a small community of approximately 25,250 people on a piece of land that juts out into Lake Ontario can help to explain the strength of the collaboration in the region, and the way in which this factor helped in the development, management and promotion of its gastronomic tourism industry.

Support. Participants identified support as a crucial element in the development, management and promotion of the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County, which the researcher then went on to classify in more specific terms as governmental support and organizational support. Three items included on the list of ten success criteria outlining the potential of gastronomic tourism regions in the province of Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2011a) fell under the category of support, namely leadership, financial support and the presence of a destination marketing organization. The Government of Ontario (2005) first highlighted the importance of leadership by explaining that individuals and organizations that have taken on

leadership roles are those that can articulate and execute a destination's gastronomic tourism vision and strategy as well as bring together stakeholders in the region. In the findings, interview participants identified specific organizations, and certain individuals within them, as having played key leadership roles in the development, management and promotion of Prince Edward County's gastronomic tourism brand. These organizations included the destination marketing organization Taste the County and the Economic Development Office of the Corporation of the County of Prince Edward.

As for financial support, the Tourism Company (2006) underlined the need for a destination to remain active in searching for, and getting access to, funding. The Government of Ontario (2005) has added that, when it comes to funding, which can originate from either government or the private sector, is it vital that the financial investment be long-term. While participants in the study spoke of financial support from the provincial level of government in the form of grants and subsidies, it was mentioned that most of this funding has been delivered on a short-term, program-to-program basis. Finally, the presence of an effective destination marketing organization, also known as a DMO, has been stressed as an essential element of successful gastronomic tourism regions (e.g., Government of Ontario, 2005, 2011a; the Tourism Company, 2006). It is said that a DMO should recognize and value the role of gastronomic tourism as part of the appeal of a destination (Government of Ontario, 2005). The DMO ought also to feature the gastronomy of a region in its marketing initiatives, which should be aimed at potential visitors as well as the media (Government of Ontario, 2005). Prince Edward County has had a destination marketing organization since 1999, from the early beginnings of the gastronomic tourism industry (Taste the County, 2007, 2011a). In the findings, participants described the DMO, Taste the County, as the entity responsible for marketing and promoting

Prince Edward County as a tourism destination, and credited it as having helped to get everybody in the region working together. Moreover, one participant had noted how the large majority of events and programs in the region that are organized and promoted by Taste the County have a food or wine focus to them (K. Kennedy), thus helping to feature the destination's gastronomy.

Communication. In the findings, participants spoke about the communication resources, strategies and tactics employed by tourism industry players in the process of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism region, both in terms of internal communication and external communication. Communication has been listed as another one of the supporting values of the Government of Ontario's recent report on gastronomic tourism titled *Ontario's Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2015* (Government of Ontario, 2011a). Firstly, internal communication was discussed by the Government of Ontario (2005) in its previous report on gastronomic tourism in the province, in which the strategy of strengthening and enhancing communication within the industry was mentioned as a success factor for gastronomic tourism. The report also added how good communication practices ought to inform, engage and serve the needs of tourism industry stakeholders (Government of Ontario, 2005). Study participants mentioned how various means, including email newsletters, meetings, consultations and networking events, were all employed by players in Prince Edward County's tourism industry to communicate and interact amongst themselves.

Secondly, external communication takes the form of marketing and promotion executed by tourism industry players and aimed at external audiences, notably potential visitors. Wahab et al. (1976, as cited in Wöber, 1997) have claimed that promotion is one of the most important tasks of tourism organizations at a destination. One report noted how a tourism destination's marketing communications should be developed and delivered with the goal of informing and

influencing consumers (the Tourism Company, 2006). Moreover, Wight (2008) has defined tourism marketing as an attempt “to persuade and seduce, and to construct realities about destinations that can be easily confirmed during the vacation” (p. 158).

While various authors have noted the importance of printed material and signage as communication tools for tourism destinations (e.g., Stewart et al., 2008; Wöber, 1997), public relations aimed at the media has been emphasized as the communication tactic of choice (e.g., Trout & Rivkin, 2010; Wöber, 1997). Goldblatt (2008) described public relations as “what *others* (their perceptions) are saying” about a destination (p. 265), adding that such third-party endorsements can be valuable and effective at encouraging tourists to visit a region. On the topic of media relations, Kivela and Crotts (2006) have also stated how “media exposure can help to shape popular opinion and influence gastronomy travel decisions” (p. 374). In addition, Trout and Rivkin (2010) have spoken of public relations specifically in the context of brand repositioning. These authors argued that, for any entity undergoing a repositioning process, including a destination, public relations ought to occupy a significant part of their marketing efforts. Trout and Rivkin (2010) also added that “you need others to write about your efforts” as this is “necessary for credibility” (p. 155). In the findings, participants discussed how tourism industry players in Prince Edward County successfully employed public relations, rather than advertising, as a way of leveraging small amounts of promotional dollars. Participants also talked about how allowing others to tell their story using public relations gave the region more credibility as a gastronomic tourism destination.

