

Gastro-Tourism as Destination Branding in Emerging Markets.

Abstract

Food related gastro-tourism refers to the pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable culinary experiences of all kinds, while traveling internationally, regionally or even locally. For gastro-tourists, *food* is the focus and the motivation for the travel. In developed countries the gastro-tourism business is booming and has become one of the most dynamic and creative segments of tourism, attracting billions of tourists worldwide. Destination brand strategy is defined as “a plan for defining the most realistic, most competitive, and most compelling strategic reason for the country, region, or city” (Anholt, 2004). Gastro-Tourism can be a driver of destination choice, especially for emerging markets. This paper defines Gastro Destination Branding, and introduces and discusses a conceptual Gastro-Tourism Destination Identity process model to assist various towns, cities, regions and countries to maximize the potential of the growing gastro-tourism market through effective use of destination branding.

Keywords

Gastro destination branding, gastro-tourism, emerging markets, culinary tourism, place branding

Introduction and Literature Review

The literature review begins with definitions and subcategories of tourism, and then describes overlaps and terminology confusion specific to food-related tourism. Place / Destination Branding is introduced and gastro-tourism destinations where food and food experiences become the destination are examined. The possibilities of branding Food Destinations within emerging markets are acknowledged.

Definitions and Subcategories of Tourism

The term tourism generally refers to the act of staying outside of a normal living-working environment for between one day and one year for recreational, leisure or business reasons (Wikipedia). Tourism is further broken down into domestic tourism (people traveling within their own country) and international tourism (people traveling across country borders or overseas). Within these two distinct categories exist multiple subcategories of specialized tourist divisions that include but are not limited to the types listed in Table 1 below

Table 1 Specialized Tourism Categories

Tourism Categories	Explanation
Adventure or Extreme Tourism	To remote, exotic, sometimes hostile destinations; outside of comfort zones
Agritourism	Travel to dude ranches, country farms, country inns and rural bed & breakfasts. Gastro-tourism is linked
Backpacking - Wilderness	Hiking and camping in the backcountry
Backpacking –Travel	Low-cost, usually international , using public transportation, staying in hostels
Cultural or Heritage Tourism	Lifestyle, art, architecture, religion, cuisine, rituals. Gastro-tourism is considered a subset
Dark or War Tourism (also Black or Grief Tourism)	Sites associated with: suffering and death, castles, battlefields, natural & manmade disaster areas, prisons and dungeons, ghost site-ings
Disaster Tourism	Visiting areas affected by floods, hurricanes, volcanoes, etc.
Eco Tourism	Small-scale, low-impact travel to fragile, untouched and protected areas
Educational Tourism	Student exchange programs, internships abroad and study tours
Gastronomic, Gastro or Culinary Tourism (includes, wine, beer & gourmet tourism) (linked to cultural and agritourism)	Intentional pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable culinary experiences of all kinds, while traveling internationally, regionally or even locally.
Genealogical Tourism	Concerned with researching personal familial lineage; linked to heritage
Geo Tourism	Geographic character enhancement linked with Ecotourism
GPS or Off-Trail Hiking	Relies on maps, compasses or GPS units; scavenger-style games
Medical Tourism	Leaving home area to obtain healthcare, often surgical procedures; or for the delivery of healthcare
Nautical Tourism	Traveling to port(s) by boat, often living on boats; subset- cruise ship excursions
Pop Culture Tourism	Locations featured in books, TV, current events, film, music, and other forms of entertainment
Religious Faith Tourism	Visiting holy sites for fellowship, missionary, healing or pilgrimage
Space Tourism	Trips into space --Russian space agency
Sports Tourism	Traveling to Sporting events, clinics, camps outside living or working areas

Sustainable Tourism	Sustaining a culture's population, employment, and positive local experiences for residents and tourists
Volunteerism	Traveling for the purpose of charitable work, organized or sponsored by non-profit or charitable groups
Wildlife Tourism	Observation of wild animals in tier natural habitats

