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VINCENZO GRANATO

EUROPEAN MASTER IN TOURISM MANAGEMENT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK

SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

FACULTY OF TOURISM, UNIVERSITY OF GIRONA

MASTER'S THESIS

**The future of culinary tourism and its marketing: An
exploratory study on future challenges and opportunities**

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VINCENZO GRANATO

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned Vincenzo Granato, a student at the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, (hereafter: SEBLU), author of this written final work of studies with the title: "The future of culinary tourism and its marketing: an exploratory study on future challenges and opportunities," prepared under supervision of Prof. Ljubica Knezevic Cvelbar.

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Abstract

Tourism industry and research are increasingly turning their attention on gastronomy as a way to increase visitors and promote the cultural identity of a destination, binding tourists to a place. Acknowledging the increasing trend towards niche tourism, which promotes local heritage, social sustainability, emotional components and sensory experiences, especially pronounced in the context of culinary tourism and its marketing, the current thesis focused on culinary tourism and its marketing as research topic. Despite the growing attention, research that explores the future of culinary tourism is scarce and challenges and opportunities have not been investigated yet. This thesis aimed to contribute to this knowledge gap, addressing the question of how culinary destinations marketing will change in the future. Through an online survey with the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) ambassadors and an internship programme conducted by the author, different factors were identified as central elements in the future of culinary tourism and marketing. Among others, digital marketing, cultural meaning and identity, sensory experiences and sustainability were identified and discussed as fundamental markers in the future of the sector. It came out clear that food has an important marketing function for a destination and it will be like this even more in the future. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a greater valorisation of local destinations and this will be reflected in the future of the field and its marketing. The emerging phenomenon centred around the concept of “locality”, which will encourage local and small-scale events and opportunities, with more attention on the local population, community and its values.

Key words

food tourism, culinary tourism marketing, gastronomic tourism, tourism destinations

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Introduction

Nowadays food represents an important factor that pushes people to travel (Getz, Robinson, Andersson & Vujicic, 2014; McKercher, Okumus, & Okumus, 2008). Some tourists even consider food as the primary reason to move and travel. Tourists see in the food experience a way to get in contact with the local culture while complying with a social purpose (Henderson, 2009). In line with the fact that food represents a reason for choosing a destination, many destinations promote their gastronomy to attract as many tourists as possible (Mak, et al 2012). In a context where food is a magnet for tourists' activities, food events have a relevant role and become a strategy to increase this beneficial movement for destinations (Cella, 2007). In the travel experience, the gastronomic one takes a significant role in determining the tourists' satisfaction of the destination and it is demonstrated to also influence tourists' behaviour and decisions (Hjalanger and Corigliano, 2000). Tourists are increasingly more prone to spend money on local food experiences that increase their cultural capital rather than getting something cheaper and homogenised, risking missing a local authenticity (Kivela and Crotts, 2006).

According to Insun and Charles (2011), destinations with potential resources for promoting preparing local food and gastronomy adopt more appropriate development strategies compared to those destinations with traditional mass tourism. In the United Nations, it is mentioned that food is relevant to the *Sustainable Development Goal 1*, which has the aim of diminishing poverty, and *Goal 3* related to health. *Goal 2* also claims: “*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*” (United Nations, 2015, p. 14). The importance of local food for tourism is becoming more important for the tourists' experience and is facing new challenges due to societal changes towards a more sustainable direction (Garibaldi, 2021). According to the UNWTO, the territory is the real backbone of the gastronomic offerings, and it involves many things from culture, values, history, to landscape values and traditions. Converting the territory into a culinary landscape has become a challenge for tourism destinations. Local gastronomy is a way to attract tourists and make them participate in the destination's own cultural identity (UNWTO, 2012). According to the European Commission, local food festivals play an important role in bringing creativity in destinations, enhancing innovation, economic activity, and also social cohesion (European Commission, 2011). Prior literature shows some unsolved issues in terms of food tourism, for instance a lack of coordination between the different stakeholders involved and the importance for the location in shaping relations between food and tourists. Moreover, according to recent literature, food events influence the image and loyalty of a destination (Folgado-Fernández, Hernández-Mogollón, & Duarte, 2017). In fact, a positive food experience influences the emotional bond between the tourist and the destination, increasing the loyalty towards that specific destination (Sun, Chi, & Xu, 2013).

Considering the increasing attention paid on culinary tourism in the tourism literature and various challenges and opportunities that seem to characterise the future of this sector, the

current thesis focuses on culinary tourism and its marketing as research topic. Although attention is increasing, research that explores the future of culinary tourism is scarce and challenges and opportunities have not been investigated yet. This thesis aims to contribute to this knowledge gap, addressing the question of:

How will culinary destinations marketing change in the future?

As well as getting insights into the future of culinary, this thesis will specifically test the following hypothesis.

H1: Future food destination events will focus more on marketing events with significantly more local food content.

H2: Future food destination events will focus significantly more on marketing events among the local population

The research will be conducted using a sample obtained within the context of an internship programme by the author, who got in contact and worked with the World Food Travel Association (WFTA). This internship and the contacts obtained represent therefore a research area and a case study to answer the research question of this thesis. The author worked within the WFTA on the two food events occurred in April 2022, organizing, and managing the events. To collect the data, a quantitative survey was developed and launched to the WFTA members and partners who expressed their opinions on the future of culinary tourism. WFTA members and partners work inside the sector of food culinary tourism and represent a relevant and interesting sample to collect information about the topic. WFTA members are also called as ambassadors, as they represent the association abroad and have the role of promoting food events with the local population.

The opportunities and challenges of food tourism and its marketing will be collected and discussed, analysing the experience of those people regarding the influence of food events on tourism and the modification of the future values for people. The methodology will allow the author to gather enough data from the stakeholders of the WFTA and get insights about the factors that may help to manage food events in the future. Moreover, the marketing issues of food tourism and events will be discussed, as well as the most successful marketing tools used by the WFTA ambassadors and their strategies to attract more people to participate in food events.

In order to develop the survey and contribute to the above research question, a literature review on culinary tourism and its marketing was conducted and presented in the following section. The theoretical foundation of this thesis lays on the concept of food tourism, where the definition of food tourism, gastronomic tourism and culinary tourism are provided (section 2.1). After having declined food tourism products, this thesis discusses the concept of food tourism destinations and how these are marked and branded (section 2.2). Next, food

tourism will be discussed more in details, zooming into the position that it covers nowadays and for which it is marked and branded, as a sensory experience (section 2.3) and for its significant role on sustainability (section 2.4). The role of marketing and branding of touristic events will then close the literature review section (section 2.5). A methodology chapter follows, where the internship programme of the author is discussed in order to frame the overall data collection of this thesis. Characteristics of the respondents' sample are then explained, next to an explanation of the overall data collection and the survey development. The results will be then presented and discussed referring to prior research and emphasizing the limitations of the current thesis. A conclusion chapter closes this thesis.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Defining food tourism products

Nowadays food has taken an important role in determining tourists' experience, influencing their decision process and satisfaction (Henderson, 2009). Food can represent for people a cultural and sensorial experience, and it encompasses the destination's offer with its own authenticity (Ellis et al., 2018). The executive director of The World Food Travel Association (WFTA), Erik Wolf, stated that food tourism is "*The pursuit and enjoyment of unique and memorable food and drink experiences, both far and near*" (WFTA, n.d.). For the WFTA, gastronomy has become an important topic in terms of tourism. The reasons behind this are to be found in the exposition given by social media and television shows, which led to an increased interest towards food-related tourism (n.d.).

Food is a fundamental and essential component of the tourism industry, making it a top concern for tourism researchers. It can also be viewed as one of the most crucial characteristics utilized by potential tourists to form opinions about a destination and as one of the factors that has the greatest impact on customer satisfaction (Grbac & Milohanovic, 2008). The seasoned and knowledgeable traveller of today continuously modifies his conduct. The only way to survive in a cutthroat market is to have the capacity to perceive and respond to changing environmental circumstances. Additionally, tourists consume cuisine with greater awareness and knowledge. Many of them anticipate that eating will be enjoyable, even a pleasant experience or a trip filled with adventure. People's lives revolve around food in many ways. It represents both a genuine means to express the culture of its people and a direct way to express the natural value of a particular location. For these reasons, culinary goods are major draws for tourists with varying customs, lifestyles, and traditions (Hall et.al., 2004).

Food products are valued as tourist resources because they are compatible with changing cultural consumption tendencies (Grbac & Milohanovic, 2008). Moreover, food goods have intrinsic as well as symbolic significance. These components allow them to portray the people and lands of the visited tourist location, allowing tourists to experience culture in a more immersive and participatory manner. Food goods have lately been one of the most highly valued tourism resources due to the cultural value ascribed to them. In a worldwide

environment where culture has become standardized, there is a need for authentic and traditional items. Because there is a rising public interest and need for "genuine" items, scholarships in tourist studies are focused with authenticity (Grbac & Milohanovic, 2008). Tourists are extremely interested in traditional food products because of their specific historical, cultural, and physical characteristics that are deeply ingrained in the place of production. The non-export nature of these products' components, as well as their strong and undisputed ties to tradition, contribute to their highly competitive potential. As a result, protecting these products has become critical (Mattiacci & Vignali, 2004). Although its defining position, the food element has typically been seen as a main requirement and supplementary component to the vacation experience, rather as a leisure activity with a key function (Corigliano, 2002; Hjalager, 2002; Richards, 2002). Food goods are no longer regarded a basic fundamental requirement while traveling as a result of the numerous changes that current society has undergone. Such features are more commonly associated with leisure and pleasure (UNWTO, 2012). This premise was further backed by a recent WFTA (2019) study, which found that 80 percent of leisure travellers make their decisions based on the availability of a food-related activity or event. Authors such as Corigliano (2002) explained the overall and continual development in interest in culinary tourist goods, as well as the resulting expansion in offer, in the twofold targeting strategy of food related items. In fact, tourist interest and consumer behaviour have evolved throughout time, and today's tourists want to discover locations as a whole rather than focused on single attractions (Corigliano, 2002). In this setting, traditional local foods have emerged as one of the primary motivators for people to visit locations. In reality, travellers seek for truly unforgettable moments and fill desire by choosing activities that allow them to immerse themselves in local cultures (Sirse, 2014).

One of the most used definition of food tourism is the one provided by the World Tourism Organization, in fact, according to The World Tourism Organization, food tourism is an experiential trip to a gastronomic region, for recreational or entertainment purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary producers of food, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmers' markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products or any tourism activity related to food (UNWTO, 2012).

Food tourism research has usually previously focused on a visitor (consumer) perspective or from a destination perspective (including development and marketing of food tourism). The consumer perspective has included motivations for food tourism, typologies of food tourists, and participation in food tourism activities. The destination perspective encompasses attributes of food tourism destinations, impact on destination image, developing food tourism attractions, and marketing to tourists (Stone, et al., 2019). According to Liberato (2020), it is important to distinguish different typologies for the binomial tourism and food. Specifically, Food tourism relates to the physical experiences, motivated by the connection with the food of the touristic destination. Gastronomic tourism focuses on professional hospitality and the way food is consumed, as well as its connection to beverages, mainly wine tasting as a subject of academic research is no longer widely studied. On the other hand,

culinary tourism is the most used typology for academic studies, and some authors use this term to evidence the connection between food and the culture of the touristic destination (Liberato et al., 2020).

According to Lucy Long, the person who coined the term culinary tourism in 2004, culinary tourism identifies travellers that make a trip with the scope or purpose to join culinary activities and experiences. In fact, she wrote: “I define culinary tourism as the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of an other - participation including the consumption, preparation and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one’s own.” “Exploration and intentionality define these instances as tourism” (Long, 2004). Thus, it seems that intentionality is the key component of the main definition of culinary tourism.

Another definition of culinary tourism was proposed by Ontario’s stakeholders that stated that “Culinary tourism includes any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional, and national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition, or culinary techniques.” (Culinary Tourism in Ontario: Strategy and Action Plan 2005-2015, p.12). Moreover, The Economic Planning Group of Canada stated that “Wine/culinary tourism is tourism in which the opportunity for wine and/or culinary related experiences contributes significantly to the reason for travel to the destination or itinerary planning while at the destination” (Stewart et al, 2008). This definition includes some degree of intentionality in going to a specific destination. According to Bertella (2011), culinary tourism involves the cultural consumption produced by the activities dealing with food, while food tourism is a concept referring to the physical experience of a tourist motivated by the desire to engage with local food and live the local cuisine (Bertella, 2011).

2.2. Food tourism destinations marketing

Food tourism has become a product used by destinations to attract more tourists to the place, since it represents a tourism attraction element that improves the tourists’ experiences and it also contributes to their destination’s decision-making process (Mak, et al 2012). Food tourism has many consequences, for instance it increases the value to many agricultural products, it can transform the culture of foods into a food event and sometimes it includes food into “mega events.” Moreover, food tourism allows the local identity to be reinforced for destination marketing and development (Quan and Wang, 2003). Tourist goods are inextricably linked to the concepts of product creation and marketing and are often one of the primary priorities for tourism players in control of service supply. As the market demands increasingly distinctive and genuine experiences, suppliers are seeking methods to increase their products appealing to visitors (Xu, 2010).

Food constitutes a tourism product and an experience for people, thus contributing to the value and competitiveness of the destination when it is well developed and managed. According to Berg & Sevón (2014), food is therefore used to brand and develop cities and places that are converted by gastronomy into attractive destinations worth to be visited.

