DEVELOPING AND BRANDING GASTRONOMY TOURISM DESTINATIONS WITHIN OIC

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

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B2B	Business-to-business
B2C	Business-to-consumer
CCG	Creative Cities of Gastronomy
CFW	Cairo Food Week
COMCEC	Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation
CTA	Culinary Tourism Alliance
CTR	Chamber of tourism establishments and restaurants
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisation
ECA	Egyptian Chefs Association
EHA	Egyptian Hotel Association
EIR	Economic Impact Research
ENIT	The Italian National Tourist Board
ENIT SpA	Italian National Tourist Board
FIBE	Italian Federation of Bars and Catering
GDP	Gross Domestic product
ICDT	The OIC Trade Centre
ICE	The Italian Trade Agency
ICIF	Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IGCAT	International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts, and Tourism
IPA	Importance-performance analysis
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
KTAs	Key Tourism Attractions
NFSA	National Food Safety Authority
NMEC	National Museum of Egyptian civilization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
POATE	Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo
PPPs	Public-Private Partnerships
SESRIC	The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis
TCC	Tourism Carrying Capacity
TUIK	Turkish Statistical Institute
TURSAB	The Association of Turkish Travel Agencies
UCCN	The UNESCO Creative Cities Network
UCOTA	Uganda Community Tourism Association
UHOA	Uganda Hotel Owners' Association
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISG	The University of Gastronomic Sciences
UNPLI	The Italian National Union of the Pro Loco Associations
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization

USD	**The United States dollar**
WFTA	**World Food Travel Association**
WTO	**World Tourism Organization**
WTTC	**World Travel & Tourism Council**

INTRODUCTION

Food is a core element in tourism experiences and a critical factor contributing to destinations and hospitality businesses' success. Recent reports show that around one-quarter of tourists' budget is spent on food and beverage, reaching even more than one-third of expensive destinations (The World Food Travel Association, 2020). As a central component of the tourist experience, food is also considered an element driving travel behavior and shaping the destination selection process. Aware of this potential impact, several destinations have started to position themselves as attractive gastronomy destinations. Gastronomy tourism, therefore, has become a growing niche tourism market that demands acute attention if destinations (especially those with rich culinary traditions yet whose share of the tourism market is still limited such as several OIC state members) are to harness the power of this promising market.

The intersection between tourism and food has often been expressed through various concepts, including food tourism, gastronomy tourism, gourmet tourism, and culinary tourism (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). Food tourism, one of the most common concepts used to describe this intersection, entails travel to gastronomic destinations where the desire to consume local food products serves as the primary motivation for travel. Tourists typically engage in tailored programs that encompass visits to food producers and farmer markets, participation in food and gastronomic festivals, exploration of restaurants and cooking shows, as well as attending events offering unique culinary experiences (Hall & Sharples, 2004).

Gastronomy tourism, as conceptualized in tourism literature, is a deliberately crafted experience that capitalizes on tourists' inclination to invest in food experiences while abroad, enriching their cultural immersion (Kumar, 2019). It is identified as a form of special interest tourism wherein participants seek personal development, contributing to the diversification of destination offerings (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019). The gastronomy concept embodies the authentic local cuisine and beverages presented to visiting tourists, reflecting both tangible and intangible aspects of heritage and cultural identity (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021). Consumption of food in tourism serves to disrupt daily eating routines and explore cuisines with diverse ingredients in unfamiliar settings, occasionally leading to cultural revelations (Quan & Wang, 2004).

A growing stream of tourism marketing and destination management literature underscores the role of food consumption in shaping the tourist experience, motivating travelers to seek destinations renowned for their local culinary offerings (e.g., Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019; Su et al., 2020). Moreover, food significantly influences the image-building efforts of destinations in tourism markets (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Given that tourists allocate approximately 25% of their travel expenditures to food consumption (World Food Travel Association, 2020), destinations worldwide are increasingly leveraging their culinary heritage to appeal to international tourists, fostering appreciation for human cultural diversity (Kumar, 2019). Consequently, tour operators in popular

gastronomic destinations, such as Italy and France capitalize on this constructed image to promote culinary holidays, often incorporating cooking classes for tourists (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019). Promoting gastronomy tourism aims to enhance revenue streams from tourism while providing sustainable livelihoods for local food and beverage businesses. This necessitates maintaining the authenticity, quality, and pricing of local gastronomic offerings to ensure tourist satisfaction (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021).

The burgeoning popularity of gastronomy tourism in recent years can be attributed to the widespread dissemination of digital content via social media platforms and traditional media channels, which have dedicated more coverage to cooking shows hosted by celebrities and renowned chefs (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019). The proliferation of culinary digital content has heightened the influence of gastronomic motivations on tourists' destination choices. Furthermore, digital advancements facilitate the marketing and sale of cooking experiences and classes, primarily offered by small, informal businesses through platforms like Airbnb, while also enabling instantaneous feedback on gastronomic products through travel and social platforms (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020).

Today, destinations worldwide recognize gastronomy as a competitive advantage in their tourism offerings. Regions strive to position themselves in the gastronomy tourism market based on the perceived quality of local dishes, ingredients, chefs, and dining environments (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). Consequently, destinations emphasize their cuisines, which reflect the social, cultural, and natural milieu, along with the local cultural identity (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). Initiatives like the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy aim to spotlight cities with unique and established gastronomic heritages on the global culinary map. For instance, cities like Parma in Italy are renowned for *Parmigiano cheese* and *Prosciutto*, while Gaziantep in Türkiye is celebrated for its *Baklava*, *Katmer*, and *Pistachios* (Forleo & Benedetto, 2020). Designated cities leverage this recognition in their promotional endeavors targeting international tourist markets.

Within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the tourism industry has experienced rapid growth, albeit at rates below the global average. If we accept the volume of international arrivals as a key success indicator, then it is indicative that the second, third, and fourth best-performing destinations in 2023 are all OIC member states: namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Albania (UNWTO 2024). However, the growth in income generated from tourism has not kept pace with the increase in tourist volume. Gastronomy in OIC countries holds immense potential and could play a pivotal role in boosting tourist expenditures. It has the potential to foster a competitive environment, leading to improvements in the quality of tourism services, particularly in restaurants, resulting in enhanced economic returns. Gastronomy in the OIC region boasts diversity and richness, reflecting the multitude of cultures and traditions across member countries, each offering unique culinary products. Developing gastronomy tourism within the OIC could diversify tourism products, attract new tourist

segments, and augment contributions to GDP and employment, which currently lag behind global averages (SESRIC, 2022).

This report aims to delve into gastronomy tourism within the OIC, spotlighting key destinations and products, outlining a roadmap for development and marketing, showcasing best practices, suggesting potential products and destinations, evaluating supply and demand dynamics, and proposing actionable steps to advance the sector. Given the dearth of research on gastronomy tourism within the OIC, this report holds significant importance, offering insights to policymakers, businesses, and researchers to address existing challenges while harnessing the extant potential to enhance the competitive advantage of OIC tourist destinations in the global travel market. To this end, the present report aims to provide OIC member countries with best practices, tools, and policy recommendations that will assist them in creating, developing, and marketing gastronomy tourism. Specifically, the study explores strategies and courses of action to foster gastronomy tourism in OIC countries. The study also identifies key barriers hindering the creation, development, and marketing of gastronomy tourism in OIC countries, as well as the core success factors. Additionally, the report attempts to identify the role of governments in developing gastronomy tourism. Finally, the report suggests policy recommendations to stakeholders and government policymakers in OIC countries.