Overlaps and Terminology Confusion Regarding Food-Related Tourism

Food related tourism refers to trips made to destinations where local food and beverages are the main motivating factors for all or part of the travel. In its broadest sense, it is the pursuit of appealing, authentic, memorable culinary experiences of all kinds, while traveling internationally, regionally or even locally. The nature and quality of the food related experience is what matters the most. As table 1 above indicates, this specialized tourist niche is often referred to as: Culinary Tourism, Gastronomy or Gastronomic Tourism, the abbreviated and hyphenated Gastro-tourism, and the more generic Food Tourism that seems to be preferred in the USA. Lesser-used or specialized labels heard predominately in the higher end tourist markets include: Tasting Tourism, Gourmet Tourism, Cuisine Tourism, Food & Wine Tourism, Wine Tourism, Beer Tourism, Spa Cuisine, and possibly other product or region-specific terms or destination brands. The definition originally proposed by Hall et al, (2003) used words and phrases such as experiential trip, gastronomic regions, recreational or entertainment purposes, visits to primary and secondary producers of food, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmers' markets, cooking shows, demonstrations, tastings of quality food products, and activities related to particular lifestyles and cultures. Gastronomy is an understanding of various social cultures, historical components, literature, philosophy, economic status, religions and others aspects, in which food is the core subject. Gastronomy products can refer not just to food and beverages but also to food-related activities pertaining to culture and heritage (Zahari et al.,2009).

Food and travel blogs, researchers, industry practitioners, and self proclaimed "foodies" use the terms Culinary Tourism and Gastronomic or Gastro-tourism somewhat interchangeably. As opposed to mass tourism (mass production and consumption), niche tourism [such as gastronomic tourism] deals with the study, participation and experiences within a locational

region, and is part of the adaptation from a services economy to an experience economy (Hall & Weiler, 1992; Goeldner et al, 2000; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Narrowly defined, Gastronomic Tourism is a form of niche tourism motivated by food and/or drink (Hall & Mitchell, 2005 Kivela and Croth, 2006, Sims, 2009)

The term "culinary tourism" was defined as an intentional exploratory participation in the foodways of someone considered an 'Other'; "an exploratory relationship with the edible world... ...whether you go to food or food comes to you, the nature of the encounter is what defines a food experience as culinary tourism" (Long, 1998, p xi). The International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA) defines it as "the pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences," while the UN World Tourism Organization consistently refers to this tourist niche as gastronomic tourism or gastronomy, and defines it as "gastronomic tourism applies to tourists and visitors who plan their trips partially or totally in order to taste the cuisine of the place or to carry out activities related to gastronomy" (UNWTO 2012, p.7).

It is widely accepted that the scholarship relevant to culinary tourism comes primarily from three fields: Anthology of Tourism, Folklore, and Food Studies and that these fields also very often overlap (Long, 2004). Theories are put into actions via festivals, public displays, presentations, new restaurant development, nutritional guidelines, etc. "The cross discipline approach makes a survey of [culinary tourism] literature "quite unwieldy" (Long, 2004, p.2). Studies related to food tourism have been largely limited to areas such as food safety, hygiene issues, analyses of food and wine festivals, supply issues, food production, food in tourism and cross-promotion of tourism in regional or national cuisines (Hall et al., 2003).

Further research on Gastro Tourism addresses encounters with gastronomic system different from our own (Long, 2004); gastronomic learning (Smith & Xiao, 2008); including familiar food to tourist in foreign milieus (Wight, 2008); engagement with and affect on all five senses (Cook et al, 2002); emotions generated by smell (Lindstrom, 2005); increased benefits and competitiveness via linkage to non-gastronomic tourism (Henderson, 2009); a major motivation for travel (Fox, 2007; Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Wolf, 2002). Gordin (2009) further stratify gastro tourism into types, and elaborate on the gastronomic brand process.