Destination competitiveness is mostly reached by the possibilities offered by destination marketing that is one of the factors of destination competitiveness and sustainability (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). Food represents part of the heritage of the region and is often used in tourism as a symbol for destinations. In fact, through culinary experiences tourists can experience an exchange of culture with the local populations and joining a food festival can transform the tourist's experience into a traditional food experience for that destination (Silkes, Cai & Lehto, 2013). The destination's image is well defined by the consumption of local food in that specific destination (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003).

Moreover, the emotional attachment that a food experience leaves to people constitutes a powerful marketing tool for the destination, since the memory of who has lived that sensorial moment and experience connects the destination with a possible positive image, with the implications for promotion and marketing (Silkes, Cai & Lehto, 2013). Another important concept is the destination's branding. Destination branding is important both for tourists and stakeholders involved in the destination, being an important aspect of place marketing (Suna, & Alvarez, 2021). For destination branding, gastronomy constitutes an important value because it defines a specific area for tourists and stakeholders, establishing a competitive advantage and working as a regional marker (Horng & Tsai, 2012). According to Chang and Mak (2018) gastronomic identity represents the *“projected and manageable attributes that are employed by destination marketers to represent the ideal gastronomic characteristics of a destination”*. Gastronomy can generate many benefits to the destination, differentiating the place from the others and being a destination's resource (Okumus, B., Okumus, F., & McKercher, B., 2007).

Nevertheless, even if food is important in creating a marker of distinction for places and in the battle to involve more visitors and businesses, it has been used in destination marketing a lot more than as an economic good (Henderson, 2016). In fact, food has also the function of being a communicator of cultural meaning that produces socio-cultural relationships (Everett, 2019). This switches the focus from economic to an urban destination marketing, where food takes the role of a cultural representation of the place and can be used as a reason for social landscape (Stalmirska, 2020). Thus, food has taken a relevant role in the last few years for marketing and promotion strategies of the destinations to tourists (Knollenberg et al., 2020). Moreover, DMOs, the destination marketing organisations, have been competing with other destinations more than ever before, even though the choices of destinations that tourists can take is wider than before (Knollenberg et al., 2021).

Besides that, competitors are not just locally, but global competitors are emerging, but due to the boost of global mobility of people (Abreu Novais et al., 2018). In this scenery, where resources are limited and the competition between destinations has been enhanced, being unique and different from others has become crucial in destination marketing (Pike & Page, 2014). According to Okumus et al., 2017, each destination has its tangible and intangible features that determine its uniqueness and contribute to differentiate that destination from others. When it comes to promoting local food, even the cooperation among public and

private stakeholders in establishing and supporting a strong image of a destination is fundamental (Okumus & Cetin, 2018). In fact, destination marketing should offer not only the benefits looked by tourists but also represent the interests of the stakeholders involved in the destination (Pike, 2016). For this reason, destination marketing, which underlines unique tangible and intangible features, instead of just trying to enhance the number of visitors, should also point at achieving the expectations of various and different stakeholders with their scopes and desires (Okumus et al., 2007). Information sources influence tourists' decision to travel to a specific destination and taste local cuisine. Food content on websites and brochures have increased their importance (Pawaskar & Goel, 2016). Moreover, destinations' marketing efforts have been realised through the use of images and textual description of food in order to inform and attract culinary tourists with promotional materials (Silkes, Cai & Lehto, 2013). Destinations frequently distribute promotional materials as maps, video clips or flyers, a traditional method where food is featured in text or images and where this material is used for direct marketing campaigns, travel fairs or visitor centres.

Therefore, in a context as the one described above, it becomes really important to consider the topic of sustainability and sustainable, identified as one of the possible trajectories. Due to this, it is crucial to consider how food is produced, distributed, and consumed as well as how consumers perceive these factors in order to achieve sustainability (Peano, C., et al., 2019).

Europe has just endorsed the United Nations-promoted Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and is committed to becoming a trailblazer in achieving them by 2030 [1]. The SDGs are a program aimed at ensuring a brighter and more sustainable future for all while leaving no one behind. Food appears to be a transversal problem that unites most of the objectives in this vast program; certainly, the 2030 agenda cannot be properly executed until hunger is eliminated, food and nutrition security is achieved, and global health is improved (European Commission, 2016).

Three objectives are directly related to food: SDG 2: "Ending hunger, establishing food security, enhancing nutrition, and supporting sustainable agriculture"; SDG 12: "Enhancing sustainability by ensuring responsible consumption and suitable production models". Additionally, Goal 15 aims to "guard, restore, and promote the sustainable use of different ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, oppose desertification, stop and reverse soil degradation, and arrest biodiversity loss." It follows that the methods for producing, distributing, and consuming food have an impact on the strategy for sustainability. This necessitates a sensible shift in perspective about the entire food system, primarily to increase fundamental understanding of it and to spot chances for designing purposeful measures to aid the changeover (EEA, 2017). In this spirit, it is essential to incorporate everyone who has the power to influence the system, especially the customer. One of the most important consequences to emerge in the previous ten years is the understanding that consumer choices, behaviours, and lifestyles, or their consumption decisions, play a critical part in attaining sustainable development (Bengtsson, M. et al., 2018). Beginning with the plans of

governments and enterprises, the consumer can shift from being a passive receiver to playing an active part and being able to affect the market trend with his/her buying selections. A new economic model is being developed in which customers are consumer-actors (prosummers/co-producers), firms are socially and ecologically committed, and organizations directly engage with the local community (Peano, C., et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have examined the ethical perspective on consumption, consumption values, place identification, ecological marketing, and consumption of organic and local products in order to better understand the concept of sustainable consumption. Therefore, sustainable consumption is seen as a notion that goes beyond the conventional definition of consumerism, which is given by as the gathering and acquisition of material possessions with the sake of enhancing enjoyment and social status. More specifically, the act of consuming sustainably entails a decision-making process that takes into account both the consumer's social duty and their own personal wants and aspirations (Peano, C., et al., 2019).

2.3 Food tourism products as experience marketing

The concept of experience has a broad meaning, referring to events or situations and involving a mix of memory or learning processes combined with specific emotions (Doppler, S., & Steffen, A., 2020). When people have a food experience they are involved in a social moment, thus giving food a social role. According to the definition by Sutton (2008), food represents *“a key mediator of social relationships, a symbol of identity and a marker of difference, whether defined by gender, class, race, or ethnicity.”* (Sutton, 2008). A customer experience can generate positive or negative emotions that influence customer's satisfaction (Batat, 2019).

These important aspects are used by firms and organisations in order to prepare an experience marketing strategy and communicate with customers through diverse ways, such as storytelling to appeal to consumers' emotions before passing through a cognitive process necessary to engage with them (Batat, 2019). Another feeling that has been used by firms is nostalgia, an emotion that brings people to experience again what their memory holds as positive moments. In this sense, marketers design and set up the gastronomy experience to influence people's emotions and appeal to nostalgic events (Doppler & Steffen, 2020). For instance, those restaurants that create a historical flashback, serving food from another decade or designing a particular atmosphere from other decades, want to evoke the original setting in the mind of the customers, in a way that they will remember the experience (Tresidder & Hirst, 2012).

In marketing communication, especially marketing events, food experience plays an important role, and it represents a valuable tool in companies' marketing mix (Steffen, & Doppler, 2020). Activating emotional and sensorial experiences is part of a marketing strategy that aims to increase the positive impact on participants and stakeholders, improving their perception of the service quality through food offerings, for instance, at events (Orefice, 2018). Thus, the interaction of sensorial, affective, social and cognitive experiences creates a holistic experience that has been recognized as really important in terms of attraction for

tourists (Schmitt, 2010). Along this line, native food and wine events represent a holistic experience because local products enhance poly-sensorial experiential units with the aim to make tourists feel emotions and a sense of place (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). These food and wine events increase the culinary tourism opportunities for destinations and have the function to promote areas and places, reinforcing a loyalty relationship between tourists and food/wine products (Simeon & Buonincontri, 2011). These festivals have an important marketing effect, since they lead people to consume, thus creating an environment where their satisfactions and reactions depend on the benefits they get (Lee et al., 2008).

Experiences have become a fundamental marker, not as goods and services, but as a form of economic offering. At the same time, marketing has changed its focus from a production and sales orientation to market and customer orientations in recent times (Richards, 2021). The economic value of the companies is boosted by offering customers experiences that they can remember, establishing an experience economy that requires a different approach than the one adopted with goods and services (Richards, 2021). According to Wiedmann et al. (2018), multisensory marketing has the power to develop brand experiences. Thus, multisensory approaches have substituted cognitive behavioural models, as they can better underline the emotion generated by experiences. Thus, in this experience marketing, gastronomic tourism experiences show how food has the capacity to connect the destination, the identity, the culture and even tourists, creating a valuable and important gastronomic experience.

Another important aspect is creativity in gastronomic experiences. According to Seeler et al. (2019), tourists are willing to live creative food experiences to be engaged and have an interactive experience that does not only leave them a good memory, but also stimulate personal growth and self-development. Indeed, the emotional experiences produced by creativity raises an emotional attachment, which is the cause of intended repeat visits to the destinations and its recommendation (Campos et al., 2018). This means that memorable food experiences make tourists talk about them and recommend the place they have been, using social media or electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) (Ranteallo and Andilolo, 2017). Social interactions are enabled by innovative technologies and e-WOM and go over the experience itself, involving digitalisation and also the online interaction with other people.

2.4 Events marketing and sustainability

Food tourism is defined by Hall and Mitchell (2001) as visits to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific locations where food and the opportunity to taste and/or experience the characteristics of a specialized food production region are the main travel motivators (Hall & Mitchell, 2001, p.308). As we can notice from this definition food events are part of food tourism. When introducing culinary tourism at a site, food events play a significant role. Food events, in general, may focus on a single type of food product or a variety of local food products (Andersson, Mossberg & Therkelsen, 2017). Food events can vary in shape, quantity, and duration based on regional resources. According to Hall and Sharples 2008, food events serve a marketing purpose by giving goods, sponsors, host communities, and other stakeholders a chance to gain market notoriety while also increasing

brand value and creating customer and consumer connections (Hall & Sharples, 2008). According to Lin, Pearson, and Cai (2011), food-related events like fairs and exhibits benefit local communities by making food items marketable and contributing to the character of a region. Additionally, it is typical for culinary events like festivals and events to be the result of teamwork (Andersson, Mossberg, & Therkelsen, 2017), supporting the idea that stakeholder collaboration is an important aspect of the destination setting. Food events are rarely the work of lone players; instead, the local DMO or business organization frequently serves as a coordinating force, bringing the objectives of a diverse range of actors, including unpaid activists, together (Andersson, Mossberg, Therkelsen, 2017). The role of DMO (Destination Management Organization) is fundamental in the coordination among private and public stakeholders, not just across one industry, but throughout the tourist and culinary industries (Everett & Slocum, 2013; Hall et al., 2003). The basic objective of delivering more and better local cuisine experiences to tourists may be shared by public and private actors. However, as Jenkins (1999) points out, it is still necessary for the DMO to manage interactions between various local stakeholders. As a result, the DMO can ensure that every effort spearheaded by stakeholders is consistent with the destination's brand identity.

Besides that, organisations that create events must deal with outcomes that are related to marketing aspects. Philip Kotler defines events as *circumstances designed to communicate particular messages to target audiences*. The agency, Jack Morton International (2006), provides a useful working definition of marketing events as “*Live events where audiences interact with a product or brand face to face*”. Event marketing is defined as the “*practice of promoting the interests of an organisation and its brands by associating the organisation with a specific activity*” (Shimp, 1993 and Van Heerden, 2001). In the existing literature it is clear that events contribute to the destinations’ image and are a factor for their development. On the other hand, these destinations benefit from relevant revenue due to the events they generate and the tourists coming and joining those (Getz, 2008).

Moreover, events have the effect of reinforcing the place brand. Place brand awareness can be developed by events with a strong brand that provide a unique quality to the host region, increasing the destination brand image thanks to a co-branding strategy (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). By boosting emotions and experiences, events can benefit the destination image and serve as a tourist’s attraction. Destinations’ brand can be influenced by events and represents a strong marketing tool that creates a positive image based on tourists’ experiences. Moreover, events help to “put on the map” destinations that were previously less touristy areas or less known, increasing visibility and popularity (Rinallo, 2017; 2018). Another relevant aspect is that events raise awareness about destinations, providing the market segment with a positive behaviour towards those destinations. Events have distinct phases and goals, and usually an event must achieve its scope within a specific time. According to Rinallo, there are many actions included in marketing event goals, from increasing the brand image, brand awareness and getting new leads or having media coverage (Rinallo, 2017; 2018). According to Gupta (2003), event marketing effectiveness can be measured using three broad schools of evaluation: 1) measuring awareness or attitude change, 2) quantifying

in terms of sales results and 3) comparing the value of sponsorship generated media coverage to the cost of equivalent advertising time or space.

Moreover, Food has become a marketing tool that destinations can use to attract tourists, it represents a perfect product that reflects the culture of a place and its people (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). Considering food events from a marketing perspective, food events affect consumers' satisfaction since the environment they create generates benefits for them (Lee et al., 2008). Marketing events are characterised by the fact that they generate something special or even unique with an event, enabling participants to experience the brand or the company. *"Event marketing is both an interactive and experience-oriented communications tool that serves the purposeful target group or scene-oriented production of specifically initiated events as well as their planning, execution and control within the context of integrated corporate communications"* (Nufer and Bühler, 2015). Place's image is generally raised by local managers through gastronomic events organisation, linking the authenticity of local food and experiences with the places' image, so that the destination is tied with its local food (Hillel, Belhassen & Shani, 2013). Food events have the power to increase the gastronomic culture, representing a strong tool to attract tourism that communicate the culture and also make the place known for the tourists (Sidali, Kastenholz & Bianchi, 2015).