To achieve the study objectives, this study draws on a sequential qualitative-quantitative research design to understand the current circumstances of gastronomy tourism drawing on the experiences of OIC Member Countries as well as leading gastronomy destinations from the rest of the world. This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of gastronomy tourism characteristics, barriers, success factors, and the role of governments in five case studies. Involving four OIC Member Countries, namely, the Maldives, Uganda, Türkiye, and Egypt, and one non-OIC country, i.e., Italy. These case studies have distinct characteristics, and they pertain to destinations in different stages of maturity. This will not only enhance the generalizability of the findings but will also provide an opportunity for comparison and benchmarking-based policy recommendations.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Conceptualization of gastronomy tourism

Food has become a major pull factor fostering tourism demand in several destinations. It is also one of the most crucial elements for potential travelers seeking unique and novel experiences (Atsız et al., 2022). By trying the local food and beverages of the destination, individuals have the opportunity to understand cultural heritage values, local traditions, and locals' habits and history (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Since food is considered an important part of a traveler's experience (Seyitoğlu, 2020), destinations have increasingly integrated food and gastronomy offerings into their marketing strategies (Henderson, 2009; Robinson & Getz, 2014). The significant role of food in shaping the

overall travel experience has led to the development of gastronomy tourism (Tikkanen, 2017). Gastronomy, in a nutshell, encompasses the art of selecting, preparing, serving, and savoring exquisite cuisine. It encompasses a country's dishes, food items, cooking techniques, culinary traditions, and eating customs that are distinctive and unique to the destination where they are produced (Sanchez-Cañizares et al., 2015). According to the World Tourism Organization (2012), gastronomy 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. Given the intertwined nature of tourism and food, gastronomy tourism involves a wide range of elements that collectively contribute to the richness and appeal of gastronomy tourism destinations (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Elements of gastronomy tourism
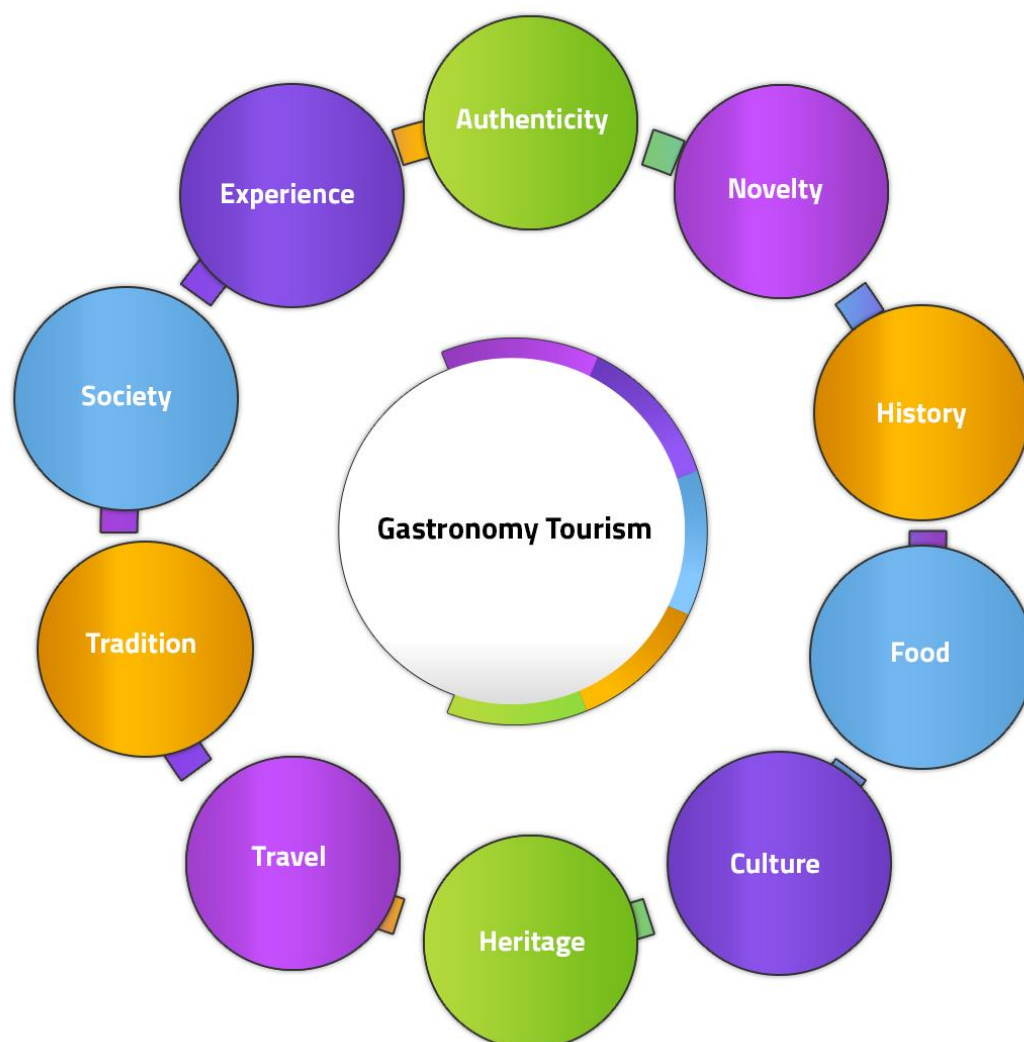
Originating from Ancient Greek, gastronomy is a combination of two terms: Gastér (i.e., stomach) and "nómos" (i.e., rule, power, authority) (de Albeniz, 2021). Gastronomy has been evaluated as being

much more than just the food of a place or destination. It is rather referred to as a type of tourism activity that is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling such as participating in food festivals and cooking classes (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024).

It should be noted that the terms gastronomy tourism, food tourism, and culinary tourism are used interchangeably by scholars and organizations (Kuhn et al., 2023). While these concepts are often used interchangeably, they may have nuanced differences in certain contexts. For example, while gastronomy tourism encompasses a broad spectrum, from food shed (i.e., distribution of foods) to foodscape (dining out in a fine dining restaurant), culinary tourism can include only foodscape such as attending a cooking class (Soeroso, 2020). Gastronomy refers to the art or activity of cooking and eating fine food or culinary customs or style (i.e., Turkish gastronomy), while culinary is defined as of or relating to the kitchen or cookery (i.e., culinary arts, culinary recipes, and culinary schools) (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Moreover, food tourism focuses more on the products itself, production, and food content. Despite minor differences across these various concepts, gastronomy tourism focuses its efforts on the final product of food and aims to create value for the region and its visitors (Küçükkömürler et al., 2018).