Lastly, many authors discussed the impact of the Internet in regards to external communication for tourism destinations. One tourism report remarked that the “Internet is becoming increasingly important as a marketing avenue” for regions, especially considering that

destinations are generally turning out to be more and more sophisticated with their marketing efforts and that competition between regions is continually increasing (the Tourism Company, 2006, p. 34). Additionally, van Keken and Go (2006) have argued that the Internet has changed the nature of the relationship between tourism industry players and visitors, as well as the way in which these two groups construct, imagine and experience destination brand identities. These authors have claimed that the Internet provides hosts and guests at a destination with “the possibility of sharing experiences” through interactivity as well as the potential for creating new forms of relationships (van Keken & Go, 2006, p. 58). Interview participants discussed how Prince Edward County’s tourism industry is making use of online communication tools, such as websites and social media. They described how industry players seem open and willing to embrace the interactivity of social media and websites with user-generated content, even if the rate of adoption of these communication technologies has been slow for some individuals, businesses and organizations.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This final chapter provides a brief summary of the research's main findings, followed by a discussion of the significance and contribution of the study. The chapter also presents a reflection on the limitations of the study, before ending with some possibilities and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Findings

The worldwide growth of the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2011c), along with the relatively recent emergence of niche tourism as a specialized form of tourism which takes place when individuals travel to pursue an interest at a particular destination (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005), provided context to the study in the introductory chapter. With the growing number of destinations making food and wine their main attraction as well as gastronomy playing an increasingly large role in people's travel decision-making (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005), the researcher chose to look specifically at gastronomic niche tourism in what the Government of Ontario (2010) has defined as the province's newest wine region and a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts: Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada. Using the theoretical framework of destination branding theory and a qualitative case study research design, this study sought an understanding of the phenomenon of branding Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination, from the perspective of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry.

The literature reviewed in the second chapter further explored the notions of tourism, niche tourism and gastronomic tourism, in addition to the theoretical framework of branding theory and, more specifically, destination branding theory. This review revealed a dearth of literature and research on the topics of niche tourism, and especially gastronomic tourism, in part

due to the only very recent attention that food and beverages have received in the context of tourism (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; van Keken & Go, 2006). A paucity of academic and practical research on destination branding, particularly in the tourism literature (e.g., Balakrishnan, 2009; Blain et al., 2005; Pike, 2005), was also exposed during the literature review. This original study therefore constituted a continuation of the research that has begun to take place on the contemporary areas of gastronomic niche tourism and destination branding. Not only did it fill a gap in these fields of the literature, but it also broke new ground by examining the emergent gastronomic niche tourism destination of Prince Edward County.

Using the qualitative case study research design outlined in the third chapter as a methodological approach, the researcher selected, collected and analyzed primary data in the form of interviews, documents and an observation, all the while paying attention to the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. This particular data produced the findings that were thoroughly discussed in the fourth chapter. In terms of the presentation of the findings, a description first summarized the context of the case study, by answering one of the study's research subquestions as to why gastronomic tourism was selected as part of the brand of the region. The most common explanations for the selection and development of a gastronomic tourism brand in Prince Edward County were found to be the agricultural history of the region and its need for economic development.

The researcher subsequently outlined her understanding of the processes and approaches taken by players in the tourism industry to brand Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination through the presentation of five categories and their respective themes, thus answering the central research question of the study regarding how tourism industry players branded the region as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. These five elements consisted of:

(1) brand identity, that is to say the definition of a particular brand identity for the region by tourism industry players through a repositioning process and a focus on the area's key characteristics; (2) product development, i.e., the development of the region's core products to produce value-added products and assets as well as events and programs; (3) collaboration, which occurred through the creation of partnerships and the presence of a strong community; (4) support, which included the human and financial support given by individuals and organizations as well as government; and (5) communication, meaning the internal and external communication strategies and tactics that were used for information sharing as well as marketing and promotional activities. These categories also addressed the remaining research subquestions of the study, namely those of the identity of the region; the strategies and tactics used in branding the region; the main resources involved in the branding process; the role of internal and external communication; and, the evolution of the brand. While these elements were presented as lessons to be learned from the case study, most could also be considered as best practices for other regions looking to develop, manage and promote a niche tourism industry, given that Prince Edward County can be regarded as having been successful at branding itself as a gastronomic niche tourism destination.