Gastro Tourists

In developed countries the gastro-tourism business is booming and has become one of the most dynamic and creative segments of tourism, attracting billions of tourists worldwide. Foodies flock to France, Italy and Spain to experience the culture and the people through traditional foods and local beverages. In a recent survey (UNWTO, p12) 88.2% of member respondents indicated “gastronomy is a strategic element in defining the brand and image of their destination, yet only 67.6% agreed that their country has its own gastronomic brand.” Further, gastro tourism ‘products’ offered involved food events (79%), gastronomic routes and cooking classes (62%) and visits to markets and producers (53%). Ageing population and changing life styles have driven demand for food tourism opportunities, with populations that provide growing markets for food tourism often categorized as: DINKS: (Dual Income No Kids); SINKS (Single Income No Kids); Empty Nesters (parents whose children have left home); Baby Boomers (members of the baby boom generation in the 1950s); and Divorcees (abouTourism, 2012). A study by ICTA which focused on the behavior of Americans, found them to be comparable to research performed on culinary tourists in other countries, notably Canada, Australia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom: “Culinary travelers are similar in demographic and psychographic profiles in almost every country for which studies exist” (ICTA, 2007, p.3). The ICTA study referenced the following significant findings regarding culinary travelers: 1) They span all age groups; 2) They span both genders, in all ethnic groups; 3) They tend to be better educated; 4) They span various income levels.

Over 33% of the money spent by tourists is dedicated to food (Quan and Wang, 2004); food and food-related events are a key source of tourism (Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Rao, 2001), and food is becoming an essential component in destination choice motivation (Hall et al 2003) In a recent survey (UNWTO, p12) 88.2% of member respondents indicated “gastronomy is a strategic element in defining the brand and image of their destination, yet only 67.6% agreed that their country has its own gastronomic brand.” Further, gastro tourism ‘products’ offered involved food events (79%), gastronomic routes and cooking classes (62%) and visits to markets and producers (53%). A description of a serious gastro-tourist follows.

Motivation for Gastro-Tourism

Various definitions, factors, and models for tourist motivation have been suggested, based upon the value and needs of consumers: tourist motivation definition (Pearce et al, 1998); factors of motivation (John & Susan, 1999; Lee and Pearce, 2003; Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Pearce & Lee, 2005); type and destination (Prebensen, 2007); measurement (Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2002; Kozak, 2002); and motivations and destination choice (Moscardo et al, 1995). While interest in the development of food tourism has increased (Kivela and Crofts, 2006), little research exists on “culinary, gourmet, and gastronomy tours motivation” (Kim et al 2010 p60). Food consumption itself remains the “peak” experience which motivates destination travel (Kay, 2003).

Tikkanen (2007) identified five distinct Maslow-ian motivations with respect to culinary travelers: 1) food itself is viewed as an attraction, 2) foodstuffs are products that culinary tourists consume and purchase, 3) food experiences are valued and sought, 4) food is viewed and valued as a cultural phenomenon, and 5) linkages between tourism and food production are sought and valued. She contends that specific individual needs of the food tourist constitute the main motivations for culinary tourism (figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Sectors of Food Tourism classified by Maslow’s hierarchy of needs



Food Tourists are motivated by interesting educational enriching hands-on-experiences. For gastro-tourists, *food* is the focus and the motivation for the travel.

Place/Destination Branding

There is a growing body of practice and research around place or destination branding. Place brand strategy is defined as “a plan for defining the most realistic, most competitive, and most compelling strategic reason for the country, region, or city; this vision then has to be fulfilled and communicated” (Anholt, 2004). Recurring themes within the various disciplines that discuss place branding include: comparisons between branding a product/service and destinations/cities (Cai, 2002; Gnoth, 2002; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2005; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005); comparisons between corporate branding and city brands (Kavaratzis, 2004; Olins, 2003; Trueman *et al.* 2004) and similarity to corporate umbrella branding (Gnoth, 2002; Papadopolos and Heslop, 2002); impressions between place branding and (re)positioning (Gilmore, 2002); image building and reconstruction (Curtis, 2001; Hall, 2004); the importance of unique identity and use of branding elements (Cai, 2002; Morgan *et al.* 2004); and, the role of emotional links with consumers (Gilmore, 2002; Hall, 2004).

Previous research has generally been specific to the individual aspects of the place branding process, and often based on specific case study contexts and, as such cannot easily be applied by practitioners. An interesting meta-model of the place-branding process was offered by Hanna and Rowley (2010). Their theoretical model of SPBM incorporates six broader place branding process models which together serves as a starting point: the relational network brand (Hankinson, 2004); city image communication (Kavaratzis, 2004); a model of destination branding (Cai, 2002), destination branding process (Laws, 2002); the 7A destination branding model (Baker, 2007); and city brand management (Gaggiotti *et al.*, 2008).