Gastronomy tourism falls within the category of heritage tourism niches. Understanding the relationship between cuisine and host culture is the essence of gastronomy. Food is not only necessary for existence; it is also a cultural relic and is frequently used as a prism through which to view and comprehend the customs of a place. Savoring other people's cuisine is an integral element of getting to know their culture. Individuals who possess a strong preoccupation with gastronomy engage not only in eating the local food but also in its preparation and investigating culinary heritage (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024). Gastronomy tourism includes a large variety of holiday-related goods and services, which cover "restaurants, bars, cooking schools, special interest culinary travel packages, food guides, cookbooks, cooking magazines, farms, farmers' markets, TV programmes, blogs, vlogs, digital simulations, food trails, food-related seminars, nutrition tours, foody tours as well as elements of wellness tourism that involves detox diets and healthy eating" (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024, p. 162).

Based on the extent to which food serves as a driving factor for travel, food tourists have been classified into four groups: "gourmet/cuisine/gastronomic, culinary, rural/urban, and all other unlabeled tourists" (Ying et al., 2018, p. 963). Simpler classification has been advocated as well. Culinary tourists are those who, when on vacation, have a particular interest in food-related activities and food plays a significant role in their trip. While trying local cuisine, experiential tourists are less interested in it than culinary tourists. In terms of gastronomic interests, the third and last group of tourists are the general tourists, who are completely different from the culinary tourists (Tovmasyan, 2019). However, Robinson, Getz and Dolnicar's (2018, p. 375) study on food tourism subsegments concluded that "food travel market is not demographically or behaviourally homogeneous."

Though hard to measure, industry analysts believe that culinary tourism has increased by as much as 20% in recent years, placing interest in cuisine on a level with historical sites and museum visits (Molina-Collado, Santos-Vijande, Gómez-Rico & del Cerro, 2024). The World Travel Association reported that 34% of travelers would select their destinations based on their gastronomy choices. Notably, the culinary tourism market has been estimated at USD 1.1 trillion, by 2033 it is expected to reach 6.2 trillion (The Brainy Insights, 2024). This is unsurprising given that food and beverage expenses are thought to make up around 25% of all tourism-related spending worldwide (The World Food Travel Association, 2020).

A destination's food plays a significant role in determining how enjoyable a vacation will be (Soonsan et al., 2024). Conspicuously, gastronomy provides travelers with a genuine cultural experience and a means of engaging in meaningful leisure activities (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024). From this perspective, gastronomy tourism is regarded as one of the subclasses of creative tourism that is centered on travelers' engagement with and acquisition of knowledge from food-making and tasting experiences (Molina-Collado et al., 2024). Additionally, studies indicate that dining in a genuine cultural setting improves tourists' perceptions of the experience's authenticity and deepens their comprehension of the local way of life and cultural identity (Soonsan, Thongmun & Phakdee-auksorn, 2024).

Experiences are "intangible, internal, individual and interactive processes that lead to sensorial engagement, and are characterised by a heightened concentration and focus and are influenced by an individual's senses, emotions, values, background, attitudes and beliefs and contexts" (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024, p .163). Given that gastronomy tourists go for experiences and activities that involve skill development, education, fulfillment, socializing, interaction, and recreation, gastronomy experiences can be viewed as a serious type of leisure (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024).

In gastronomy, the sensory environment shapes the whole experience and elicits good emotions and perceptions (Molina-Collado et al., 2024). This atmosphere impacts consumers through incitements such as "flavors, colors, music, fragrances, exclusive designs, or even comfortable furnishing" (Molina-Collado et al., 2024, p. 4). It has been established that sensory marketing in gastronomy produces positive benefits in consumer behavior and contributes positively to creating the overall experience. The sensory environment creates psychological responses that kindle the multisensory brand experience and yield positive experiences by concentrating on all senses (Molina-Collado et al., 2024).

Gastronomy tourism consists of four key resources (see Fig. 2) that may be used for its development (Smith & Xiao, 2008). Facilities are commonly known as buildings/structures and land uses for food production or preparation when businesses offer their services to tourists. In particular, buildings/structures are the places that enable tourists to learn about, consume, or buy gastronomy products. Land uses also offer travelers to create some tours regarding the landscape of culinary attractions to be experienced. The second attraction can be one of the most critical ones that help to

improve gastronomy tourism in the destination by the personal involvement of tourists in consumptive, and educative activities. The events category consists of shows that embrace food products and cooking equipment. Especially, festivals are one of the significant attractions that make gastronomy tourism visible. Finally, organizations are extremely helpful for the development of the gastronomy tourism market. This category confirms the quality of gastronomy-related businesses or foods in the destination.

Figure 2: Gastronomy tourism resources
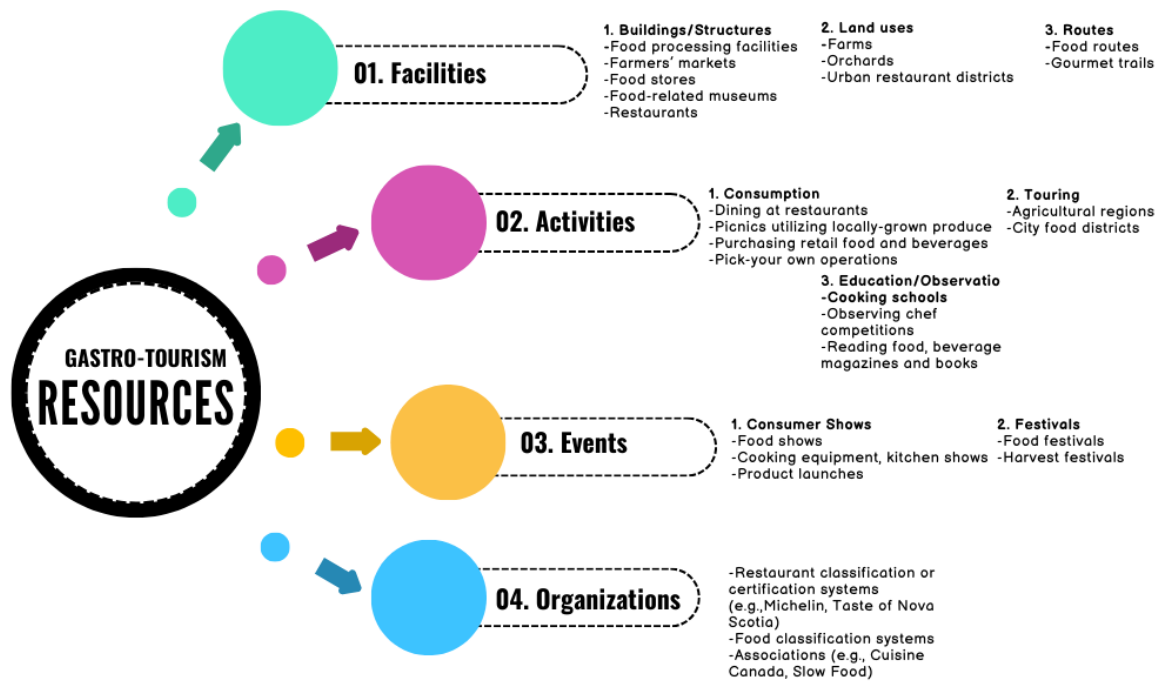
Adopted from Smith and Xiao (2008).