Finally, an analysis and interpretation of the findings was put forth by the researcher. Connections, primarily in the form of similarities, were drawn between the findings of the study, the scholarly literature and tourism reports and studies, so as to have the study's results confirm and extend certain elements contained within the literature and the documents. While most of the themes and categories contained in the findings could be linked back to the existing research literature in some way, the main themes of the study that had been expanded upon in the literature were those of economic development and brand identity.

In effect, the study's findings revealed that Prince Edward County placed significant importance on regional economic development, and utilized tourism as a way to bolster a struggling economy. The benefits of such a focus were confirmed by numerous scholarly articles and tourism reports that highlighted the economic development opportunities of tourism for regions and, particularly, of gastronomic tourism for rural regions (e.g., Henderson, 2009; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; López & Martín, 2006; Renko et al., 2010; Sims, 2009; Stolarick et al., 2010). Next, regarding brand identity, the findings of the study showed how tourism industry players branded Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination through a repositioning of its brand identity and a focus on its core characteristics. The practice of repositioning and differentiating a region according to a new identity was discussed in the branding theory and destination branding theory literature (Blain et al., 2005; Qu et al., 2011; Trout & Rivkin, 2010), which formed the theoretical framework of the study. Research results revealed that one such repositioning exercise had been undertaken by Prince Edward County, thus providing linkages between the literature and the study's findings. Moreover, some of the main characteristics of Prince Edward County's gastronomic brand identity, specifically those of local, authentic and rural, could be connected to the research literature on niche tourism and gastronomic tourism, where the concepts were highlighted as key elements for tourism destinations with a focus on gastronomy (e.g., Carmichael, 2005; Government of Ontario, 2005, 2011a; Henderson, 2009; LeBesco & Naccarato, 2008; Lin et al., 2011; Sims, 2009; Wight, 2008).

While at first glance it might appear as though the region of Prince Edward County has simply been fortunate to find itself in the right place at the right time as a gastronomic tourism industry began to take form, the region would not have arisen as a successful destination had it

not been for the concerted efforts of tourism industry players. It certainly cannot be denied that a number of circumstantial elements have contributed to the growth of the region's gastronomic tourism industry, notably the proximity to the large cities of Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal; the beauty of the area, with its pastoral landscapes and extensive shoreline; and, the presence of government incentives as the tourism industry began to develop. Nevertheless, it is by utilizing the processes of brand identity, product development, collaboration, support, and communication that individuals and organizations in the tourism industry were able to create, develop, manage and promote a tourism destination based on gastronomy. In short, it is truly a coalescence of all these factors that has contributed to the uniqueness of Prince Edward County and to its success as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. It can thus be said that the region of Prince Edward County is an exciting and timely case study to investigate given that, in such a short period of time, so much emerged in the area in terms of a gastronomic niche tourism industry.

Significance and Contribution of the Study

This study has the potential to make both academic and practical contributions to society, particularly in the fields of tourism, branding, communication, marketing, community development, public policy, and food and beverage. Firstly, the study adds to the scholarly conversation by supporting and advancing certain aspects of branding theory and destination branding theory literature. Through an exploration of the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination by tourism industry players, the study also contributes a new perspective and way of understanding to the relatively new fields of niche tourism and, in particular, gastronomic niche tourism in academia. This advancement of scholarly knowledge thus brings forth a deeper understanding of the complexities of the tourism industry. Furthermore, the Government of Ontario (2005), in its report called *Culinary Tourism in*

Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005 –2015, stated that academic research is a priority in the establishment and implementation of a strong provincial plan for culinary tourism, and stressed the role that university researchers have to play in this endeavour. This case study on the region of Prince Edward County can therefore be seen as an academic contribution in the advancement of gastronomic tourism in the province. Ultimately, the main theoretical contribution of this study is in the advancement of academic knowledge for the branding of gastronomic tourism destinations, which adds to the scholarly conversation that is found at the intersection of the concepts of gastronomic tourism and destination branding.