The events that have a sustainability policy or encompasses sustainable practices in their management and operations can be defined as green events (Laing & Frost, 2010). Sustainability is a concept that involve environmental responsibilities, economic and socio-cultural aspects, as shown in the triple-bottom-line. A sustainable event to be recognised in these terms must fulfil fundamental social, cultural, economic and environmental issues that people value in this type of events (Laing & Frost, 2010). They can resist indefinitely and if they have the support of all the stakeholders involved, they can become a movement supported in the community. Social sustainability, for instance, can be enhanced by local food festivals that represent a chance to create relations across groups of people and create a harmonious place of cohabitation (de Jong & Varley, 2018). First of all, it occurs to define what is a green event, in fact green events include in their management and operations all the sustainable practices with sustainability being part of their policies (Laing & Frost, 2010).

Competitiveness of a destination is usually determined by the local and regional food that are part of a food tourism offer, in particular a sustainable competitiveness from the tourism development and destination marketing perspective, is influenced by the local offer (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). Local economies can be supported by reinforcing tourism and agricultural sectors through the promotion of local and regional food, which establish a strong and powerful tool for maintaining the culinary culture and the authenticity of the destinations (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). In many festivals where food is present, it is a great reason to celebrate, in fact food encompasses all the senses like sense of taste, touch and smell, transforming the experiences into a cultural exchange (Hall, Sharples et al., 2004).

Experiencing cultures and flavours through the local cuisine that allows tourists spending experiential interaction, means taking the ownership in a destination and as a result, a deeper appreciation for the culture (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). In this way, the connection with a destination becomes something stronger because of an emotional identification between the tourists and the gastronomic experiences that are lived by him/her. Thus, a shared food experience is turned into the reason for forming a powerful connection that links tourists to the destination. This type of experience lasts in the memory of people for a long time even when they are back to their destination (Silkes, Cai & Lehto, 2013). Thus, the destination's image encompasses the consumption of local food that represents part of the destination (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Moreover, residents also benefit from a positive portrayal of a festival because it creates a positive experience that can enhance their participation in future festivals (Silkes, Cai & Lehto, 2013). It has been demonstrated by large research that a good interaction between host and guests can leave long-lasting memories of the destination to the tourists and that they can remember it even after the holidays (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). Extensive literature in the field of festivals and other events identify that festivals are being used as a means of destination branding (Chalip and Costa, 2005).

Different types of festivals exist and they all have many themes, but food is always a commonplace in almost all of them. To be defined as food festival is not enough the presence of food, in fact in order to be called food festival it has to underline the local or regional food gastronomy, or the festival is a food featured event with activities and programmes based on food themes (Pritchard, 2007). Food festivals involve a community of people that engage in the public celebration and promotion of local food, where people experience local food and engage each other (Pritchard, 2007). Consequently, food festivals also can be used to promote a destination as a food tourism destination. Food festivals, indeed, can be beneficial for local businesses and producers, bringing tourists and representing an economic impact, they also reinforce the awareness of the area as a food tourism destination with its local foods. Food events greatly contribute to the destination's attraction in a way that tourists can taste new flavours, engage in cultural new activities and experience authentic lifestyle, discovering the tradition of that destination (Wan & Chan, 2013). In this way, an emotional identification determines the relation between tourists and the destination, in fact people, experimenting and living new activities have the opportunity to appreciate the local culture (Hall & Sharples, 2008). Thus, local festivals enhance local themes for tourism development and also destination image makers, taking the role for culinary tourism and increasing sustainable tourism (Smith, Costello & Muenchen, 2010). This industry is currently developing in a contradictory way: the more globalized the world becomes, the more local resources are hunted and appreciated (UNWTO, 2012).

2.5 Food products for destination branding

There are several factors that distinguish a place. It might be its environment, weather, natural resources, animals, culture, and so forth. Food is an essential part of culture. According to Garibaldi and Pozzi (2018), cuisine may be used to market the identity and culture of a place to tourists. Lin et al. (2011) claim that the ever-increasing rivalry among tourism locations has compelled them to devise eye-catching attractions to entice possible tourists, and they have used food as an appealing method of enhancing their tourism marketing. Food, as a representation of a place, combined with a component of creativity in daily living, leads to a more efficient destination marketing (Richards, 2012). Foods and drinks have been theoretically featured as one of the six parts of a destination brand image, and gastronomy has been specifically recognized a brand image for destinations in food tourism research (Lai et al. 2017). Food, as a result, is one of several things that create an image of a place to visitors, and as such, according to Hashimoto and Telfer (2006), it may be employed in destination branding. Food contains the social, cultural, and ecological features of a certain location, and it can have a wide range of symbolic connotations (Lockie, 2001); therefore, it is recognized as a significant aspect in the development of a destination brand (Hashimoto and Telfer, 2006). Identity is crucial in destination branding, as seen by Lin et al. (2011). As a result, if food is to be a destination brand, its character must be strongly conveyed in order to produce distinctive experiences and memories for travellers. Everett and Aitchison (2008) claim that the uniqueness of food in regard to a place has a significant impact on destination identity because food typically endeavours many attributes that are specific to a place or region. As a result, local communities and residents promote their food as a component of destination identity (Lin et al. 2011).

A crucial component utilized to distinguish and promote products is the provenance of the goods. The provenance of a product is particularly crucial for the food industry when promoting and differentiating food goods (Marcoz et al., 2016). The country-of-origin effect (COO), which describes how a product's origin affects consumers, describes how consumers' views of a particular product are influenced by the associations of the country from where the product originates (Johnson et al., 2016). However, some items may affect how the country from which they originate is seen, in an equivalent way that the country of origin can affect consumers' perceptions of a product. This is a crucial factor to consider when managing destination brands, since they heavily rely on the image travellers have of the location. Moreover, while tourists normally perceive a location as a package, destination management is frequently the outcome of collaboration among various stakeholders (Engl, 2017). As a result, when addressing destination-specific items that affect and contribute to the construction of a destination brand image, makers of these products have an influence on the destination brand image, alongside other players working at a destination. When maintaining and developing a clear destination brand, the participation of several stakeholders at a tourism destination poses a considerable difficulty. According to Lin, Pearson, and Cai (2011), food has been utilized to establish destination brands, with the argument that cuisine provides a mechanism for destination managers to create a destination

identity. Berg and Sevón (2014) have also noticed an increase in the use of food, meals, and gastronomy in place branding. Overall, a location impacts not just the experience of food in that location, but also the character of the location and its brand image. More recently, Kapferer (2012) defined a brand as: a name that symbolizes a sustained engagement, crusade, or dedication to a distinctive set of values, entrenched within goods, services, and behaviours, making the organization, person, or items stand out or distinct (Kapferer, 2012). It is important to think about how destinations vary from businesses before presenting the essential elements of destination branding. According to Engl (2017), destinations vary from enterprises in one keyway, notably in their less extensive capacity to influence a number of crucial customer-facing factors. According to Cai (2002), destination branding is: “selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building; unlike typical goods and services, the name of a destination brand is relatively fixed by the actual geographic name of the place” (Cai, 2002). An important aspect is the involvement of stakeholders. According to Tasci and Gartner (2007), stakeholders have a significant role in defining the presentation of a distinct destination image. Given the significance of stakeholders in the framework of destinations, it is critical to define stakeholder and stakeholder interaction. In broad sense, stakeholder theory states that a brand or organization is formed of numerous stakeholders such as governments, suppliers, workers, and customers (Freeman, 1984), and that in order to be labelled as a stakeholder, the subject must be interested in the brand's or the organization's activities.

But in the context that was underlined, who is in charge of brand identity? Considering that there is a considerable importance for marketers to identify a precise destination identity and to conserve it, at the same time, according to Macelloni & Felder, 2020, the consistency of identity and communication should be examined and managed by DMOs. Lin, Pearson, and Cai (2011) emphasize that the DMO should manage brand identity across all stakeholders when it comes to who is in responsibility of brand identity. In other terms, DMO should be in charge of developing brand identity, which may subsequently be used to influence other stakeholders of a location, such as hotel and restaurant operators (Macelloni, E., & Felder, 2020). Furthermore, Yusof, Ismail, and Ghazali (2014) believe that having a powerful destination brand identity serves the objective of positioning itself to tourists. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have used the increase in popular interest in food over the past ten years to expand consumer markets and increase revenue for a larger variety of regional tourism vendors that operate in the food and beverage (F&B) industry (Alliance, O. C. T., & Present, S, 2015). Best practice DMOs are effectively incorporating user-generated social media material into their advertising efforts, while also creating their own sophisticated content platforms in collaboration with local culinary tourism producers.

Food is progressively becoming considered an important part of the cultural tourism market, especially in rural areas (Hall and Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager and Richards, 2002), because local foods or food products have the capacity to boost tourism sustainability, add value to destination authenticity, fortify the local economy, and provide environmentally friendly facilities (Handszuh, 2000). Such a link is incredibly important for tourism because of the

potential for using food and the related environment to build strong local identity in the tourism sector. Similarly, according to Boyne and Hall (2004), high-quality culinary items from a specific location may be used to improve a region's overall tourist image and tourists' experiences.

Food and food tourism are said to provide important prospects for regional development, according to Hall (2005) and McBoyle (1996). Due to the possible connections between various economic sectors, which might result in a longer money flow within local economies as well as the creation of new value-added products, many towns consequently view food tourism as a crucial part of local development goals (OECD, 1995). Hall (2005) mentions such a strategy as a new value-added production growth strategy, which adds value to local produce before it has been exported, emphasizes local authenticity and identity in branding and promotional strategies, and sells directly to consumers through farm shops, farmers' markets, or extraordinary events and festivals. Special events and festivals, as previously noted in Hall's (2005) strategy components, play an essential role in establishing new value-added products (Cela et al., 2007), which is the foundation for developing regional destination branding.

As a marketing technique, branding entails a process of utilizing and controlling a product's components to create a good perception to pull in and keep customers (Low and Fullerton, 1994). The term "branding" as it relates to tourism describes how destination marketers compete for travellers by developing and upholding a consistent destination "identity" that is perceived unique and alluring (Fox, 2007; Morgan et al., 2002). The perception of a brand in terms of its attributes and connotations, frequently structured by visitors in meaningful ways and maintained in memory, is one of the most crucial success elements for destination branding (Tasci et al., 2007; Tasci and Kozak, 2006). As a result, brand image immediately reflects a brand's power (Getz and Robinson, 2014) and adds to the formation of the destination's brand (Tasci and Kozak, 2006).

According to Qu, Kim, and Im (2011), place branding is mostly achieved by controlling a destination's image, particularly by creating a distinct image that may improve a potential tourist's overall view of a location and by distinguishing that destination from others. This claim demonstrates the potential for destination branding by highlighting a distinctive image. According to recent studies, culture and major events play important roles in shaping how people see a place (Knott et al., 2015). Food and gastronomy have been considered within the tourist industry as contributing to destination brand image (together with nature, cultural attractions, retail centres, transportation, lodging, and entertainment). The concept of cuisine as a destination's brand image has been more extensively developed in culinary tourism research. The difference between these two concepts is crucial, particularly when nations want to include a distinctive and positive perception of their food and cuisine into their branding strategies in order to draw visitors (Getz and Robinson, 2014). In these circumstances, the national tourist boards use the brand image of food and cuisine as a selling factor (Okumus et al., 2007).

Image has progressively been used to food and cuisine as a measure of destination branding success in recent years. According to Berg and Sevo'n (2014: 289), "food and gastronomy are directly and indirectly shaping the character of the location and its brand-image." Several studies have also found that "tourists flock to areas that have built a reputation as a place to experiment with great local products." (World Tourism Organization, 2012).

According to the WFTA (n.d.), food tourism is "*The act of travelling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place,*" thus meaning that gastronomy is key in getting to know heritage elements of the destination. Food products acquired a concept of leisure and relaxation during travels, in fact, according to a WFTA research from 2019, food activities or experiences influence the 80% of leisure travellers that base their choice on these factors (WFTA, 2019). Nowadays, tourists are looking for authentic experiences in order to live the local culture of the destination and they find a good reason to visit it thanks to the local food products that constitutes a unique experience for them (Sirse, 2014).

The concept of product development and marketing and is usually one of the main themes for tourism participants in charge of providing services. Moreover, authentic experiences are the most required by the market and uniqueness is what the market is looking for, so that businesses seek interesting products to offer the visitors something unforgettable (Xu, 2010). Destinations have been developing gastronomic tourism products that became essential for tourism, in particular they are looking for strategies that can turn the simple food experience into something memorable. According to the UNWTO and the BCC 2019, the focus on communication and marketing, brand identity and value chain represent a holistic strategy for each destination (UNWTO and BCC, 2019). This strategy is also important to diversify the food related tourism offer in order to tackle mass tourism and preserve the consequent loss of small-scale food producers (WFTA, 2019).