Destination Branding involves the establishment and maintenance of an identity of the destination brand – places where tourists visit be it countries, regions, or cities - and are a key element involved with tourism (de Chernatory, 2010; Morgan *et al.*, 2004). Konecnik (2002) categorizes a destination brand as a collection of products and services. A destination brand identity includes six to twelve dimensions (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000) involving

experiential, symbolic and functional benefits (Keller, 1993). The destination brand must be authentic, and “organic and self-developing” (Olins, 2007). Indeed, in terms of nation branding every destination now competes for position with all other destinations (Anholt, 2007).

While destination branding offers the opportunity to counter the problem of place substitutability, there are a number of challenges that must be addressed when branding places.

Destination Branding involves a wide variety of stakeholders; volatile external environment; potentially difficult heritage issues; and budgetary pressures (Balakrishvan, 2009, Morgan et al, 2004; Pike, 2005). Other challenges include the multidimensionality of the place (Marzano and Scott, 2005), politics (Gilmore, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005; Pike, 2005), funding (Palmer, 2001 in: Morgan *et al.* 2002), the external environment (Morgan *et al.* 2004) and creating differentiation (Morgan *et al.* 2002). As a relatively new field of study, there remains a lack of empirical research on place branding (Caldwell and Freire, 2004). Since the motivations for eating particular foods are complex, varied and personal and what a gastro tourist considers memorable can vary drastically from one to another, the geographic location appears to be secondary. Food remains the star attraction, actually becoming the destination. The place or location is just the vehicle, or the backdrop for experiencing food in meaningful ways.

Gastronomy as a Driver of Destination Branding

A national survey done in partnership with the Travel Industry Association (TIA), *Gourmet* (the magazine) and the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) revealed that 27 million American Travelers (17%) engaged in culinary or wine-related activities while traveling. On average they spent \$1,194 per trip with over 36% (\$425) going towards food-related activities. The segment that the survey labeled “deliberate” food travelers, where culinary activities were the key reasons for the trip, spent on average \$77 more for the entire trip, but 50% of that total (\$593) was spent on food-related activities. Surprisingly, those travelers identified as wine travelers spent less on average per trip (\$950), but did spend the same 36% (\$339) on wine-related activities (WFTA, 2011). According to the Barcelona Field Studies Centre (2012), increases in food tourism are driven by five trends: 1) Trading Up: consumers spend a higher portion of their income on discretionary purchases when the product/experience is aspiration and down when it is only

function; 2) Demographic and Household Changes: an aging population and lifestyle changes have driven demand for increased eating out and food tourism opportunities; 3) Rejection of ‘MacDonaldisation’: tourists reject low cost mass-produced foods that are perceived as bland and lacking individuality, searching out instead local, fresh, cuisine that reflects authenticity of the destination; 4) Growth of The Multi-Cultural Consumer: immigration, globalization, the internet, have spurred a relentless growth in international tourism; and 5) The Celebrity Chef and Media: the niche of food programs, TV channels and magazines have created food celebrities and experts to emulate.

Gastro-Tourism in Emerging Markets

With minimal infrastructure, a little organization, a bit of local hospitality, and targeted marketing, emerging markets in underdeveloped countries as well as underdeveloped pockets in developed nations can become gastro tourism destinations for travelers who yearn for intimate cultural immersion through food adventures. The factors to consider are shown in the Gastro Tourism Destination Identity Process Model below (figure 2).

Figure 2: Gastro-Tourism Destination Identity Process Model

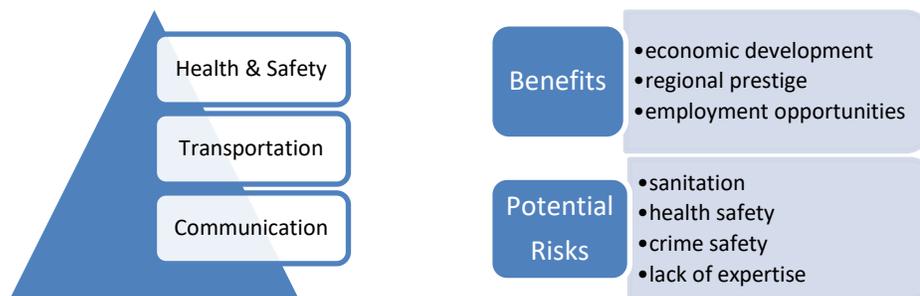


Infrastructure

The research seems encouraging that new markets in emerging nations or less affluent pockets within more dominate markets can capitalize on this ever growing gastro-tourism niche to provide economic, social and cultural benefits. By utilizing existing food resources and local