Secondly, the study holds the potential of being employed in a practical manner for the strategic development, management and promotion of niche tourism and, especially, gastronomic niche tourism within the industry. From the unique case study outlining the successful branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination, the researcher's description and analysis of the findings are presented as lessons to be learned, and can also be taken as best practices for regions looking to develop, manage and promote a niche tourism industry. In effect, it is hoped that the findings of the study can be used as a reference and a guide for individuals, organizations and governments that are considering and/or exploring the possibility of developing a niche tourism industry in their own regions or cities, and that some of these findings would be transferable to a variety of niche tourism products, activities and experiences. In addition, it is believed that the case study findings could be transferable to other regions of comparable nature, size, history and/or current realities for similar gastronomy-focused tourism initiatives. Finally, in its report named *Culinary Tourism in Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005 –2015*, the Government of Ontario (2005) declared that regions with quality, market-ready gastronomic tourism products should be "highlighted to other stakeholders

as benchmarks or for industry to learn some best practices” (p. 42). As a result, this case study on the gastronomic tourism brand of Prince Edward County fits into the need, as identified by the province of Ontario, for a practical understanding of established food and beverage products that can in turn be used to foster new gastronomic tourism development elsewhere. In sum, the main practical contribution of this study can be found in the provision of lessons learned and best practices for the strategic development, management and promotion of gastronomic niche tourism by industry stakeholders, particularly in rural regions.

For Prince Edward County, its successful branding as a gastronomic tourism destination lied in the use of specific strategic processes by tourism industry players. These processes included the use of, and focus on, brand identity, product development, collaboration, support, and communication. Moreover, certain initiatives as part of these processes can be highlighted as having been particularly successful in the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic niche tourism destination. For instance, a deliberate repositioning of the region’s brand identity, from one focused on nature to one centered on gastronomy, was undertaken by industry players in order to help raise the region’s profile as a destination and increase spending by visitors; multiple product development initiatives were actively carried out by tourism organizations, including the creation of desirable events that could be used to attract tourists to the destination; a strong sense of community was cultivated in the region through partnerships and extensive collaborative efforts; financial support from government was specifically sought out by tourism industry leaders, and a supportive destination marketing organization was created and maintained in the region; and, public relations was strongly utilized by tourism players as a key element of its external communication efforts, given that it was a way of leveraging small marketing budgets and promoting the region using a third party endorsement.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was its narrow time frame. The entire study was completed in a little over a year, as dictated by the length of the researcher's Master of Arts in Communication university program. This meant that its scope and depth was constrained from the beginning. Consequently, the researcher was only able to review a finite amount of literature on the concepts of tourism, niche tourism and gastronomic tourism as well as on the theoretical framework of branding theory and destination branding theory. Moreover, the researcher had to limit the amount of data collected by imposing a maximum number of interviews that could be conducted and documents that could be consulted, and by only carrying out one observation. The relatively short time frame of the study also did not allow the researcher to go back into the field multiple times during the processes of data collection and analysis to saturate certain categories of data or to further explore particular discoveries, as is a common practice with qualitative case study research designs (e.g., Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995). If more time had been available to the researcher or if monetary resources had been accessible to hire a research assistant, a greater depth to the study could possibly have been achieved.

As previously mentioned in the methodology chapter, the selection of interview participants was done through an online search, and potential participants were subsequently recruited with an email message sent to their publicly available email addresses. This particular approach, chosen by the researcher for its ease and efficiency, may have had the effect of excluding individuals, organizations and/or businesses that do not have an online presence, thus limiting the pool of participants as well as the possibility of everyone having an equal opportunity to be chosen to take part in the study. To mitigate this effect, the search for participants could have employed hard copies of tourism brochures and directories, in addition to

online resources, and potential participants could have been contacted by mail and over the telephone as well as through email.

Lastly, the original intention of the researcher for the data selection process had been to contact all the individuals, organizations and businesses in the gastronomic tourism industry of Prince Edward County that had been found during the initial search for participants. Due to the large pool of potential participants as well as the limited time frame and scope of the study, this approach was modified in order to be able to conduct a quicker and more efficient process of data selection and collection. The search was limited in time to allow for a period of recruitment of potential participants, follow-ups and scheduling of interviews, and reduced in scope to include only a fixed number of individuals to be contacted for interviews. The choice of participants was then made by the researcher based on the criterion and snowball strategies, and on the availabilities of both the researcher and the potential participants. If more time and resources had been available to the researcher for the study, this limitation could have been alleviated by identifying and contacting a larger pool of potential interview participants, and subsequently selecting them on a first come, first serve basis. With additional resources, more participants could also have been interviewed as part of the study, as a way to obtain data saturation and greater depth in the findings.