Marketing a gastronomic destination, indeed, means also customising the offer to the several types of tourists in order to satisfy broader interests and needs in a way that follows the change of trends. Diversification allows a more competitive market for destinations and connects food products in a way that improves the destination branding. In a market that is always more competitive, an increasing number of urban destinations are trying to better position themselves through the use of food in destination marketing activities (Ellis et al., 2018; Henderson, 2016). Another concept that improves the destination branding is authenticity, in fact, according to the WFTA 2019, authenticity is the most sought-after thing that tourists want to find in their travelling experiences and a gastronomic experience can guarantee this type of feeling. Food activities have the value to bring something unique and innovative (WFTA, 2019).

In sum, the above literature review poses the foundations for the main concepts that will be further investigated in this thesis and then can represent the starting points to increase the understanding on the future of culinary tourism and its marketing. These concepts comprised: a first definition of culinary tourism, food tourism, gastronomic tourism (section 2.1), the definition and discussion of food culinary marketing and events branding (section

2.2), the role of sensory marketing and sensory experiences that food and food tourism marketing cover (section 2.3), the role of sustainability in this sector (section 2.4) and last the role of food as destination branding (section 2.5). The concepts and definitions posit the foundations for this thesis data collection and survey design. These concepts will indeed be discussed with the food ambassadors that represent the sample of this research, as they centred around this thesis research question of how culinary destinations marketing will change in the future. As well as understanding, at a more general level, how culinary tourism marketing will progress and develop in the future, the current thesis aimed to test two specific hypotheses, focused on the role of local contents and local population in the future of culinary destination events. As explained and presented in the literature review above, food tourism is facing a change, also due to the Covid-19 pandemic, towards niche tourism rather than mass tourism (e.g., Richards, 2021; Wiedmann et al. 2018).

It seems therefore plausible to think that tourists will be increasingly more interested in authenticity, emotional component, sense of identity and cultural heritage of the destinations they visit. Although these factors are present in the literature review above and emphasized in prior research, we do not know whether this sense of “locality” will characterise the future of this sector and its marketing. This thesis, and the methodology chapter that follows, will specifically investigate this research point through two hypotheses, in order to understand whether the food ambassadors that work within this sector agree on this trend and see it as prospect for the future.

3. Methodology

In order to investigate challenges and opportunities for the future of culinary tourism and its marketing, as well as for the testing of hypothesis 1 and 2, this research adopted a qualitative and quantitative method. The qualitative method, with open questions, allowed respondents to express their opinion on the topic without being restricted by the survey design. The answers were coded and grouped into corresponding categories of answers to find common patterns. The quantitative methods instead, included close questions, multiple choice questions and scale agreement questions. This qualitative approach allowed 1) to collect data that could be more comparable across respondents and 2) to test this thesis hypothesis.

This chapter outlines the methodological considerations of this thesis, starting with the internship programme of the author that allowed the data collection for this thesis (section 3.1). The research approach, with the emphasis on the data collection, the sampling design of the questionnaire and data analysis process are then explained.

3.1 The author's work at the WFTA

This thesis was written considering the author's experience at the WFTA, the World Food Travel Association, for 4 months, from January 2022 to April 2022. This working experience allowed him to get in touch with many food tourism stakeholders and professional people that deal with the food tourism sector or are ambassadors of the association.

The tasks that were conducted began with an analysis of the WFTA metrics and how the association could implement its website with a more engaging copy or a call to action on its social media pages. The author analysed the main KPI through tools like Not Just Analytics and Fan Page Karma, two websites that allow you to have an overview on the numbers of the most important metrics, like engagement, comments, hashtags, sharing. This analysis allowed the author to advise the association on some changes in the use of social media and also to imitate and study the most successful posts and how those posts created a better engagement with the audience. The work of the author was also related to the thinking of new engaging posts in order to create mock-up posts that could involve more people to participate in the world food travel day, one event that constituted in sharing a food experience on social media. The aim of the association was to involve as many people as possible to consider the importance of local food and food tourism in a destination. The author tried to think about gamification posts and created new posts using Canva that could lead to a more engaging and interactive way of looking at the WFTA profile on Instagram.

Quiz and informative posts were created with the scope to increase the audience. Moreover, the author had to find speakers that could take part in the event world food travel summit, with the aim to interact with tourism professionals and propose them a participation as speakers to the event. The event was centred around the topic of sustainability and food tourism, to enhance issues linked with the food tourism industry. Moreover, another internship responsibility was to create a marketing plan that could be addressed to the

ambassadors of the WFTA around the globe, so that they were able to follow a strategy before talking with their community. The marketing plan included interesting issues that were considered relevant for social media, such as food waste, sustainability and the local cuisine, but also a different way of posting on social media, with the aim to establish a relationship with the community and launch a debate on delicate issues of common interest. The marketing plan was thought and written by the author in order to help and support the ambassadors that represent the WFTA abroad and that spread the association's voice.

Finally, the author made a survey, with the scope to bring attention to specific themes connected with the use of marketing tools and the importance of marketing between the local population and local cuisine. The author reached the ambassadors out and asked them to give their opinion and view, answering quantitative questions and open questions, part of this thesis data collection. Other professionals were contacted through LinkedIn and the author's net of contacts, among tourism professionals. The full-time internship was conducted remotely and with weekly meetings with the other interns and the association president every Monday at 15.00h.

This internship programme represents an added value for this thesis, where the author could already put into practice some of the concepts presented in the literature review section. These theoretical inputs form the foundations for the data collection of this thesis and for the general work in the internship. Thanks to the close collaborations and contacts provided by the WFTA, this thesis survey was developed and optimized by and for the real users of the food tourism, in a form of co-creation. Being involved in the activities of the WFTA also permitted to get closer and advance the understanding of some theoretical concepts that were found in the literature. This more applied approach allowed the author to directly implement what learnt and translate it into the survey design, that, in this way, represents a more realistic picture of the issue, with its challenges and opportunities. Overall, the contacts and collaborations created in this internship contributed to the quality of this research, both theoretically and practically, guaranteeing appropriate setting for answering this thesis research question and testing its hypothesis.

3.2 Research approach

An online survey approach was used to collect data in this research, containing both qualitative and quantitative measures. The survey was created and designed in such a manner that it will answer the research question: "How will culinary destinations marketing change in the future? The survey had also the objective to test the formulated hypothesis. Online survey is a systematic method for obtaining information from a sample in order to construct some quantitative descriptors of attributes of a larger population (Groves et al., 2004). Survey is the most used research methods in social science, including tourism in order to study individuals as units of analysis and measure unobservable data (Groves et al., 2011). Usually, this quantitative approach includes large number of individuals that could not be easily reached through qualitative approach such as interviews. In the time of Pandemic, the

survey methodology also allowed for a more remote data collection, particularly necessary in this period, when this thesis was conducted.

Being self-administered by respondents, the survey does not allow for the researcher's influence on the responses, attempting to reduce bias. Despite this positive characteristic, quantitative measures have also some disadvantages as they ask respondents to stick to the a priori formulated questions, limiting a more open and deep reflection on the matters in question. Quantitative approach can also limit the comprehension of thoughts that may arise from a more open qualitative approach. For these reasons, research has often encouraged the use of both quantitative and qualitative measures, if theoretically justified (Guba 1990; Letourneau & Allen, 1999). Moreover, since both qualitative and quantitative methods have their limitations, their combination could help to reduce them (Letourneau & Allen, 1999).

In this research the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative methods is advisable as the aim is to understand respondents' opinion about the future of culinary destination marketing, giving the space and possibilities to more subjecting and deep reflection on the topic. Through open questions, respondents have thus the opportunity to write down their thoughts and feelings on the topic, allowing to collect higher quality data.

3.3 Data collection and sampling

To collect data on the future of culinary tourism, a survey was designed and launched to professionals and ambassadors. In this research a sample of 38 respondents among professionals in the tourism marketing sector and ambassadors of the World Food Travel Association was collected. The survey has been forwarded by the author in the association's private group of work. With the support of the director Mr. Wolf, many ambassadors were reached to answer the survey. The survey was also sent in some specific groups on LinkedIn (e.g., trade tourism or culinary destination marketing groups) with professionals of the food tourism sector. The people selected include informed professionals with knowledge about the topic.

The ambassadors of the WFTA answered the survey through the main Nifty channel, the association's private platform where the author and his colleagues worked and exchanged materials and ideas with the director Mr. Erik Wolf.

In this project, non-probability sampling is the sampling method that was applied. Non-probability sampling methods can be used as a non-randomized approach in which the sample is drawn based on the subjective judgement of the researcher instead of using random selection (Elfil & Negida, 2017). Instead of randomization, participants are selected because they are easy to access. From the non-probability approach, we can study particular phenomena with a potential to gain valuable insights. The non-probability sample is usually used to study existing theoretical insights or developing new ones. The advantage of this sampling approach is considered less expensive, less complicated and easy to apply as compared to other methods (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). The type of non-probability that was applied is convenience sampling, in which subjects who are readily accessible or available to the researcher are selected (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

Data collection has been conducted through the online environment, mostly professionals tools like Nifty, the private website of work of the World Food Travel Association, where tourism Ambassadors are active and collaborate to the promotion of the WFTA events, LinkedIn, especially tourism professionals groups, academic researchers from the University of Girona and Southern Denmark reached by email and finally Facebook trade tourism group managed by the director of the WFTA Mr. Erik Wolf. This resulted in the questionnaire reaching a wider demographic of respondents. In the pre-test stage, the researcher checked the questionnaire in detail to ensure no significant mistakes had been made that could jeopardise results of the research.

3.4 Development of the questionnaire

As previously mentioned, this thesis is designed as a questionnaire-based survey, usually used to gain knowledge about characteristics and attitudes of individuals (Veal, 2017). The research objectives are unique to every study which suggests that each questionnaire need to be adapted to the specific context of the research. However, previous surveys can be of inputs for the development of the future ones and literature review represents an important input and instrument for a proper development of a survey (Veal, 2017).

The questionnaire was designed after careful review of existing literature and consideration of a literature gap and, finally, after having formulated hypotheses and a research question (initial crafting stage). Based on that, the development of this questionnaire has been made in accordance with provided guidelines. Brief questions, easy to follow, with no technical or specialised terms were formulated and presented to the respondents in a survey format. Multiple choice questions, questions with scale rating and open type-in questions were included. Wording was chosen carefully in order to create simple, correct and clear sentences in order to reduce ambiguity and potentially response errors. The questionnaire includes 26 questions, grouped into different categories: 1) general questions including job sector, country and age, 2) questions about the definition of the topic under investigation, 3) challenges of marketing culinary tourism, 4) development status of marketing culinary tourism, 5) operational tools used by the respondents, 6) future of culinary tourism and 7) the impact of Covid-19.

The first part of the questionnaire is represented by a brief introduction where respondents are introduced to the topic in question and thank for their time. The main body follows including questions related to the research aim, such as the challenges and opportunities of culinary tourism, its marketing tools and a more open reflection on the future. The last part includes the demographic characteristics of the respondents that are usually included at the end.

Majority of the questions are based on close responses which makes easier for respondents to complete the questionnaire, allow for easier process of the answers and enhances comparability (Ekinci, 2015). These closed questions are designed as a list of statements where respondents declare their (dis)agreement on a five-point Likert scale from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree” (Veal, 2017). The Linkert scale is one of the most commonly used formats for measuring attitudes (Bryman, 2016). Other close questions were measured

by other type of five-point scale, for example from 1 “the worst” to 5 “the best” and other questions were measured through multiple choice options. Open questions were also included as explained previously to guarantee a more open reflection on the future of culinary tourism and its marketing. More details on questions, their category and their measurements are provided in table 1 below. The complete survey questions are attached in Appendix A.

Table 1: questions of the survey grouped into categories and measurements.

Category	Survey question	Measurement
General question	Job sector: What is your job sector?	Multiple choice
	Age: how old are you	Multiple choice
	Country: In which country are you ambassador? If you are not an ambassador in which country are you a professional?	Open question
Defining culinary destination in marketing	How would you define culinary destination marketing? Please, Give your short and personal definition	Open question
Agreement to the common definition of culinary tourism	Marketing culinary tourism means to promote a destination through memorable food or beverage experiences.	1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree
Main challenges of marketing culinary tourism	What are the main challenges of marketing culinary tourism? (Content, sales, technology)	Open question
Development status of culinary destination marketing and food tourism marketing	Food tourism marketing is still not developed enough compared to the marketing in other sectors (tourism, sports, performing arts, music).	1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree
	Culinary destination marketing is not well developed as marketing in other sectors, like sport, adventure, performing arts, music.	
Operational tools for marketing culinary tourism and campaigns	<u>Evaluation of marketing tools</u>	1-5 scale from the worst to the best
	Write your evaluation from 1 to 5 for each marketing tool. Options: WOM word of mouth, social media sharing including electronic word of mouth, social media	

advertising, social media marketing, Instagram stories, Instagram posts	
<u>Used marketing tools</u>	
Which marketing tool do you use the most?	Open question
Which social media do you use the most for your marketing campaigns?	Multiple choice
Which is your usual operational tool for marketing culinary tourism in your destination? (website, social media, blog). Please answer briefly	Open question
<u>Successful actions to promote culinary tourism and World food travel day</u>	
Which is your most successful action to promote World Food Travel Day or a culinary tourism event in general? evaluate from 1 to 5	1-5 scale from least successful to 5 most successful
<p>Raise awareness about local food issues</p> <p>Invite people to talk about culinary experiences</p> <p>Invite people to share culinary experience</p> <p>Invite people to join culinary movement with shared values (sustainability, authenticity, respect), invite people to celebrate food through social media</p>	
Importance of videos as tools	1-5 scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree
Video is the most successful tool for culinary marketing.	