Gastronomy tourism has been linked with local products in the destinations since a wide range of travelers attaches importance to locality (Ghanem, 2019). Moreover, some conceptual descriptions include local products that belong to a specific local area to the gastronomy tourism definition. For instance, distinctive local products, local culture, and experiences trigger gastronomy tourism in the destination (Martins, 2016). Moreover, gastronomy tourism, benefiting from local resources, helps destinations boost the local economy (Privitera et al., 2018). Therefore, local foods are considered a core product of gastronomy tourism that provides a multiplier effect on the local economy (Putra, 2019). Local foods are often associated with authenticity. According to Antón et al. (2019), authenticity has a crucial role in the quality of gastronomy and might influence tourists' desire to create lasting memories throughout their trip. Travelers aspire to discover local culture and seek

authentic hints in gastro-activities. It is specifically regarded as one of the most crucial characteristics of memorable gastro-tourist encounters (Williams et al., 2019).

Creative Cities of Gastronomy (CCG) are designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to acknowledge a destination's food culture (Guo & Hsu, 2023). Not only the CCG award is valued for food culture conservation and economy, but it is also cherished from a tourism development perspective as it boosts a destination's reputation and resources (Guo & Hsu, 2023). UNESCO's acknowledgement of a city as a hub of gastronomy creativity has been shown to increase gastronomy tourism and increase visitor interest in the locality (Soonsan et al., 2024). Such recognition acts as a promotional tool and augments the economic development of the city through tourism (Soonsan et al., 2024). Table 1 tabulates the UNESCO Criteria for the CCG (Forleo & Benedetto, 2020).

Table 1: Criteria for the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy

-Well-developed gastronomy that is characteristic of the urban center and/or region
-Vibrant gastronomy community with numerous traditional restaurants and/or chefs
-Endogenous ingredients used in traditional cooking
-Local know-how, traditional culinary practices and methods of cooking that have survived industrial/technological advancement
-Traditional food markets and traditional food industry
-Tradition of hosting gastronomic festivals, awards, contests and other broadly targeted means of recognition
-Respect for the environment and promotion of sustainable local products
-Nurturing of public appreciation, promotion of nutrition in educational institutions and inclusion of biodiversity conservation programs in cooking schools curricula

Source: UNESCO, 2007

A search on the UNESCO's creative cities list, yielded 52 results under gastronomy all over the world, for instance, Fribourg (Switzerland); Iloilo City (Philippines); Battambang (Cambodia); St. Antono (USA). Furthermore, there are two cities from the Middle East, Zahlé (Lebanon); Buraidah (Saudi Arabia). If Türkiye (Gaziantep, Hatay, Afyonkarahisar) and Iran (Rasht and Kermanshah) are included that would make it seven cities in the Middle East (UNESCO Creative Cities Network).

Over the last few years, gastronomy has gained recognition as a significant component of cultural heritage, consisting of cultural identity, communities' way of life, and eating behaviors (Oktay & Sadıkoğlu, 2018). Gastronomy recalls the past of a community's food-related lifestyle while also presenting its cultural legacy and identity (Jimenez Beltrán et al., 2016). As a result, according to its operational definition, culinary aspects must be anchored in the past to provide tourists with novel

experiences. Considering the importance of heritage and the past, gastronomy tourism is grounded in history, culture, tradition, and custom in society.

In sum, gastronomy tourism has been growing at a global scale drawing increasing attention from both policymakers and scholars (Kuhn, dos Anjos & Krause, 2023). For destinations to increase their share of this emerging market, it is important to appreciate the significance of the market and understand its key characteristics.

1.2. Significance and characteristics of the market

In recent years, gastronomy tourism has garnered increasing significance, emerging as a central focus for industry professionals and destination planners. An overwhelming majority of destinations (87%) recognize gastronomy as a pivotal and strategic element capable of shaping destination image and branding (World Tourism Organization, 2017). This recognition underscores the role of gastronomy tourism as a catalyst for local development, prompting many countries to harness its potential to promote their unique assets and vie competitively with other regions.

Moreover, gastronomy tourism is heralded for its capacity to elongate the tourism season, rendering destinations appealing and enjoyable to visitors year-round (Çalışkan, 2013). This extension of the tourism season not only enhances economic prospects but also ensures a sustained flow of tourists, bolstering local economies. Additionally, destinations regard gastronomy tourism as a guardian of cultural heritage, serving as a conduit for transmitting knowledge to future generations (World Tourism Organization, 2020). Preservation of cultural heritage through gastronomy tourism not only safeguards traditions but also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of local cultures among both residents and visitors alike.

World Tourism Organization (2019) emphasizes the importance of gastronomy tourism for destinations highlighting the following points:

- ➢ Gastronomy tourism facilitates differentiation and distinctive positioning of destinations;
- ➢ It offers the potential to ensure visitors with novel values and experiences;
- ➢ It can be implemented in less developed regions and areas with limited tourism resources, including small villages;
- ➢ It is easily introducible and can be improved as a compelling narrative; and
- ➢ It generates high revenue for destinations and fosters visitors' loyalty.

Therefore, several destinations incorporate gastronomy tourism into their tourism strategies. It is noteworthy that gastronomy tourism is largely dependent on local products, and therefore its role in promoting environmental sustainability in destinations is recognized. Local food systems are expected to prioritize the production, distribution, and consumption of food grown and processed in relatively close areas (Polat & Aktaş-polat, 2020), lowering greenhouse gas emissions by promoting

short supply chains. The inclusion of local food in gastronomy tourism has positive impacts in terms of sustainability by preserving and carrying forward the local cuisine culture, which is an integral part of local cultures (Bilgin & Akoğlu, 2018).

Demand for authentic food has increased among modern tourists visiting cultural destinations (Atsız et al., 2022). Authentic food can play a key role in the travel decision-making process (Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2010). Thus, some destinations label their foods as authentic cuisine (i.e., authentic Turkish cuisine) to attract visitors (GoTürkiye, 2024). They know that offering and advertising foods as authentic can influence tourists' future behaviors toward their gastronomy products and the destination as well (Castéran & Roederer, 2013). Thus, it is believed that the perception of authentic foods being original to the destination motivates potential visitors which in turn contributes to the global movement of gastronomy tourism.

Infrastructure development plays a vital role in making possible gastronomy tourism a significant activity within the tourism industry. Thus, most destinations that desire to improve their strategy and enhance their tourism experience invest in gastronomy–related facilities in their region (Smith & Xiao, 2008). These efforts are exerted to meet the special requirements and interests of gastro-travelers (Sio et al., 2024). Among these, destinations can create food trails, food districts, and organize food tours in the destination (Mason & O'Mahony, 2007).

Considering the importance of gastronomy tourism across the world, there is considerable assessment of the key characteristics of the gastronomy tourism market. In order to understand the characteristics of the gastronomy tourism market, it is better to first comprehend the major features of gastro-tourists. The majority of gastro-tourists target traveling to destinations where they will taste foods and experience food-related activities such as food festivals, cookery schools, chef tables, and farm-to-table dining venues (Henderson, 2009). Gastro-tourists typically plan longer stays and take more trips compared to other tourist groups, resulting in higher expenditures during their visit (Williams et al., 2018). Most of gastro-tourists commonly seek to experience original and memorable food or beverages during their visitation (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). They are eager to gain insight into exploring the hidden gems of local gastronomy, flavors, and ingredients of foods through experts on cultural heritage (Robinson & Getz, 2014). They can sometimes quest for different meals rather than typical ones (Hall & Mitchell, 2007). This can differ across gastro-tourists, such as deliberate gastro-tourists and incidental gastro-tourists (Williams et al., 2018).