Future Research

From the findings of this study, future research could further explore either one of the two themes – agricultural history and economic development – that comprise the contextual description of the choice of gastronomic tourism as the brand of Prince Edward County, or any one of the five categories – brand identity, product development, collaboration, support, and communication – that constitute the processes at play in the branding of the region as a

gastronomic tourism destination. While this last approach means that such research would be limited in scope compared to the present study, it would also allow for a greater depth and focus to the research. Another approach for future research would be to undertake a more extensive qualitative study by gathering a larger quantity of data, in the form of interviews, documents and observations, over an extended period of time, in order to achieve a more comprehensive picture of the gastronomic tourism industry in the region. Given that Prince Edward County has been declared Ontario's newest wine region and a must-visit destination for gastronomic enthusiasts by the Government of Ontario (2010), more research on the region would be beneficial to the growing role of gastronomy in its tourism industry, as well as to the advancement of the gastronomic niche tourism industry as a whole.

The present study sought an understanding of the branding of Prince Edward County as a gastronomic tourism destination specifically from the perspective of individuals and organizations in the tourism industry and, as a result, the descriptive and analytical findings are a product of the point of view of the industry. Future research on the region could be conducted from other viewpoints, such as those of government and tourists. First, research could focus on the perceptions of government, including those of municipal, provincial and federal decision-makers, regarding the development of the destination brand of Prince Edward County for tourism purposes. This research could explore the desirability as well as the benefits and disadvantages of a gastronomic brand for the tourism industry from the perspective of government. Second, research could centre on potential and actual tourists' awareness and perception of the brand as well as the ways in which they experience and interact with it, in order to add another layer of understanding to the phenomenon of branding the region as a gastronomic tourism destination. In effect, further research on the outsider perspective could provide insight into the congruence or

disparity between the perceived and actual brand, thus providing useful information to tourism industry players.

Along the same lines, future research on gastronomic niche tourism would be important to carry out in other regions – whether small or large, rural or urban – in Canada or elsewhere in the world, given the sustained growth of tourism worldwide (UNWTO, 2011c) and the rapid expansion of gastronomic tourism in the past few decades (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Moreover, the findings of the present case study on Prince Edward County, which form lessons learned and best practices, may be applicable to future research on the gastronomic tourism industries of other regions on a global scale. The emergence of niche tourism, as a new and specialized form of tourism within the industry (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005), also means that future research could be done on other forms of niche tourism, in order to contribute to the advancement of scholarly and practical knowledge in the field. Some niche tourism industries that could be further explored include adventure, sport, health, nature-based, arts, heritage as well as cultural and educational tourism (C. M. Hall & Weiler, 1992b; Novelli, 2005). Finally, the theoretical framework of branding theory, and particularly destination branding theory, could be applied to other areas of tourism research.

Future research could also explore the potential losing aspects of the gastronomic niche tourism industry in Prince Edward County, given that this study essentially focused on the benefits and successes. For instance, research could look at whether a tourism industry based on gastronomy has any negative environmental or social impacts on the region, and whether it could affect the sustainability of the area. Research could additionally examine the potential detrimental impacts of an economic downturn on the growth and continuation of the industry.

Furthermore, given that this research took a qualitative approach to explore the reasons behind the selection of a gastronomic tourism brand for Prince Edward County and the processes employed by individuals in the tourism industry to develop this brand, the information learned from this study could be used as the foundation for a subsequent quantitative study. First, this research having been conducted with a limited number of participants means that a quantitative study would allow for a larger participant base. A quantitative study could also have its research questions revolve around, for instance: the quantifiable benefits, such as the economic ones, of a gastronomic niche tourism industry for the region; or, the number of tourists who come to the region and those that visit specifically to engage in gastronomic tourism, broken down by season.