Future of culinary
destination events

Important factors for the future

How important are the following for destination branding?
from 1 to 5 (local food and drink, connecting people and
tourists, stakeholder participation, gastronomic diversity of
the destination, authentic culinary events)

1-5 scale from
1 very little to
5 very much

How much does culinary marketing influence destination
decision-making?

1-5 scale from
1 very little to
5 very much

Role of diversity

Marketing gastronomic diversity of a destination is an
effective strategy to increase tourists.

1-5 scale from
strongly
disagree to
strongly agree

Gastronomic diversity of a destination is a fundamental
aspect for tourists.

1-5 scale from
strongly
disagree to
strongly agree

Role of local population and contents

Future culinary events for destinations will focus
significantly more on marketing to the local population.

1-5 scale from
strongly
disagree to
strongly agree

Future culinary destination events will focus more on
producing and marketing events with significantly more
local culinary content.

1-5 scale from
strongly
disagree to
strongly agree

<u>Role of sustainability</u>		1-5 scale from 1 very little to 5 very much
	How much will future culinary events impact recycling?	
	How much will future culinary events impact food waste?	1-5 scale from 1 very little to 5 very much
<u>Role of marketing</u>		1-5 scale from 1 very little to 5 very much
	How much is <i>marketing</i> important to attract tourists to join gastronomic EVENTS when they arrive to the destination?	
	How much is <i>digital marketing</i> important to improve gastronomic TOURISM and the destination branding?	1-5 scale from 1 very little to 5 very much
<u>Future changes</u>		Open question
	Now that Covid-19 pandemic is starting to end, how will culinary events marketing change in your opinion?	
Impact of covid 19 on food tourism marketing	How did Covid-19 influence food tourism marketing?	1-5 scale from 1 very little to 5 very much
	Increase need for digital marketing, increase sensitivity towards sustainability, attention of food of origin and sources, digital involvement of people	

3.5 Data analysis procedure

Statistical package SPSS version 26.0 for Windows was used for the analysis of the collected data. Graphical presentations of the results were conducted with Microsoft Office Excel. Descriptive statistics were used to investigate respondents' perceptions over the future of culinary tourism and its marketing. Normality of data distribution was assessed for each variable of hypothesis 1 and 2. Both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed that data deviates from normal distribution. This implies that non parametric tests had to be used for testing the hypothesis. Hypothesis testing was approached by establishing a null hypothesis and the maximum acceptable level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ (Bryman, 2016).

One sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to test the hypothesis, comparing the median of the sample to the hypothetical median of 4. As we did not hypothesize any

correlations between the variables, no correlation tests, as Spearman correlation coefficient, was used to assess the relationship between variables. As respondents belonged to one group only, the analysis did not include any assessment of statistical difference between different groups (for example ANOVA test).

The multiple-choice questions were analysed calculating the frequencies and the open questions were analysed through coding procedure and group with the aim to identify similar patterns in the answers (table 2).

Table 2: Analysis of the questions.

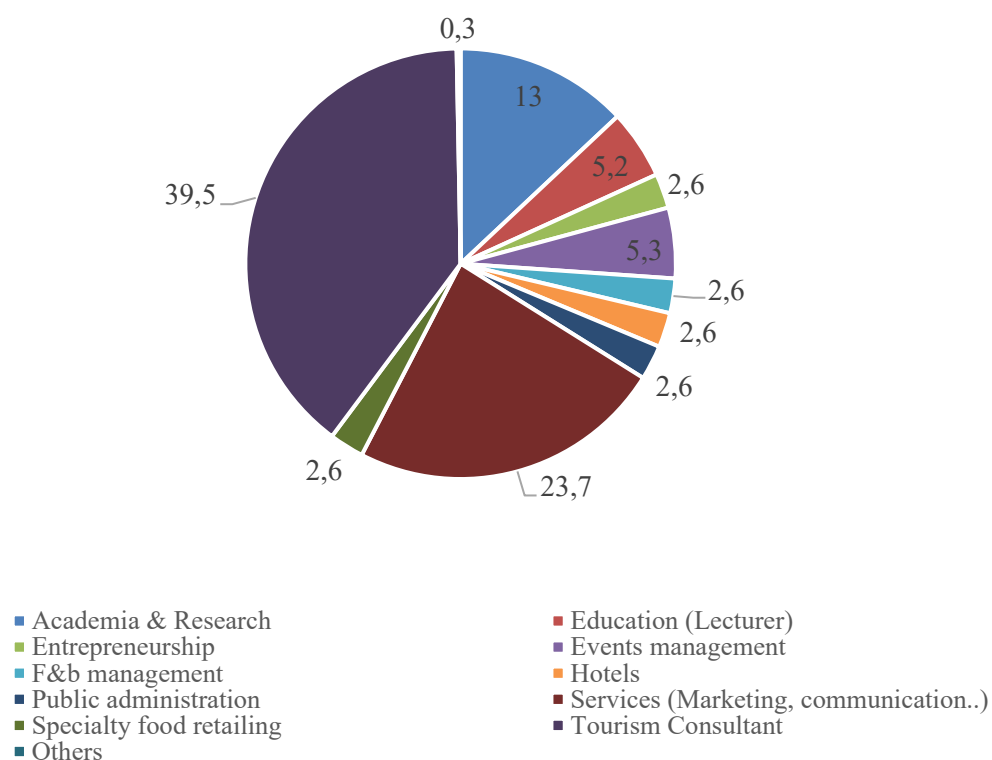
Category questions	Analysis
Questions measured through Linkert scale	One sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Descriptive statistics
Multiple choice questions, demographic questions	Descriptive statistics-frequencies
Open questions	Coding procedure and grouping

3.6 Descriptive characteristics of the respondents: job role, age and country

The first question aims at identifying the job's sector of the people involved. The researcher chose to forward the questionnaire just to tourism professionals but these people are working in different areas. For this question it was left the possibility to type down the profession that was not mentioned by the multiple choice. 39.5% of the respondents are tourism consultants, meaning they work in destination development, sales or marketing. 23.7% of the people are working in services, including marketing, communication, pr and branding. The 5.3% deals with events management. The rest is divided for a 2.6% each and encompasses different types of activities that were typed down by the respondents. Among these professions it was mentioned, Education (Lecturing), Specialty food retail, Entrepreneurship, Researcher, Public administration, F&b management, Professor, Hotels, Academic & research, Lecturer (figure 1, panel a). Most of the respondents (60.5%) had age between 18 and 35 years old, representing a rather young sample (figure 1 panel b).

In terms of countries, the sample presented a high heterogeneity, including respondents from diverse countries. 13.5% of the respondents were ambassadors or professionals operating in Spain and the rest of the responders worked in different countries within and beyond Europe (figure 1, panel c).

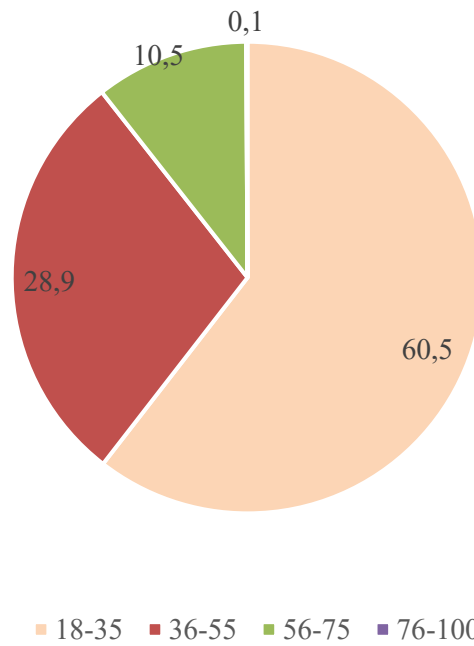
Job sector of the respondents (%)



Job sector	Percentage of respondents
Academia & Research	13
Education (Lecturer)	5.2
Entrepreneurship	2.6
Events management	5.3
F&b management	2.6
Hotels	2.6
Public administration	2.6
Services (Marketing, communication.)	23.7
Specialty food retailing	2.6
Tourism Consultant	39.5
Others	0.3

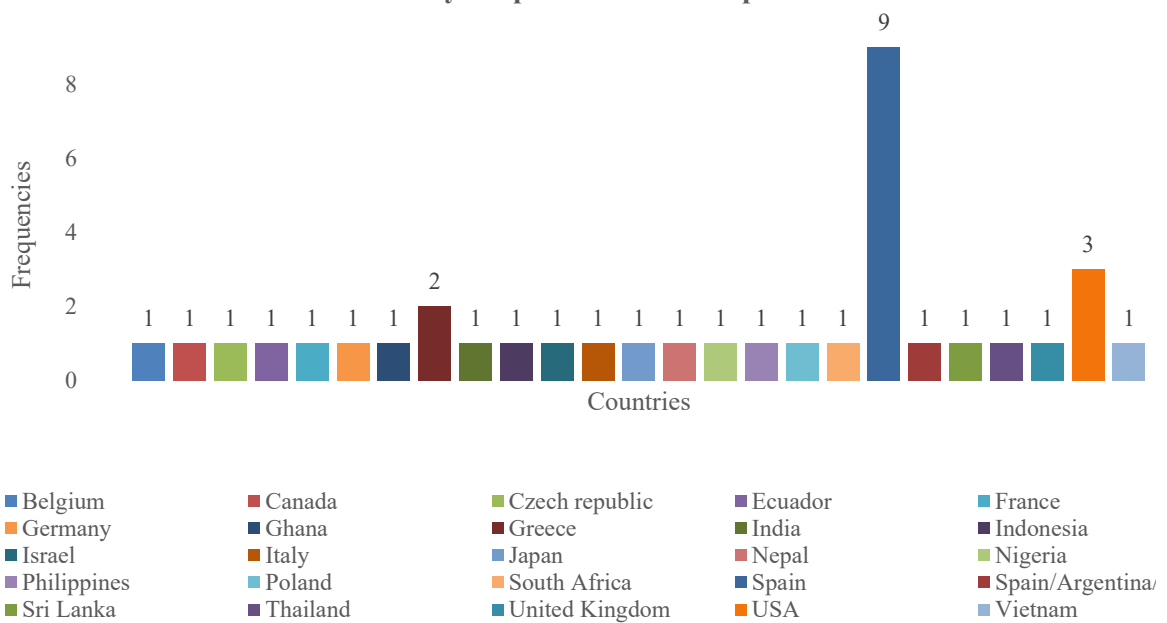
a

Age of the respondents (%)



b

Country of operation of the respondents



c

Figure 1: demographics characteristics of the respondents including job profile (panel a), age (panel b) and country of work (panel c). The above graphs and figure need to be printed in colours.

4. Results of the survey

4.1 Defining culinary tourism marketing

When asked whether they agreed on the common definition of culinary tourism marketing (“Marketing culinary tourism means to promote a destination through memorable food or beverage experiences”), respondents stated, on average, to agree with this statement (from 1-5 scale $M=4.60$, $SD=0.68$). 68.4 % of the respondents indeed stated to strongly agree with this definition (figure2).

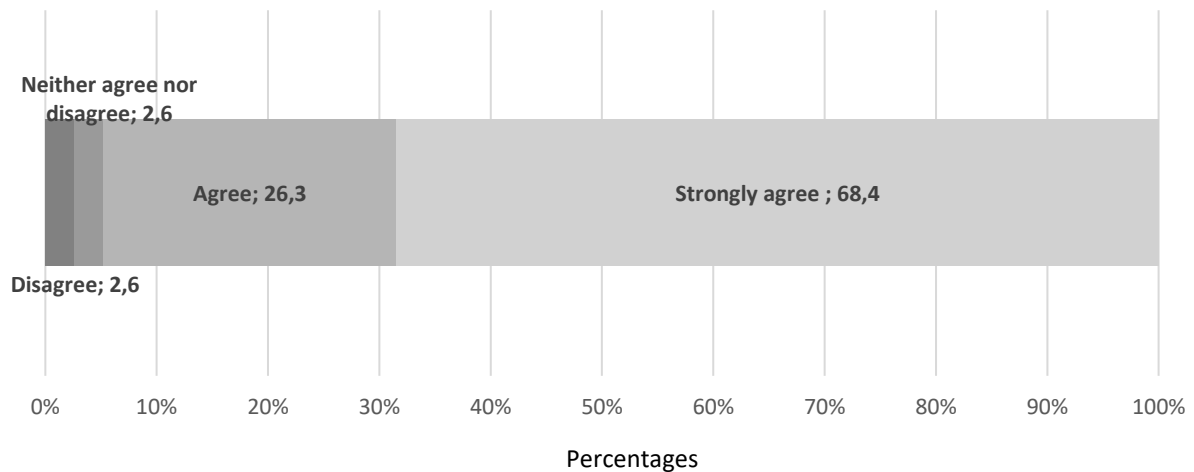


Figure 2: respondents' agreement with the statement about the definition of culinary tourism marketing. Own source figure.

When asked to report, in a more open manner, their thoughts and feelings about culinary tourism marketing, respondents raised up different concepts. The results of the coding procedure suggest that different terms were repeated by the respondents. Among others, these were related with food and gastronomic experiences, creation and communication of an identity and promotion of a food culture. Table 3 provides some examples of definitions, grouped according to the codes.

Table 3: Definition of food tourism marketing according to the respondents.