experts a gastro-tourist program can be launched, even in remote parts of the world, provided that key infrastructure exists. Gastro tourism is appreciated not only for its own sake but also for its ability to generate rural development. “Gastronomic tourism is helping to increase rural revenue sources and improve income levels and employment of local labour, especially women (Barcelona Field Studies Centre, 2012). Countries as well as independent purveyors have found start-up risks to be minimal, provided three basic infrastructure elements are available, viable and enforced: 1) If a destination offers clean water, healthy food handling and sanitation practices; 2) can safely transport people to and from various purveyors; and 3) has the means to articulate and advertise a message. Figure 3 below depicts this basic infrastructure demand.

Figure 3



Resource Identification

The way a country, a region or even a local village or neighborhood gathers, prepares and serves food defines its food tourism potential. The best gastro-gathering events stem from resources and products that are uniquely local, traditional, and are prepared and consumed by the locals. Sharing culinary flavors and styles teaches world travelers about people in other parts of the world or city in ways that geographical books, politics or tours of museums and landmarks can never fully do. Communities can easily identify their town experts and village matrons who might be eager to host gatherings for strangers willing to pay a fee to learn from them about foods and practices that already exist. Emerging markets should look at the resources that

already exist in their neighborhoods, villages, towns, communities, cities and countries. Communities can begin by looking at local foods, festivals and harvesting seasons such as: Hairy Crab Season in Shanghai; China's Cold Food Festival; LaMancha's Saffron Harvest. If an area can identify at least six purveyors (hosts) with interesting food-related opportunities who are willing to loosely organize and continuously communicate, then gastro tourism becomes possible. The diagram below (figure 4) depicts this stage of the process.

Figure 4



Destination Identity

Once a minimum of six experiences and hosts are identified, a 'trail' or schedule can be created that suits all purveyors and potential tourists. How a local group decides to brand their local food and food-related experiences is unique and highly individual. They can create food trails so tourists can taste similar or uniquely different foods and preparations; they can include kitchen gardens, cookery lessons in Mama's kitchens, dining on the docks, or bike tours through city streets. Regardless of the unique components, any loosely formed group of purveyors who wishes to advertise their gastro-possibilities to outsiders should agree upon brand promise: What is being promised to the gastro-tourists that visit? This promise becomes the guiding force in the actual creation of the events and experiences as well as in all marketing materials and messages regarding the gastro-tourism group. So, what exactly is being promised? Memorable local food-related experiences are a must. But, a community can also offer, fun, warmth, a glimpses into unique cultures, customs, rituals, hands-on cooking, and expert lectures and demonstrations. What each community is able and willing to promise will be unique.

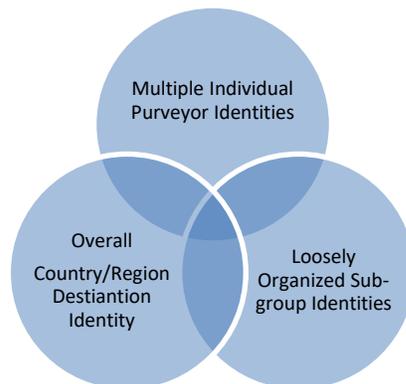
Following are examples of two existing food-tourism initiatives. 1) The Global Hansik Initiative (GHI) was created and launched in 2008 to popularize Korean food by focusing on the health

benefits and uniqueness of Korean cuisine both in Korea and around the world (MIFAFF, 2008). In this instance Korean Food itself becomes the “destination.” 2) The Tourism Bureau of Taiwan has launched its new global campaign slogan: “Taiwan — The Heart of Asia”. The new campaign “also features a heart containing some of the crucial elements of Taiwan, including food, culture, festive events and biodiversity.” (Shan, 2011)



As the two examples suggest, all related marketing components should consistently reflect the brand promise and destination identity. In gastro-tourism destination identity encompasses 1) individual purveyor identities; 2) sub-groups or trails of purveyors, even if only loosely organized; and 3) the overall regional or country destination identity. Successful gastro-tourism destinations cross-promote all three identities and address any potential disconnects. The figure 5 below symbolizes the co-dependent nature that will exist, particularly in emergent markets.