Study participants and tourism documents pointed to the little or non-existent tracking research and data on the tourism industry in Prince Edward County, which research was also considered as an important element for any tourism destination. Specifically, these participants and reports discussed the need for visitor tracking information, as a way to better understand the demands, wants and needs of the market (E. Shubert; Queen's University, 2008; the Tourism Company, 2006); communication data, in order to measure the effectiveness of marketing activities (Brain Trust, 2005); and, hospitality and service performance data, so as to measure and evaluate guest satisfaction (Brain Trust, 2005; D. Taylor; Government of Ontario, 2011a; K. Kennedy). As a result, future research could be done in these areas to help industry players in the region to improve and grow the tourism industry, since they currently lack the financial and human resources to conduct such research themselves (K. Kennedy). This type of research would also provide important information and feedback to industry players in Prince Edward County regarding the fundamental components of the gastronomic tourism brand that are succeeding as well as those that require improvements.

This qualitative case study has illustrated the reasons for, and the processes behind, developing, managing and promoting a destination brand based on gastronomy for niche tourism industry players in a rural region. As the literature has shown, gastronomy in the context of tourism has only just begun to receive attention from academia and industry (C. M. Hall & Mitchell, 2005; van Keken & Go, 2006), and destination branding has been identified as a recent phenomenon, particularly in the tourism literature (e.g., Balakrishnan, 2009; Blain et al., 2005; Pike, 2005). As a result, a scarcity of literature and research was uncovered in the areas of gastronomic tourism and destination branding. This contemporary research thus contributes scholarly and practical knowledge by presenting an original case study that provides insight into the strategies and tactics utilized by tourism industry players to brand a gastronomic niche tourism destination. The emergent niche tourism region of Prince Edward County was in fact studied as a model of successful gastronomic tourism branding of a destination. The findings of this study therefore hold the potential of framing Prince Edward County as a leader within the gastronomic tourism industry of Ontario and Canada.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Time and length: _____

Place: _____

Interviewee: _____

Occupation of interviewee: _____

Coordinates of interviewee: _____

Introduction

Hello and thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

I will just briefly go over some key aspects of the study with you before we begin the interview. The purpose of this study is to understand how Prince Edward County was branded as a gastronomic/culinary niche tourism region. The study's goal is to contribute academic and practical knowledge to the domains of gastronomic tourism and destination branding, and to provide lessons learned and best practices that can be used as a guide and a reference within the industry.

I am meeting with/contacting you today so that we can actively discuss the branding of Prince Edward County as a culinary tourism region. This interview is meant for you to share your knowledge, experience and opinions freely and openly, so that I can get your perspective on the development, management and promotion of the culinary tourism brand of Prince Edward County. The interview will take approximately one hour.

I am audio recording this session so that I can later study what you have said, but please be assured that our discussion goes no farther than here; anything you say today will remain confidential.

Do you have any questions for me regarding the study?

Now please take a moment to read and sign the consent form.

Questions

Please take a moment to introduce yourself, and to tell me about your job.

- 1) Could you please start by telling me how you got involved in culinary tourism?
- 2) Would you say that you have had a role, whether direct or indirect, in branding Prince Edward County as a culinary tourism region and, if so, can you describe that role to me?
- 3) According to you, why was culinary tourism selected/developed as a brand for the region?
- 4) How would you define and describe the identity of Prince Edward County when it comes to culinary tourism?
- 5) Can you explain to me the strategies and the tactics that have been used to brand Prince Edward County as a culinary tourism region?
- 6) How is the culinary tourism brand of Prince Edward County being used to create a gastronomic experience for residents and visitors?
- 7) What have been the main resources involved in branding Prince Edward County as a culinary tourism region?
- 8) Which elements have facilitated or benefited and/or hindered or posed challenges to the development, management and promotion of the region's culinary tourism brand?
- 9) What has been the role of internal and external communication in the development, management and promotion of the culinary tourism brand of Prince Edward County?
- 10) How has the culinary tourism brand of the region evolved since its beginning?
- 11) Do you have any lessons learned, best practices or recommendations to share regarding culinary tourism in Prince Edward County?

Conclusion

The interview is now finished.

Thank you very much for your time and participation in my study. Is there anything that you would like to add or amend in regards to what you have said to me at this point in time?

As indicated, I will soon be giving you the opportunity to review your interview transcript for the accuracy of the information that you have given today. A secure, password protected electronic document will be sent to you by email in the coming months.

You will also receive a preliminary copy of my Master's thesis research in an electronic format prior to any form of dissemination or publication.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding my project.

Finally, is it okay for me to get in touch with you over the telephone or by email if I need to clarify or expand on certain points discussed today?

Thank you again.