Concept/coding	Example definition
Marketing through gastronomic experiences	<i>“Marketing of a destination characterized by a strong and varied Eno gastronomic offer”</i>
	<i>“Inspiring potential visitors to visit a destination for the primary purpose of food”</i>
Creation and communication of an identity	<i>“Promote local products, creating an identity through food and beverage”</i>
	<i>“Show your heritage, customs and culture.”</i>

Promotion and
marketing of a
food culture

“Branding the uniqueness of Culinary Culture, flavours and cooking techniques in order to use it for financial advantage”.

“Creating interest and awareness about the destination's local food, ingredients, recipes and methods to educate visitors”.

“Process of value adding to the destination by promoting the culinary heritage”.

“Marketing approach that involves promoting specific location with its own products (touristic, gastronomic and agricultural)”.

Based on these answers, it can be drawn that a comprehensive definition of culinary tourism marketing should be one that includes the concept of experience, identity and culture. While the common definition (“Marketing culinary tourism means to promote a destination through memorable food or beverage experiences”) restricts the focus on the destination (market a destination), so on a physical place, a more comprehensive definition, according to the respondents, should enlarge this focus beyond that. It, therefore, seems that marketing culinary tourism is more about promoting a food cultural identity or culinary heritage than a mere physical destination or place. A new definition could be indeed proposed: “Marketing culinary tourism means to promote a culinary heritage through gastronomic experiences.” The consequences of this marketing can be varied and do not necessarily need to be included in this definition. Promoting the culinary heritage can indeed lead to an increased awareness from the tourists about that destination, food culture and products. It can also lead to an increased education, in which visitors get to know better the destination and its particular heritage, including recipes, local cooking techniques etc...

4.2 Main challenges and status of development

When asked to give an evaluation about the development status of culinary tourism and marketing respondents were somewhat heterogeneous. 26.3 % of them strongly agreed on the consideration that culinary tourism and marketing are not well developed as marketing in other sectors, like sport, adventure or culture. Some respondents did not agree with this view and some were rather neutral. In general, respondents had a rather neutral view on the matter ($M=3.42$, $SD= 1.22$) (figure 3).

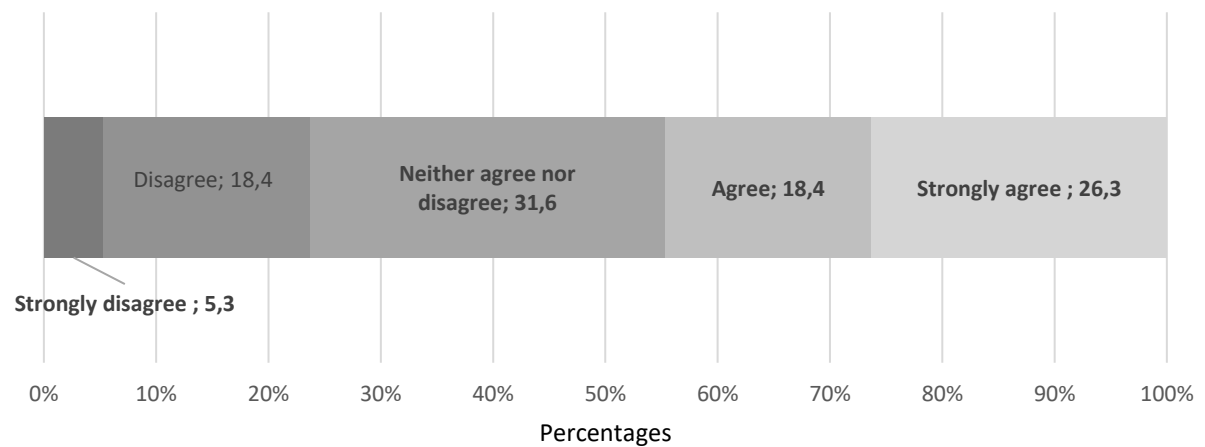


Figure 3: respondents' agreement with the statement about the status of development of culinary tourism and its marketing. Own source figure.

When asked to report which are the main challenges in marketing culinary tourism, respondents mentioned among others: having access to technology to create marketing campaigns, the difficulties in identifying the right platforms, attracting attention of the users, getting into the correct market etc.. These examples were grouped into different macro-factors in order to pinpoint the main challenges. Table 4 includes factors related with innovation and technology, financial factors, factors related with differentiation and positioning, and factors related with the development of creative contents.

Table 4: Challenges of culinary tourism and marketing with examples raised by the respondents

Challenges	Examples
Technology and innovation	<p><i>"Having access to technology to create good marketing campaigns."</i></p> <p><i>"Lack of skills in technology of social media for most people working in the industry and keeping up with current marketing trends. Data analysis is also difficult and other GDPR issues need to be considered."</i></p>
Financial budget	<p><i>"Cost. Because these marketing techniques should be attractive"</i></p> <p><i>"Interest, sales, lack of resources (financial)"</i></p>

Differentiation
and
positioning

“Getting to the correct market.”

“how to promote effectively to the targeted customer”

“Differentiation of products. There is too much information and it's often exaggerated, especially in social media.”

“Find niche”

Creativity in
contents

“creating relevant, new and diverse content fast enough for social medias”

“Sales, without a doubt. Generating enough interest to convert visits into sales is the hardest part”

“the conservative destination stakeholders (such as regional governments)”.

“Create authenticity, develop and experience”

Overall, respondents considered that marketing culinary tourism will need a boost in the technology and digital platforms. One of the main challenges that respondents viewed in this sector was indeed the access of to the right technology to create good marketing campaigns or the access to technological knowledge and know-how. Probably this is also the reason why 26.3 % of the respondents strongly agree on the idea that marketing culinary tourism is somewhat behind in its development compared to other sectors, such as the one of sport or music. In addition, 18.4 % of the respondents also agreed on this development stage of marketing culinary tourism. Lack of access to technology and to its knowledge and expertise might keep this sector a bit behind and prevent that culinary tourism is properly market, promoted and even branded. More specifically, respondents also mentioned the lack of knowledge on social media as a more specific challenges than the use of technology in general. Lack of use of social media or its correct use prevent people working in this industry to keep up and monitor marketing trends and thus, to successfully promote the sector. Another main challenge raised by the respondents was related with the differentiation strategy and market position of culinary tourism. Respondents found difficult to effectively promote culinary tourism to the target costumer, to get into the correct market and to

differentiate their products. Finding the right niche and costumer target is a challenge especially when access or knowledge of technology is scarce.

4.3 Tools used to market culinary tourism: the status quo

When asked to evaluate some of the marketing tools, respondents evaluated social media advertising, social media marketing and Instagram posts with a medium mark, around 3 points from a scale from 1 to 5 (very good). Social media advertising got an average score of 3.11 (SD = 0.80), social media marketing got a score of 3.33 (SD= 0.73) and Instagram posts got a score of 3.51 (SD=0.62) (table 5). These results suggest that marketing tools for culinary tourism are not so positively considered by respondents. This result suggests a coherence with the results in the previous section where access and knowledge on the technology and digital tools were raised up by respondents as one of the main challenges of the sector.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for the evaluation of marketing tools for culinary tourism.

Item	N	Mean	SD
Evaluation of social media advertising	38	3.11	0.80
Evaluation of social media marketing	38	3.33	0.73
Evaluation of Instagram posts	38	3.52	0.63
Valid N (listwise)	38		

In general, respondents stated to use different social media tools such as Instagram, websites, Tic-toc, YouTube, Facebook and some to reply on social relationships. Instagram appears to be the most used social media tools in marketing culinary tourism (table 6).

Table 6: Frequencies and percentages of respondent's using different marketing tools.

Marketing tools to promote culinary tourism	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	7	18.42
Instagram	16	42.11
Linkedin	1	2.63
Tic-Toc	3	7.89
Twitter	1	2.63
YouTube	6	15.79
None	1	2.63
Total	38	100.0

Regarding the use of videos, respondents were not so convinced that videos are most successful tool for culinary marketing (from a scale 1-5 (most successful) the indicated Mean was 3.92, SD=1.0). In general, though, 34.2 % of the respondents strongly agreed that videos represent the most successful tool for culinary marketing (figure 4).

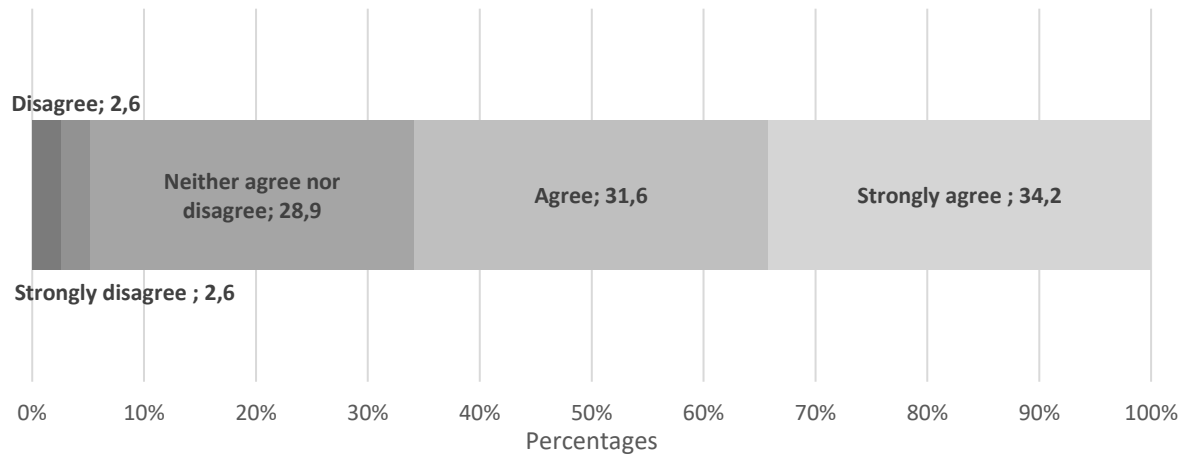


Figure 4: respondents' agreement with the statement about the video tools. Own source figure.

4.4 The future of culinary tourism and important factors for its future development

4.4.1 A general overview-qualitative responses

When asked to reflect on the changes that the culinary tourism and marketing will experience, respondents reported many factors. Among these, the importance to go back to personal interaction was mentioned. Respondents also mentioned the need to keep hybridity as the “new normal” in this period. For some, this is a constant that will remain. Moreover, respondents mentioned that in the future there will be more focus on the niche rather than on mass tourism, with more attention to authenticity and local cultures. In this regard, the experience tourism will also probably grow, events that focus their attention on providing a sensory experience that permits tourists to engage more in the activities they undertake. In addition, there will be more focus on health and sustainability, especially considering the post-covid situation. There will be new hygiene standards and people will be more careful on their health when they travel and in the activities they choose. Last, digital marketing will have a bigger role, as online information become more impactful during covid times (table 7).

Table 7: Crucial changes for the future of culinary tourism with examples raised by the respondents.

Changes for the future of culinary tourism-category	Examples
More personal involvement and interaction with hybridity as the “new normal”	<p><i>“Everything has gone digital. Culinary events will be seen differently from the physical and hybrid opportunities”</i></p> <p><i>“I think hybrid events will be more popular.”</i></p> <p><i>“in the short term they will become physical again. in the long run increasingly oriented towards digital sensoriality”</i></p>
More focus on the niche than the mass	<i>“More selective toward the target markets. More niche, less mass”</i>
More experience tourism	<p><i>“Authenticity will be key, as well as, engagement with locals</i></p> <p><i>“Now people are eagerly awaiting to travel. It would be more beneficial if we could have a plan on how to promote gastronomic activities for travellers”</i></p> <p><i>“There should be a proper investigation of the most demanding culinary experience of any country (ex- France- wine tourism, Italy - purely food) and then arrange specific programs to increase the interest of people to take part in arranged activities (ex- France can arrange a large scale wine tourism activities and can give a chance for travellers to engage in wine making activities). As a result, people would come to experience these new things”</i></p>
More focus on health and sustainability	<i>“I feel there needs to be a component built into marketing that addresses any health concerns a potential customer may have.”</i>

	<p><i>“With more hygiene measures and higher standards to reduce environmental impacts”</i></p> <p><i>“There will be an emphasis on safety precautions and a focus on community”</i></p>
Central role of digital marketing	<p><i>“The marketing strategies will be more and more digitalized, so it will be crucial to work with social media and with a clever positioning on the web”</i></p> <p><i>“As people are engaged in digital spaces more than they were before the pandemic, online information is more impactful than it was. Events themselves still should be offline if they are experience-based. If they are about just sharing knowledge without tasting, like about history and nutrition, they can attract audience online”</i></p>

4.4.2 Testing the hypothesis: Will tourism become more local?

First, on a more general quantitative level, respondents agreed on the importance to raise awareness about local food issues ($M=3.38$, $SD=0.64$), on the importance to invite people to talk and share about culinary experiences ($M=3.51$, $SD=0.63$) and on the importance of culinary movements with shared values such as sustainability, authenticity and respect ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.56$). Different are the factors that were mentioned for the future of culinary tourism. These were grouped into factors related with diversity, local population and contents, sustainability and the role of digital marketing. Respondents considered important to better integrate and promote gastronomic diversity of a destination as fundamental aspect for the tourism ($M= 4.03$, $SD= 0.88$) and also as a strategic tool to increase tourists in the future ($M=4.26$, $SD=0.76$). With an attention for sustainability related issues, respondents reflected on the role and impact of culinary events on topics such as food waste and recycling. Respondents stated that according to them future culinary events will somehow impact food waste ($M= 3.31$, $SD=1.30$) and recycling ($M= 3.39$, $SD= 1.24$). Last, respondents considered digital marketing and marketing in general of great importance for the future of culinary tourism. Respondents stated that digital marketing is really important to improve gastronomic tourism and the destination branding ($M= 4.55$, $SD= 0.72$). Also the role of marketing was recognized to attract tourists to join gastronomic events when they arrive at the destination ($M= 4.34$, $SD=0.81$) Moreover, respondents recognized the importance of local culinary contents, stating that future culinary destination events will have to focus more on producing and marketing events with significantly more local culinary

contents (M= 4.37, SD= 0.85). Also, the marketing and the promotion of these events will have to be targeted and focused on more local populations as well (M=3.68, SD=1.02) (table 8).