1.3. Economic, social, and environmental impacts of gastronomy tourism

Tourism has emerged as the most crucial industry in most of the least-developed countries in the world and has grown more quickly in these countries' economies than in OECD (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries (MacNeill & Wozniak, 2018; World Tourism Organization, 2017b). This expansion has fostered increased interaction among travelers, destinations, and residents, facilitating an immersive tourism experience. Noting this, many

institutions and scholars highlighted that the industry could have multiple and mutual social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts on the destination (Hernández-Rojas et al., 2022). Since gastronomy tourism represents the fastest-growing segment of this industry, its positive and negative effects on the economy, society, and environment deserve particular attention.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) organized the 7th World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in 2022 under the theme of "Gastronomy Tourism for People and Planet: Innovate, Empower and Preserve." The forum concluded that long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability of gastronomy tourism resources should be secured for the future (World Tourism Organization, 2023). It is always imperative to recall the ethos of sustainable tourism, whereby destinations should take "full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (World Tourism Organization, 2017b, p. 12). Based on these evaluations, the economic, social, and environmental impacts of gastronomy tourism will be considered (See Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Impacts of gastronomy tourism
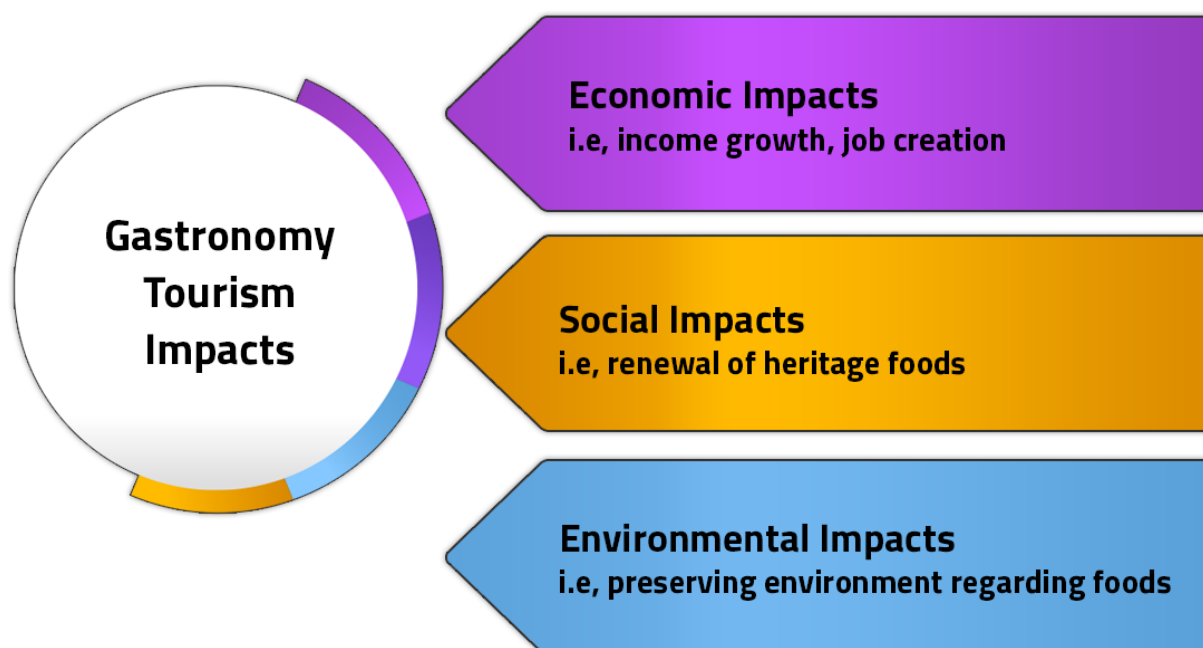
Source: authors' own elaboration.

Gastronomy tourism has highly been reported as a "rising economic sector" within the tourism industry across numerous countries (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022). Notably, expenditures related to gastronomy placed as the most generated revenue from visitors (8 of 10 visitors allocate their budget for food consumption) (World Tourism Organization, 2017). Also, a significant share of potential travelers considers the food culture of any country when deciding to visit a destination (TURSAB, 2014). Moreover, gastro-tourists contribute to increased arrivals and extended stays in the regions they visit. These movements inevitably lead to economic vitality for the long and short term in the region (Piboonrungroj et al., 2023). In particular, the fact that gastronomy tourism resources are unique to the region can help destinations increase their competitiveness in the global gastronomy market.

As positive economic impacts of gastronomy tourism, it has a wide range of benefits for the region's development. According to a report published by Allied Market Research, the gastronomy tourism market was valued at $1.2 trillion in 2019 and is projected to reach $2.1 trillion by 2027. The report also emphasized that Europe is the major gastronomy tourism market across the globe and received over 50% of the international market segment in 2021. This is because Europe has a rich gastronomy culture, numerous food attractions, and offers a wide range of high-quality artisanal food and beverage which can contribute to the gastronomy tourism experience (Allied Market Research, 2023).

Since gastro-tourists are the groups that are inclined to spend more money at the tourist destinations they visit (Gálvez et al., 2017), their spending levels help to increase investments in gastronomy tourism. Therefore, beyond its primary economic benefits, gastronomy tourism is extremely helpful for regional and local development in terms of increasing revenue for numerous gastronomy-related businesses such as restaurants, coffee shops, food stalls, gourmet establishments, food festivals, and events cooking classes providers. Gastro-tourists spend in such places and help to grow these businesses in the market. Moreover, gastronomy tourism creates employment opportunities in these businesses and the hospitality industry.

The development of gastronomy tourism may not only directly provide work opportunities in these businesses but may increase indirect employment as well by revitalizing other sectors in the region. For example, in the European Union (EU) region, 8% of total employment is derived from the food-related sector (Eurostat, 2019). Moreover, in 2022, 10.4% of total U.S. employment is related to food (Economic Research Service, 2022). Additionally, depending on the year, between 10 and 13 percent of all employed people in Türkiye are working in the food and beverage sector (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Industry and Technology, 2020). These official statistics, along with the predicted growth in the popularity of gastronomy, indicate that employment in the industry will likely continue to rise.

Gastronomy tourism also benefits from local products for visitors who desire to experience local foods. In particular, some destinations can promote their food culture through a dynamic gastronomy network (i.e., restaurants). Furthermore, the fact that visitors desire to have local gastronomic

products can increase the demand for these products and the traditional cuisine of a region. By doing so, it can foster agriculture and contribute to local farmers.

While it is widely acknowledged that tourism can positively contribute to a region's economy, there are also a few negative effects of gastronomy tourism in the destination. It is well known that overall pricing levels rise in tandem with a region's growth in tourism. Therefore, the products whose prices have increased cannot be purchased by residents. This can lead to regional inflation (Kırca & Özer, 2020), especially in regions where gastronomy tourism is concentrated. Moreover, the cost of living of local people in the region will increase and the local economic balance may be shaken.