Appendix B: Documents List

Name	Organization	Type and format	Location	Date obtained
<i>2011 Insider's Guide to Prince Edward County</i>	Taste the County	Guide – Hard copy and online copy	Researcher's home and prince-edward-county.com	August 29, 2011
<i>2011 Wine Tour Map</i>	Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association	Map – Hard copy and PDF	Researcher's home and www.thecountywines.com	September 15, 2011
<i>Branding for Artisan Food Business Cluster Project</i>	Economic Development Office, The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward	Request for proposal – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	December 10, 2010
<i>Culinary Tourism in Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005 – 2015</i>	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Government of Ontario	Strategy and plan – PDF	www.mtc.gov.on.ca	November 29, 2010
<i>Discovering Ontario: A Report on the Future of Tourism</i>	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Government of Ontario	Report – PDF	www.mtc.gov.on.ca	June 15, 2011
<i>Executive summary of the 2001 Ontario Wine and Culinary Tourism Strategy</i>	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Government of Ontario	Strategy – PDF	www.mtc.gov.on.ca	November 29, 2010
<i>Growing the Creative-Rural Economy in Prince Edward County</i>	Queen's University	Report – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	November 15, 2011
<i>Market Research for Artisan Food Business Cluster Development</i>	Economic Development Office, The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward	Request for proposal – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	December 10, 2010
<i>Ontario's Four-Year Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan</i>	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Government of	Strategy and plan – PDF	www.mtc.gov.on.ca	November 15, 2011

<i>2011-2015</i>	Ontario			
<i>Premier Ranked Tourist Destination Report for Prince Edward County</i>	Brain Trust	Report – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	February 12, 2011
<i>Prince Edward County Agri-food Markets Study 2007</i>	Ryerson University	Study – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	March 7, 2011
<i>Prince Edward County Culinary Tourism Study 2006</i>	Ryerson University	Study – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	March 7, 2011
<i>Prince Edward County Taste Trail Study 2008</i>	Ryerson University	Study – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	March 7, 2011
<i>Results-based Plan Briefing Book 2010-11</i>	Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Government of Ontario	Summary – PDF	www.mtc.gov.on.ca	November 15, 2011
<i>Starting a Vineyard in Prince Edward County? A Viticultural Primer for Investors and Growers</i>	Economic Development Office, The Corporation of the County of Prince Edward	Guide and tool kit – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	December 23, 2011
<i>Sustaining & Managing Growth: Prince Edward County Tourism Strategy</i>	the Tourism Company	Strategy – PDF	www.pecounty.on.ca	February 12, 2011
<i>Taste Trail</i>	Taste the County	Guide – Hard copy, PDF and online copy	Researcher's home and tastetrail.ca	August 29, 2011
<i>The 2011 Year-Round Travel Guide</i>	Wine Council of Ontario	Guide and map – Hard copy and online copy	Researcher's home and www.winecountryontario.ca	May 29, 2011
<i>Wine Council of Ontario Backgrounder</i>	Wine Council of Ontario	Media kit – PDF	www.winecountryontario.ca	November 15, 2011

Appendix C: Observational Protocol

Date: _____

Time and length: _____

Place: _____

Activity: _____

Elements to observe at the event

- Physical setting and layout; look and feel of the event
- Signage (e.g., text, images, messages)
- Vendors (food vendors, beverage vendors, sponsor and information booths, farm and artisan market vendors)
 - Products (e.g., food, wine/beer/cider, vegetables) and services on offer
 - Gastronomic offerings
 - Non-gastronomic offerings
 - Communication/marketing/promotional tools, products and tactics
 - Look and feel of booths
 - Interaction with other vendors and with consumers
- Event organizers and volunteers
- People in attendance (e.g., age, status, interests, reactions, main attractions at the event, reasons for coming to the event and to Prince Edward County)
- Seminars and workshops
- Overall flow and organization of the event

Elements to reflect upon at the event

- Messaging around the event
- Portrayal of the brand of the region by the event and the vendors, and the way in which residents and visitors experience and interact with it
- Role of the event and the vendors in branding the region as a gastronomic tourism destination
- Definition and description of the identity and attributes of Prince Edward County based on attendance at the event
- Visitor experience at the event
- Any other elements that strike as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important at the event

Descriptive notes - Description of physical setting - Description of particular activities	Reflective notes - Experiences - Hunches - Reactions - Discoveries - General comments and conclusions

Visual sketch of the setting