Table 8: Crucial factors for the future of culinary tourism and marketing. Importance rating on 1-5 scale.

Factor	Items	N	Mean	SD
Diversity	Gastronomic diversity of a destination	38	4.02	0.88
	Marketing gastronomic diversity		4.26	0.76
Sustainability	Food waste impact	38	3.31	1.30
	Recycling impact	38	3.39	1.24
Marketing and digital	Marketing for gastronomic tourism	38	4.34	0.81
	Digital marketing for gastronomic tourism and destination branding	38	4.55	0.72
Local	Focus on local contents	38	4.37	0.85
	Focus on local population	38	3.68	1.01

As well as understanding, at a more general level, how culinary tourism marketing will progress and develop in the future, the current thesis aimed to test two specific hypothesis. Based on the literature review, this thesis aimed at investigating whether food culinary tourism (events and destinations) will become more local, with more attention to local contents (H1: *Future culinary destination events will focus more on producing and marketing events with significantly more local culinary content*) and local population (H2: *Future culinary events for destinations will focus significantly more on marketing to the local population*). Previous table 6 shows the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for the role of local contents and population. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the two items was calculated and showed that the two items cannot be incorporated in one single construct but should be analysed separately (Cronbach's alpha= 0.41). The data

of both variables “local content” and “local population” deviates from the normal distribution as the significance levels for Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests (usually used for small sample size like in this thesis) were lower than 0.05 (Appendix B). One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was conducted for both variables “local contents” and “local population.” The p-value for the one sample Wilcoxon test for “local contents” was equal to 0.014, which is less than the significance alpha value of 0.05. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and it can be concluded that the median for “local contents” is significantly different from the hypothesized median of 4. The hypothesis 1, namely that Future culinary events for destinations will focus significantly more on marketing to the local content, is confirmed. Food ambassadors think that the future of culinary tourism will significantly more focus on local contents in the future.

The p-value for the one sample Wilcoxon test for “local population” was equal to 0.065, signalling a marginally significant or non-significant result (depending on the interpretations). Hypothesis 2, namely *future culinary events for destinations will focus significantly more on marketing to the local population* is therefore partly confirmed. It seems that food ambassadors consider important the role of local population in the future of this sector but its focus will not be significantly higher in the future (as the value is close to significance). The test statistics for both variables are displayed in table 9.

Table 9: One-sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Summary for the role of local contents and population

Items	Total N	Test statistic	Standard Error	Standardized Test statistics	Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)
Local contents	38	262.50	35.53	2.45	.014
Local population	38	99.00	34.47	-1.84	.065

As it can be seen in the figure below (figure 5), the observed median of “culinary contents” is higher than the hypothesized median of 4. Hypothesis 1 is accepted. The observed median of “culinary population” is not higher than the hypothesized median of 4. Hypothesis 2 is not accepted, based on this criterium.

Variable: local contents

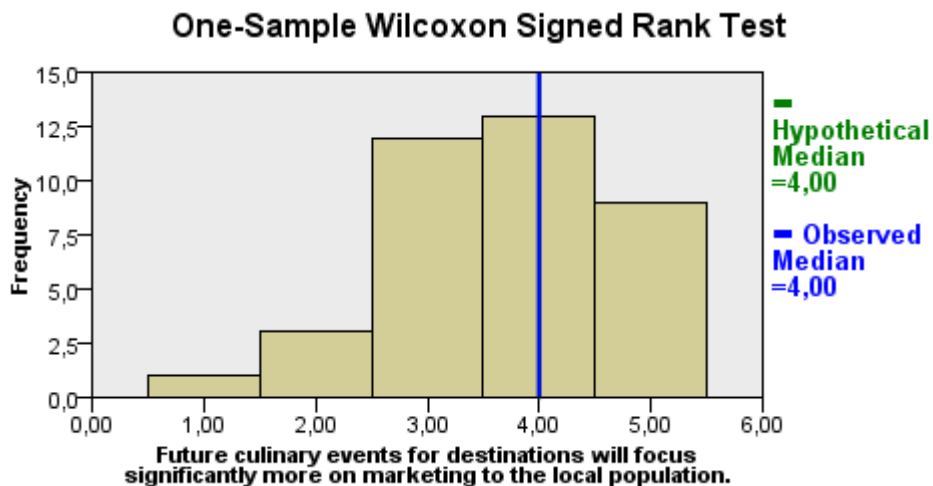
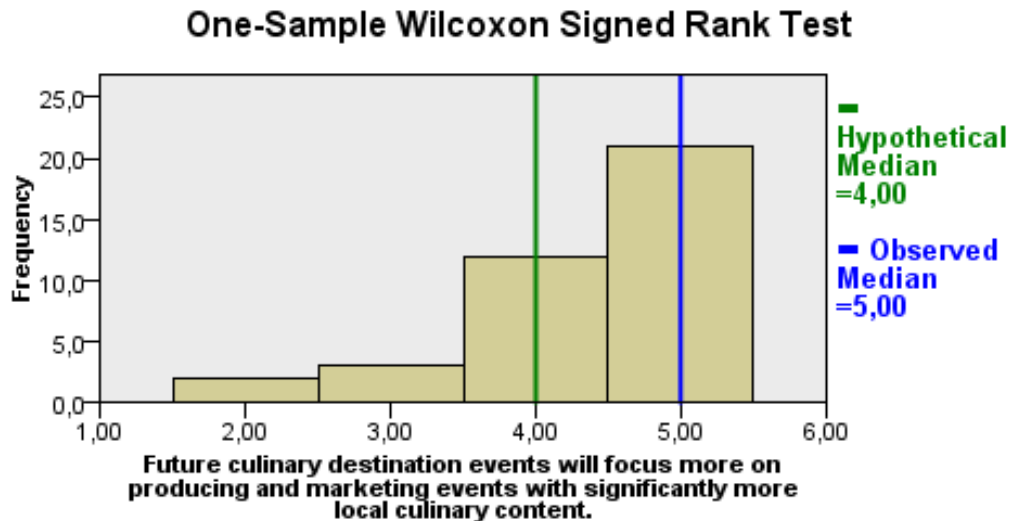


Figure 5: Histogram for the variables “local contents“ and “local population” on the future of culinary tourism and marketing. Own source.

4.5 The impact of Covid on food tourism: preliminary insights

When asked how covid19 influenced food tourism marketing, respondents evaluated 4 main factors, the digital involvement of people, the increased need for digital marketing, the increased sensitivity to sustainability related topics and the increased attention to food origin and sources. Respondents somewhat agrees that these represent relevant factors raised up the pandemic, which increased particularly the attention to food sources and origin (table 10). More than half of the respondents (52.2%) agreed that the pandemic increased the need for digitalization and digital marketing in promoting events and content. Respondents also agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic increased the attention towards sustainability and pushed

forward the digital involvement of people. Interest towards food origin and sources also increased during the pandemic and 73.1 % of the respondents agreed on that (figure 6).

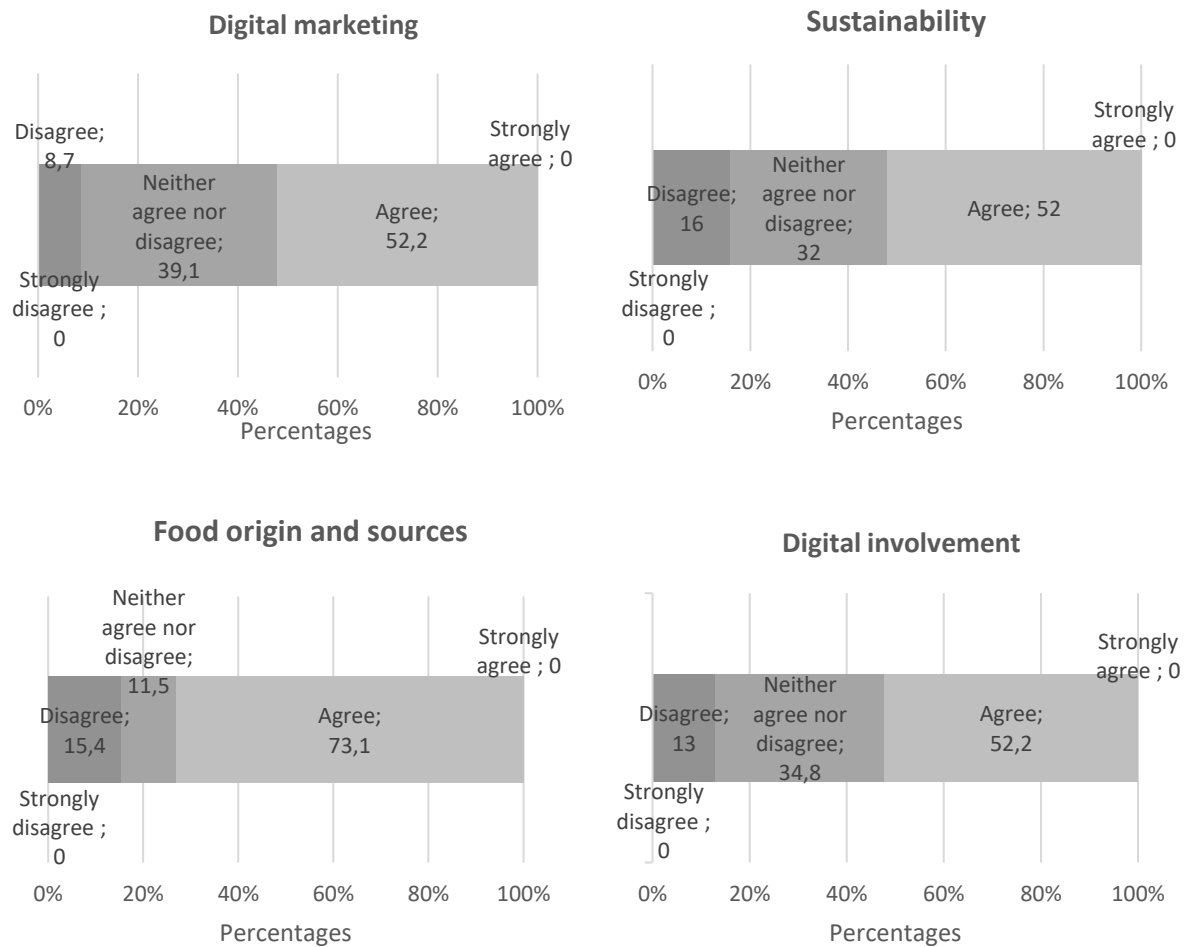


Figure 6: Respondents agreement with the statement regarding the Covid-19 impact. Own source figure.

Table 10: Descriptive statistics for the evaluation of the Covid-19 impact of culinary tourism marketing.

Item	N	Mean	SD
Increased need for digital marketing	38	3.44	0.66
Increased sensitivity towards sustainability	38	3.36	0.76
Increased attention on food origin and sources	38	3.58	0.76
Increased digital involvement of people	38	3.39	0.72
Valid N (listwise)	38		

5. Discussion

Food represents an increasingly important factor for tourism industry. Food experiences represents a way to connect with the cultural heritage and identity of a destination and as a result represent an important marketing strategy in the tourism industry. Many destinations indeed promote their local gastronomy to attract visitors and increase their economic revenues. In addition, food events influence the image and loyalty of a destination, creating an emotional bond between the tourist and the destination. For these benefits, tourism literature is increasingly turning its attention on food tourism and the understanding on how this sector will evolve in the future is essential. Although attention is increasing, research that explores the future of culinary tourism and its marketing is scarce and challenges and opportunities have not been investigated yet.

The present thesis had the aim to increase the understanding of the future of culinary tourism and its marketing, from the perspective of who is working in this sector nowadays. As an explorative analysis of future challenges and opportunities, this study collected data among food ambassadors and professionals connected with the largest and most important association in this field: the World Food Travel Association, in which the author conducted an internship program to conduct this study and collect the research data. Qualitative and quantitative measures were included in a survey launched to the food ambassadors in order to collect an overview on the future of culinary tourism. A brief summary and discussion of the main results is provided in the next section, next to a reflection on the study limitations.

5.1 Brief summary and discussion of the results

Results of this study showed that the future of culinary tourism is related to some main important concepts that came out repeatedly in different answers of the survey. Some of these concepts are in line with the trends identified by recent tourism literature and some seems more innovative, opening the way to interesting new concepts and opportunities for the future of culinary tourism and its marketing.