Figure 5

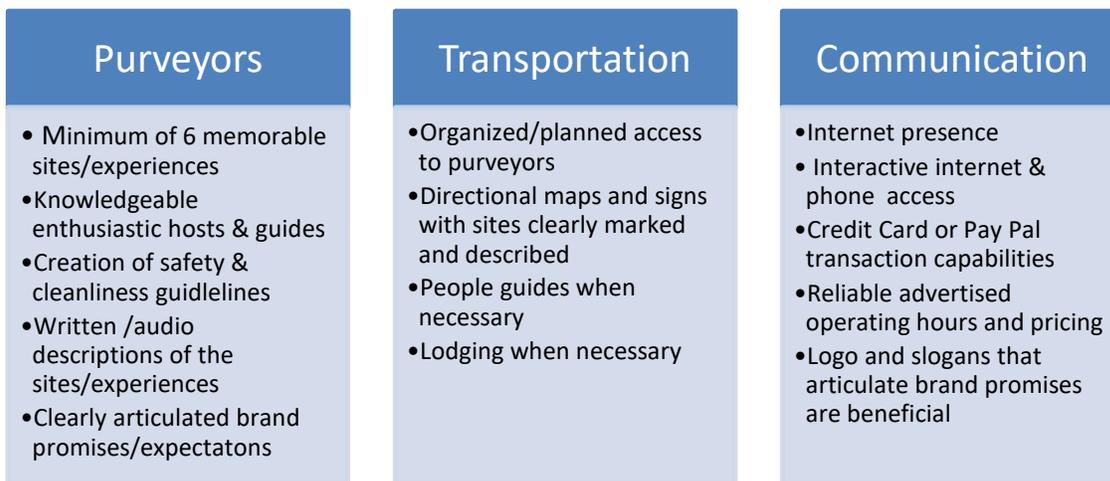


Market and Promote the gastro-destination

In a study highlighting some of the differences between what is and what should be in a culinary tourism campaign, Harrington (2011) identified six key areas associated with culinary tourism success: 1) the strategy itself; 2) cooperation among stakeholders; 3) leadership issues; 4) culinary profile promotion; 5) communication of quality; 6) enhancing tourist perceptions. The first three areas (strategy, stakeholder cooperation and leadership) are important considerations for the purveyors of the gastro-events. The remaining three areas (culinary profile/brand identity, quality and tourist perceptions) form the backbone of the marketing effort involved in gastro-tourism in emerging markets. Kay, (2003, p.64) advises that “in the early stages of the motivational process, marketing communication campaigns and activities, in particular, have an important role to play in converting positive attitudes and motives for attending cultural experiences into actual attendees.”

When developing a marketing plan, three items are paramount: 1) Purveyors, 2) Transportation, 3) Communication (figure 6).

Figure 6. Marketing and Promotion Requirements.



As discussed earlier, the transportation infrastructure and purveyor network must be able to accommodate the tourist demand generated by the communication programs.

Evaluate

A continuous evaluation cycle is essential for a gastro-tourism effort to take hold and to grow. It is necessary to constantly monitor tourist expectations, individual purveyor needs and gross economic and infrastructure demands of the region. By staying on top of tourist demands for transportation, health

and safety, and purveyor satisfaction, the gastro-tourism effort can minimize potential risks and capitalize on existing and potential benefits (figure 7).

Figure 7



Conclusion

Although Destination Branding in this tourist segment may look very different from country to country or town to town, the critical components and clearly successful branding message concerning meaningful culinary experiences was clear. This preliminary subjective research also suggests that it is possible to ignite a profitable culinary tourism business with: 1) a spattering of homegrown resources and rich talent, 2) an organized and marketed façade or brand and 3) minimal adjustments to a few necessary, but considerably basic infrastructures such as transportation, health and safety.

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