Gastronomy tourism also impacts the social environment of the destination. As gastronomy is inherently a social concept, it inevitably impacts both visitors and locals. Among the positive social impacts, cultural interaction and understanding are the most significant social outputs of gastronomy tourism because they enable travelers to meet local culture through gastronomy (Alonso et al., 2018). The exploration of gastronomic products becomes a gateway to understanding a destination's cultural heritage and customs (Ondkieki et al., 2017). As potential visitors desire to experience the diverse flavors and culinary practices of a region, they not only taste dishes but also participate in an intense cultural exchange (Long, 2014.) As they visit a destination and attendfood-related activities, travelers get insights into the history, values, and residents' lifestyles. This quest for experiencing culture fosters mutual respect and appreciation, breaking down barriers and creating bridges of understanding between people of different backgrounds (Stone et al., 2022). Therefore, gastronomy tourism extends beyond food culture, promorting an understanding of cultural diversity and unity among visitors and residents.

Gastronomy tourism also plays a major role in preserving culinary culture, serving as a key link between the past and present. In order to pass down this culture to the next generation, traditional recipes, cooking methods, and ingredients could be protected by creating ambassadors among travelers and residents (Wijaya, 2019). Thus, a mutual social approach should be established provided to safeguard the cultural identity embedded in its foods, enabling the continuity of culinary heritage (Ondkieki et al., 2017). By doing so, food culture becomes a bridge between history and individuals as well as a piece of evidence for the importance of protecting cultural richness in an ever-changing world.

Creating a food identity for gastronomic heritage in various destinations is required for social value (Antón et al., 2019). In particular, if a destination can gain a competitive advantage and locals benefit from its resources, it can enhance community identity towards gastronomy (Baycar, 2022). Gastronomy tourism can aid destinations in creating an identity towards foods. Hence, it is important to protect gastronomic products, increase diversity and enrich tastes in the destination (Başat et al., 2018). These are important for the social development of gastronomy tourism both today and in the future and are necessary for the next generation to know about gastronomic products (Eren, 2018).

As the negative social impacts of gastronomy tourism are discussed, two significant issues emerge. Firstly, there is a risk that gastronomic resources can become commodified for the gastronomy tourism market, losing their authenticity, genuineness, and originality (Abarca, 2004). Some residents can change their practices of foods and beverages to meet travelers' expectations, potentially losing the authenticity of the cultural experience. This is a result of the cultural commodification of gastronomic products in the market (Murphy, 2014). Second, cultural diversity in dishes or cuisines can be lost due to presenting popular foods for tourists to experience. Therefore, it is essential to preserve these foods and pass them down to future generations through gastronomic endeavors to uphold social values and cultural legacy.

As much as gastronomy tourism has major impacts on social and economic areas, it has a few positive and negative environmental impacts as well. Among the positive environmental effects, the modern gastro-tourists seeks authentic products, which in turn encourage producers to support local and sustainable agriculture, such as organic farming and crop cultivatio) (Visković & Komac 2021). Further, this can promote the use of local sources and seasonal ingredients. This can lead tourists to select eco-friendly practices in the gastronomy experiences. Moreover, with the revenue generated from gastronomy tourism, food culture conservation projects can be implemented in the destination. On the other hand, gastronomy tourism can bring negative consequences for the region and gastronomic products. High demand of gastronomy tourism can lead to resource-draining by putting pressure on natural attractions. Therefore, habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity can be experienced by the destination due to resource depletion (Fusté-Forné, 2019).

To summarize, it is clear that gastronomy tourism has economic, social, and environmental benefits for society. It is necessary to sustain these benefits by addressing them with a sustainable approach as much as possible. However, while using gastronomic resources for tourists, the current and future interests of local people should also be considered. Otherwise, all the aforementioned negative impacts may arise and harm the development of gastronomy tourism. Moreover, minimizing negative impacts is very important in terms of acceptability by residents. It is reasonable to think that if locals see the benefits of any tourism activity, they will support it.

1.4. Main regional and international gastronomy tourism initiatives and their importance

Gastronomy tourism, as abovementioned, has emerged as a powerful driving force for individuals and societies. For this, many destinations have attempted to create appealing attractions of gastro-tours and gastronomy experiences, not only restricted to dining out at some commercial outlets (i.e., restaurants), but also visiting markets, harvesting, touring streets and other creative gastronomy experiences (World Tourism Organization, 2017). Moreover, since it plays a major role in creating a destination image and cultural identity in society, some countries give importance to its development (Italian Association of Gastronomy Tourism, 2021). Considering the importance of gastronomy for their region, destinations attempt to organize some gastronomy tourism initiatives. In particular,

these initiatives are believed to enhance the competitive development of the value chain, preserve the gastronomy culture, market, and comprehensively manage gastronomy tourism. In particular, there are some regional and international gastronomy tourism initiatives that help to enhance and improve gastronomy tourism at national and global scales.

Notably, each of these initiatives has its objectives and focuses. For example, while the Culinary Tourism Alliance (CTA) brings travelers with authentic foods in the region, supports local enterprises, and contributes to regional economic development, European Regions of Gastronomy aims to improve sustainable tourism standards for gastronomy tourism, support community and environmental well-being and health. Moreover, the World Food Travel Association (WFTA) attempts to increase gastro-tourist arrivals, enhance destination brand equity, improve local pride, generate export demand for destinations' food and beverage products, and create a significant economic impact on the area.

UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (CCN) recognizes and promotes cities with creativity in seven themes, including "crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts, and music" (Yılmaz et al., 2020, p. 786). The CCN is a worldwide program initiated by UNESCO in 2004 that includes gastronomy as one of its areas of creativity (Yılmaz et al., 2020). To date, a total of 52 creative cities have been selected within gastronomy to explore countries' well-developed gastronomy potential, traditional restaurants and/or chefs, indigenous ingredients used in traditional cooking, traditional cooking practices and methods, traditional food markets, gastronomic festivals, sustainable local products. Some research evidenced that participating in UCCN has improved the reputation, image, and attractiveness of the destination offering gastronomic products for visitors (Yılmaz et al., 2020).

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) also attempts to organize some schemes for developing gastronomy tourism in destinations. For example, WTO organizes some forums on gastronomy tourism to "promote "the exchange of experiences between experts in tourism and gastronomy." Further, the forum aims to describe practices and promote gastronomy tourism as a factor in the development of destinations. WTO also prepares some reports to encourage destinations to invest in gastronomy tourism and corroborate with the gastronomy market at a local, national, and international level (World Tourism Organization, 2017). Within the same vein, it also declared its "Guidelines for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism" for managing and planning (World Tourism Organization, 2019). These initiatives aid regions in promoting their gastronomy tourism potential across the globe. For each destination, suggestions for action are proposed, and practical recommendations are given on aspects to be considered in the initial phases of the development of a gastronomy destination.