Among the respondents, there was agreement that the future of culinary tourism will be characterized by more sensory experiences, by the valorisation and marketing of cultural meaning, by uniqueness and authenticity and emotional components, among others. Respondents agreed that food has an important marketing function for a destination and it will be like this even more in the future. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a greater valorisation of local destinations and this will be reflected in the future of the field, according to the experts. There will be more attention to local and cultural meaning, uniqueness and authenticity. This seems in line with recent studies on the topic which underline the increasing trend towards niche tourism rather than mass tourism (e.g., Richards, 2021; Wiedmann et al. 2018). The emerging idea is that tourists will be increasingly more interested in touristic offers that value uniqueness and an emotional component, different from the rest. As confirmed by the results of this study, tourists will be increasingly more in

search for special experiences that they can remember and that diversify them from others. Differently from mass tourism, this trend will encourage local and small-scale events and opportunities, leading to stronger connections between the tourist and the destination (Silkes, Cai & Lehto, 2013). The hypothesis testing confirms this ideas and trend in quantitative way. Hypothesis 1 stated that *future culinary destination events will focus more on producing and marketing events with significantly more local **culinary content*** and hypothesis 2 stated that *future culinary events for destinations will focus significantly more on marketing to the **local population***. Hypothesis 1 was confirmed suggesting a support for the general trend in culinary tourism and its marketing for more local contents. Although hypothesis 2 was formally rejected, the p-value of the analysis showed a marginal significance, shoring a partial support for the idea that the future of culinary tourism and its marketing will focus more (but seems not significantly more) on local populations.

Within this context, where local contents, populations, and authenticity seem to be the key, the results of this thesis shed the light on an important phenomenon and trend: tourism for sensory experiences. Activating sensorial experiences seem part of a marketing strategy by different ambassadors with the aim to reach a unique brand experience through sensory marketing (Wiedmann et al., 2018). It comes out clear that sensory experiences will become a fundamental marker in an increasingly competitive contexts with many options and offers to choose from. Sensory experiences are also connected with the concept of diversity and cultural identity, as they are considered as a powerful tool to promote local cultural identity of the destination and its diversity from the rest. Marketing this diversity, though, seems far from an easy challenge as mentioned by the respondents when asked to reflect on the main challenges in marketing culinary tourism. “Create authenticity and develop experience” was recognized as one of the main challenges, also considering the fast and dynamic setting of today’s type of communications.

While food ambassadors acknowledged that food has become a marketing tool to attract tourists (Du Rand & Heath, 2006), they also recognize that some challenges need to be solved in the future to really optimize this potential. The challenges are mainly centred around the use of technology and innovation which, in this field, often lays behind. “Having access to technology to create good marketing campaigns” is recognized as a pivotal factor that they wish to change to boost culinary tourism in the future, as well as the use of social media. Food ambassadors underline the lack of skills in technology and social media of most people working in the industry, thus stressing a rather innovative point in this overall picture.

A change that food ambassadors see in the future of culinary tourism is related with digitalization and digital marketing. Food ambassadors recognize that “Everything has gone digital. Culinary events will be seen differently from the physical and hybrid opportunities.” Marketing strategies of the future will therefore need to adapt with this change and become “more and more digitalized, so it will be crucial to work with social media and with a clever positioning on the web.”

Next to digital marketing and innovation, the role of sustainability in the future of marketing culinary tourism was stressed out by the ambassadors, thus remarking a central trend in the literature as well (e.g., de Jong & Varley, 2018). As well as mentioning social and economic sustainability as relevant factor in the future of culinary tourism, food ambassadors stressed the role of environmental sustainability and agreed on the fact that its importance will occupy more space in the future. Specifically, the results of this study showed that recycling and food waste are important issues taken into account by the experts who will increasingly assess the extent to which a touristic event impact on sustainability concerns, as on recycling and food waste. Sustainability concerns were also raised up in the overall discussion of Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on food tourism. The pandemic has led many changes in the field, one of which related with an increased awareness of sustainability and health. In the discussion about the changes driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, the food ambassadors mentioned the need to be more attentive towards sustainability and health related issues in the culinary tourism. These points were also touched by preliminary research stating how the pandemic has revealed a series of failures in the global tourism system, including the vulnerabilities of workers, tourism businesses, sectors and global supply chains (Benjamin et al., 2020; Brouder, 2020; Hall et al., 2020).

5.2 Limitations of the current research

This study has some limitations that can be acknowledged.

First, although the survey method has some advantages (e.g., the cost to gather a sample is pretty low and it is easy to use), it can also lead to answers that can be considered “societal accepted” or more in line with what the respondents think the researcher would like to find out. It can be therefore difficult to know how well the collected data are representing the true concern of the population (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). This limitation was partially attenuated in this thesis by adding qualitative measures in the survey design, which allowed respondents to give their personal opinion about the topic in an open way, elaborating on their opinions rather than simply selecting one option.

Second, this study relied on a rather small sample size of food ambassadors connected with the Food World Travel Associations. While on the one hand this limited sample size can represent a limitation for the generalizability of the answers, it can also represent an advantage for the quality of the data. The respondents of this survey were indeed highly involved and connected with the association and probably more incline to dedicate time and commitment in answering the questions of this survey than general respondents. The survey was also launched in collaboration with the association, thus from “inside” the organization with which the respondents connect and associate. Third, in order to limit the time of response, the survey included both qualitative and quantitative measures. Although this limited the time of the survey and provided diversity, it may represent a limitation in this study that had an explorative intent, where only qualitative questions could be favoured.

6. Conclusion

Tourism industry and research is increasingly turning its attention on gastronomy as a way to increase visitors and promote the cultural identity of a destination, binding tourists to a place. Acknowledging the increasing trend towards niche tourism, which promotes local heritage, social sustainability, emotional components and sensory experiences, especially pronounced in the context of culinary tourism and its marketing, the current thesis focused on culinary tourism and its marketing as research topic. Although attention is increasing, research that explores the future of culinary tourism is scarce and challenges and opportunities have not been investigated yet. This thesis aimed to contribute to this knowledge gap, addressing the question of how culinary destinations marketing will change in the future.

The research was conducted using a sample obtained within the context of an internship programme by the author, who got in contact and worked with the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) for his internship. Thanks to the close collaborations and contacts provided by the WFTA, a quantitative survey was developed and launched to the WFTA members and partners who expressed their opinions on the future of culinary tourism. Through both qualitative and quantitative measures, different factors were identified as central elements in the future of culinary tourism and marketing. Among others, digital marketing, cultural meaning and identity, sensory experiences and sustainability were identified and discussed as fundamental markers in the future of the sector. It came out clear, from this study, that food has an important marketing function for a destination and it will be like this even more in the future. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a greater valorisation of local destinations and this will be reflected in the future of the field and its marketing.

Local and cultural meaning, uniqueness and authenticity will be the key component for a flourish. This study seems to confirm recent literature on the topic which underlined the increasing trend towards niche tourism rather than mass tourism (e.g., Richards, 2021; Wiedmann et al. 2018). The emerging phenomenon centred around the concept of “locality”: tourists will be increasingly more interested in touristic offers that value uniqueness and an emotional component, special experiences with a different positioning in mind. Differently from mass tourism, this trend will encourage local and small-scale events and opportunities, with more attention of the local population, community and its values. This will also strengthen the connections between the tourist and the destination. Challenges and opportunities of culinary tourism and its marketing were also discussed by the food ambassadors, providing an explorative overview of how this field will evolve and transform in the future.

As a methodological reflection, this study also showed how combining qualitative and quantitative measures can increase the quality of the data when the intent is rather explorative. Quantitative methods alone can indeed lead to socially accepted responses which can be filtered out by adding qualitative open responses. These allowed respondents to give their personal opinion about the topic in an open way, elaborating on their opinions rather

than simply selecting one option. Adopting this approach, this thesis shows how much more elaborated the answers of the respondents became, providing in-depth information on the future of culinary tourism and its marketing that would not have been possible to get through a quantitative approach only. In addition, this study demonstrated the value of recruiting food ambassadors that were truly interested in the topic of this research, as people from “within” the sector and not external. These respondents were indeed highly involved and connected with the association and probably more incline to dedicate time and commitment in answering the survey than general respondents outside the network of food ambassadors.

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Appendix A: Complete survey questions

How will culinary destination marketing change in the future?

This Survey has the aim of a quantitative data analysis for my thesis whose title is:

Analysis of future challenges and opportunities for marketing culinary tourism

Thank you very much for participating to the survey

Vincenzo Granato

Here my LinkedIn to connect each other:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/vincenzogranato95/>

*Campo obbligatorio

1. What is your job sector? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ☐ Services (Marketing, communication, Pr, branding)
- ☐ Tourism Consultant (Destination development, Sales, marketing)
- ☐ Events management
- ☐ Other: Which one? Write it down
- ☐ Altro: _____

2. How would you define culinary destination marketing? Please, Give your short * and personal definition

3. Marketing culinary tourism means to promote a destination through memorable food or beverage experiences.

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

4. Culinary destination marketing is not well developed as marketing in other sectors, like sport, adventure, performing arts, music.

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

5. Which is your usual operational tool for marketing culinary tourism in your destination?(website, social media, blog). Please answer briefly

6. Food tourism marketing is still not developed enough compared to the marketing in other sectors (tourism, sports, performing arts, music).

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

7. Future culinary destination events will focus more on producing and marketing events with significantly more local culinary content.

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

8. How much is digital marketing important to improve gastronomic TOURISM and the destination branding?

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very little	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very much

9. How much is marketing important to attract tourists to join gastronomic EVENTS when they arrive to the destination?

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very little	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very much

10. Future culinary events for destinations will focus significantly more on marketing to the local population.

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

11. How much will future culinary events impact food waste? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very little	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very much

12. How much will future culinary events impact recycling? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very little	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very much

13. How did Covid-19 influence food tourism marketing? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	1 (very little)	2	3	4	5 (very much)
It increased the need for digital marketing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It increased sensitivity towards sustainability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It increased the attention of food origin and sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It increased digital involvement of people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Now that Covid-19 pandemic is starting to end, how will culinary events marketing change in your opinion? *

15. Video is the most successful tool for culinary marketing. *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

16. Which social media do you use the most for your marketing campaigns? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

☐ LinkedIn

☐ Instagram

☐ Facebook

☐ YouTube

☐ Pinterest

☐ Tic-Toc

☐ Other:

☐ Altro: _____

17. Which is your most successful action to promote World Food Travel Day or a *
culinary tourism event in general? evaluate from 1 to 5

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	1 (less successful)	2	3	4	5 (most successful)
Raise awareness about local food issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Invite people to talk about culinary experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Invite people to share culinary experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Invite people to join a culinary movement with shared values (sustainability, authenticity, respect)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Invite people to celebrate food through social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Which marketing tool do you use the most? *

19. Write your evaluation from 1 to 5 for each marketing tool. *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	1 (the worst)	2	3	4	5 (the best)
WOM (word of mouth)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media sharing, e-WOM (electronic word of mouth)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media marketing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram stories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram posts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. What are the main challenges of marketing culinary tourism? (content, sales, * technology)

21. How important are the following for destination branding? from 1 to 5 *

Contrassegna solo un ovale per riga.

	1 (very little)	2	3	4	5 (very much)
local food and drink	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
connecting local people and tourists	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stakeholders participation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
gastronomic diversity of the destination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
authentic culinary events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. Gastronomic diversity of a destination is a fundamental aspect for tourists. *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

23. Marketing gastronomic diversity of a destination is an effective strategy to increase tourists. *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	strongly agree

24. How much does culinary marketing influence destination decision-making? *

Contrassegna solo un ovale.

	1	2	3	4	5	
very little	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very much

25. In which country are you ambassador? If you are not an ambassador in which * country are you a professional?

26. How old are you? *

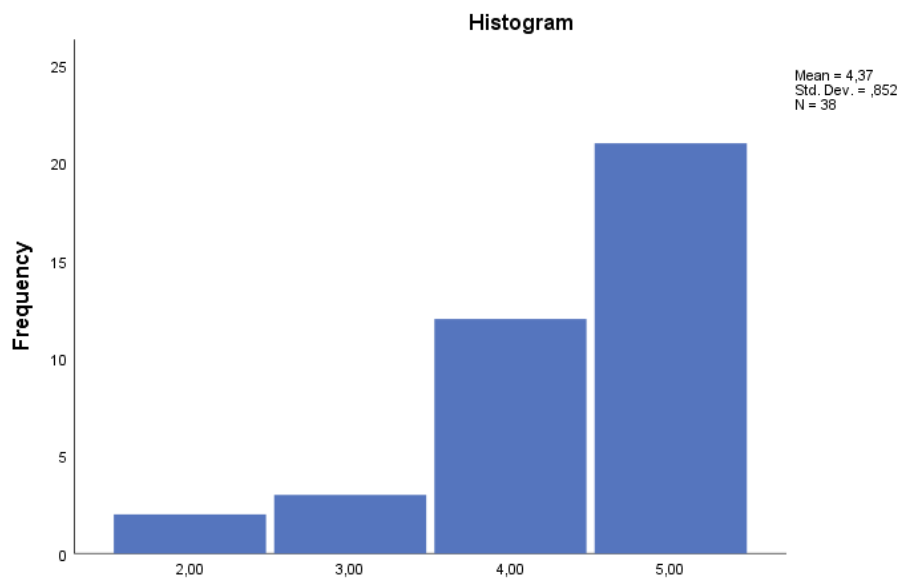
Contrassegna solo un ovale.

- ☐ 18-35
☐ 36-55
☐ 56-75
☐ 76-100
☐ I prefer not to answer

Appendix B: Normal distribution tests

	Tests of Normality					
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Future culinary destination events will focus more on producing and marketing events with significantly more local culinary content.	,323	38	,000	,730	38	,000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



Future culinary destination events will focus more on producing and marketing events with significantly more local culinary content.

	Tests of Normality					
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Future culinary events for destinations will focus significantly more on marketing to the local population.	,201	38	,000	,889	38	,001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