"World Region of Gastronomy" is an initiative organized by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts, and Tourism (IGCAT) that aims to select gastronomy destinations to highlight the importance of regions' food cultures and gastronomy innovation. This label is considered an award that calls destinations credible. This award is given by an independent jury consisting of researchers

in various fields such as tourism, culture, hospitality, and agriculture. The award was given to the Aseer region (Saudi Arabia) for 2024 and to Catalonia (Spain) for 2025 (Gencat, 2024).

The World Gastronomy Network organizes its initiatives at the international level by bringing culinary enthusiasts and professionals together. The platform aims to connect "global gastronomic cultures and showcase[ing] their diversity through an innovative and interactive platform" (World Gastronomy Network, 2024). The Network also offers some important gastronomy activities for individuals by transferring their knowledge through gastro tours, cooking courses, recipes, and festivals.

Apart from the list mentioned above, some more specific regional initiatives to improve gastronomy tourism do exist. For example, in Spain, Basque Country Culinary Center— an academic institution— aims to improve education, conduct research, find innovative approaches, and promote food tourism (Basque Culinary Center, 2024). Similarly, the Japanese Food Culture Association seeks to promote and support Japanese foods and ingredients to the world. To realize this purpose and increase awareness of Japanese foods, they organize some events in foreign countries such as the Japanese Food & Sake Festival (Japanese Food Culture Association, 2024).

Some destinations organize food festivals to attract visitors to their region by creating social and economic value. For example, the Singapore Tourism Board orgnaizes an annual gastronomy festival offering its visitors the rich culinary heritage and flavors of Singapore. Moreover, food tours, cooking demonstrations, dining events, and competitions are available for visitors to attend giving them memorable gastronomy experience. Moreover, the Gaziantep Gastronomy festival aims to convey the culinary culture from local to global. The festival organizes some activities for children and young to enjoy the experience during their visit. Moreover, some destinations are renowned for their produce, e.g., truffle, and they are successful in exploiting this. Countries such as Italy, France, Spain, Hungary, Croatia, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, and Greece, organize truffle festivals.

Participating in these festivals is considered a remarkable and memorable experience that allows travelers to indulge in the country flavors of the world's most prized fungi while also experiencing the cultural traditions and history surrounding their cultivation and harvest. Apart from these, there are numerous festivals e.g., Puerto Vallarta International Gourmet Festival (Mexico), Pizzafest (Italy), in the world to attract gastro-tourists and promote their gastronomical values.

For the last 22 years, Madrid Fusión Alimentos de España has brought together top chefs, culinary experts, and industry professionals from both national and international levels. During the event, visitors can enjoy and participate in gastronomic presentations (the role of sustainability, popularity of gastronomy and future of gastronomy), and tastings of Spanish dishes. It also includes and offers networking opportunities, workshops, and competitions. Hence, it serves as a hub for gastronomic innovation, teaching, and partnership, bringing together food enthusiasts and professionals across the globe (Madrid Fusion, 2024). In particular, Spain designed a new program for promoting Spanish

gastronomy worldwide: SpainFoodNation (La Moncloa, 2022). These initiatives are believed to increase the quality of gastronomical products in Spain.

The National Gastronomy Association in Türkiye aims to provide consultancy and support the education of all individuals who work and want to work in the gastronomy sector, sector professionals, and gastronomy students. It also seeks to carry out promotional activities for Turkish gastronomy to support people and organizations working in this sector and to organize various activities and projects related to the subject (Gastronomy Association, 2024).

Another institution, Türkiye Gastronomy Tourism Association aims to educate young for gastronomy sector, organizing some events (e.g., GastroShow 2023) and seminars (e.g., Gastro TALKS) and deliver some educational material on gastronomy tourism. By doing so, it strives to develop regional tourism, national and global gastronomy tourism, and to increase relations and cooperation among members (Türkiye Gastronomy Tourism Association, 2024). In particular, some development agencies attempt to examine the feasibility of gastronomy tourism before improving it in a destination (Ahiler Development Agency, 2023).

In some destinations, gastronomy touring within cultural routes is arranged to experience food attractions. For instance, Baltic Sea Culinary Routes (Baltic Sea Culinary Culture, 2024) include ten countries to offer major gastronomy destinations for tourists craving to experience culinary attractions. For this, the route was marked on the map, and information about destinations was given. Some organizations can create thematic routes as well. In Portugal, "Tourist and Gastronomic Route of the Cheeses" are offered for visitors to experience the history, traditions, customs, and gastronomy of the destination.

To promote their culinary culture, destinations can organize some programs for tourists. In Malaysia, a national initiative was devised to brand its cuisine across the world. Malaysia Kitchen Program aimed at "promoting Malaysian restaurants overseas, by creating demand for Malaysian cuisine through an integrated, holistic and multi-pronged promotion program in collaboration with restaurant." Also, to preserve culinary heritage, the Philippines attempted to advocate for the preservation and promotion of Philippine gastronomy heritage.

The Vietnam Culinary Conservation, Research and Development Centre has attempted to protect and introduce the quintessence of every food and beverage in the destination, contributing to elevating the position of Vietnamese cuisine on a local and world scale. Moreover, the Centre concentrates its efforts on "building and organizing research programs on Vietnamese-style and special dishes, popularizing and introducing Vietnam's tourism images; collect information about Vietnamese traditional dishes and drinks, and continue developing traditional cuisine festivals; and cooperate with other agencies to launch training courses for chefs; and connect domestic tourism agents to open cuisine & tourism products."

Destinations can develop and implement action plans to ensure the sustainable development and effective marketing of gastronomy tourism for future generations. For this, Slovenia has focused on documenting an action plan for their gastronomy tourism by combining tourists, environment, and sustainable production. Considering the importance of action plans, Slovenia attempted to create a gastronomy development strategy in 2006, then regional gastronomy trademarks were created between 2007 and 2010. Strategy for the sustainable growth of gastronomy was adopted and see gastronomy as a strategic tourist product in these years.

As a result of these plans, the country was selected as a "European Region of Gastronomy 2021" and their restaurants started to be ranked in "The World's 50 Best Restaurants" in 2018. Between 2019 and 2023, the development and marketing of Slovenia's gastronomy were planned to make possible gastronomy a communication tool worldwide. While gastronomy tourism strategy focused on the development of the destination's range of products from 2006 to 2017, international visibility was adopted in their strategic plans between 2018 and 2021 (European Region of Gastronomy, 2019). The country continues to invest significantly in gastronomy to position Slovenia as a destination for 5-star culinary experiences (Slovenia Info, 2020). The objectives of these initiatives include creating higher added value, targeting guests with higher purchasing power, developing year-round tourism, and dispersing tourist flows (Slovenia Info, 2020). Similar action plan initiatives have also been implemented in various destinations such as Culinary Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2005-2015) in Ontario and The Food Tourism Action Plan for Wales 2015 – 2020.

The aforementioned efforts encompass a range of programs and activities aimed at promoting gastronomy tourism and showcasing the culinary attributes of diverse sites to tourists. Many countries are also taking steps to improve their food, with a focus on the process phase. For example, some action plans have been created to propose strategic decisions to develop gastronomy tourism in their region. The World Tourism Organization (2019) proposed a comprehensive plan for destinations to market their foods by involving different stakeholders. Based on this plan, destinations are recommended to promote a strategy and specific marketing with messages adapted to gastro-tourists' tastes and needs (i), to improve online positioning through various platforms (i.e., social media, websites, blogs) and campaigns (ii), to create relevant, attractive, and interactive content regarding gastronomy tourism for various B2B and B2C channels (iii), to identify performance analysis for measuring action impacts (iv), and to create 'ambassadors' for promoting the gastronomy tourism of the destination (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

Since each destination has distinctive gastronomic characteristics, its development processes vary across countries and even cities. A development agency conducting its activities in three major gastronomy destinations of Türkiye (i.e., Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Kilis) created a "Gastronomy Tourism Strategy Plan" and proposed several stages to develop gastronomy tourism in these regions. By involving different stakeholders (i.e., businesses and locals), eight major subjects were identified to develop gastronomy tourism: joint action (public and private), identifying gastronomic themes, creating project teams (researchers, entrepreneurs, and tourism businesses), creating performance

criteria, establishing monitoring and evaluation criteria, preparing evaluation notes, and communication strategy (communication plan, visual communication, and social media).

Identifying and effectively utilizing gastronomy tourism resources (activities, facilities, events, organizations) is the most important first phase of development. Moreover, evaluating governmental principles for promoting gastronomy tourism is crucial to regulate the food-related sectors in the destination. For this, "integrating specific policies and appropriate strategies" and "maintaining good relationships with tourism and hospitality organizations and industry" are the two major indicators for this phase. Following this stage, destinations should adopt marketing strategies to promote their gastronomy tourism through building the brand of the destination, packaging products to focus on the target market of gastronomy tourism, and planning and integrating marketing strategies for the destination. Finally, constructing an educational environment for gastronomy tourism is crucial for the sustainability of food-related sectors and for enhancing tourism knowledge through academia.

Although the role of strategies and plans is well-demonstrated, some developmental stages emphasize the importance of stakeholders (i.e., destination associations, communities, organizations, destination environment, and food institutions) in the gastronomy tourism development, contributing their expertise and resources to create memorable gastronomy experiences for travellers (Long et al., 2023). In particular, locals are considered key stakeholders who provide required knowledge on foods and offer visitors authentic experiences that represent the cultural heritage of the destination. For instance, some destinations (e.g., Emilia-Romagna, Italy) offer their visitors the chance to experience renowned food products of the region by collaborating with local farmers, producers, and chefs (Emilia-Romagna Tours, 2024).

Moreover, government agencies and tourism boards provide support, funding, and infrastructure improvements for visitors as well as entrepreneurs to make investments in the region's gastronomy tourism (Boyne et al., 2003). For instance, the Basque Country in Spain has successfully leveraged government support to showcase its gastronomy tourism offerings, including culinary festivals. In addition, significant stakeholders of the tourism industry, including restaurants, hotels, tour operators, and food producers, contribute to gastronomy tourism improvement by exploring innovative gastronomy experiences and marketing initiatives that attract travellers. In sum, collaborative works among stakeholders are of paramount importance for the sustainable improvement of gastronomy tourism destinations. Moreover, all the parties involved in gastronomy tourism should participate in each stage of development. Accordingly, holistic growth will be achieved.

To summarize, national and international initiatives often provide important benefits for the development of gastronomy tourism in a destination. Firstly, initiatives aid destinations in promoting and marketing their gastronomic products through various campaigns, activities, and collaborations. Secondly, efforts to use gastronomic products can lead to the establishment of national and international associations across the world. Thanks to these associations, rules, and standards can be created to foster and standardize gastronomy tourism. Moreover, these can provide the safety, quality,

and sustainability of gastronomy tourism activities. Further to this, collecting data from gastro-tourists is difficult. Therefore, initiatives of associations facilitate data gathering on gastronomy tourism trends, gastro-tourists' demographics, and economic impacts. Such initiatives will be extremely useful for authorities concerning strategic plans and resource allocation in gastronomy tourism. Finally, with the development of gastronomy tourism, it will be possible to use resources more effectively in the region and the development of infrastructure (e.g., airports, roads, and accommodation facilities) will accelerate.

1.5. OIC and Gastronomy: General outlook of OIC countries in gastronomy

The OIC member countries have recognized gradually more the significance of the tourism industry, due to its direct and indirect contributions to numerous economic activities. Considering this, tourism has been considered among the six priorities economic areas in the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC (COMCEC) Strategy by emphasizing its sustainable and competitive side in the OIC region (The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries [SESRIC], 2022). Although OIC countries have received a significant share of the international tourism market, these countries have a great potential to offer diversified tourism experiences through niche tourism (i.e., cultural tourism, gastronomy tourism) for their potential visitors (SESRIC, 2023a). Among the niche tourism experiences, the development of gastronomy has gained importance due to the diversity of local cuisine.

In Qatar Travel Mart, the growing significance of gastronomy tourism for OIC countries was underlined, especially in terms of the richness and variety of food culture within these countries. Moreover, it was stated that gastronomy tourism presents an opportunity to revitalize endangered ingredients and culinary customs within OIC countries (Aguilar, 2023). Considering the importance of gastronomy tourism in OIC members, a Training Webinar on "Gastronomy Tourism in OIC Countries" was organized to emphasize four major topics: (i) Key Concepts and Prospects of Gastronomy Tourism, (ii) Challenges facing Gastronomy Tourism in OIC Countries, (iii) Policies and Digital Tools and (iv) The Role of Gastronomy Tourism in Empowering Local Communities and Promoting Sustainable Tourism (SESRIC, 2023b). The OIC Trade Centre (ICDT) has also provided funding for a project named "Unleashing Tourism Potential in OIC Countries through Health and Gastronomy Tourism" which was started in 2023.

To attract foreign direct investments, OIC members have attempted to take some initiatives and measures. For instance, some of countries have improved widespread marketing strategies to display their authentic delicious, traditional cooking methods and gastronomic variety to targeted tourist groups across the globe. Bahrain, for example, will host UNWTO's World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in November 2024 (World Tourism Organization, 2023) thanks to the country's efforts (e.g.,

Bahrain Food Festival organized by Bahrain Tourism and Exhibition Authority), aiming to promote Bahrain's culinary offerings.

Several OIC countries within the Arab group (e.g., United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia) also make considerable investments in gastronomy tourism to strengthen the sector and attract international visitors (SESRIC, 2023b). For instance, among these countries, the Dubai Tourism Authority launched an initiative "Taste of Dubai" promoting the destination as a gastronomy tourism region (Taste of Dubai, 2024). Within this attempt, food festivals, tasting events, and culinary tours are organized. Qatar also celebrated its culinary culture through the Qatar International Food Festival by focusing on its rich culinary heritage and vibrant dining scene. The United Arab Emirates also implemented initiatives to promote its distinctive gastronomic products such as Dubai Food Festival, Abu Dhabi Culinary Season, and Emirati Cuisine Competition (Visit Dubai, 2023; Emirates Culinary Guild, 2024).

The OIC nations (Asia, Africa, and Arab members) have the potential to generate $260 billion in gastronomy tourism, which is projected to grow to $500 billion by 2030, according to SESRIC (2023b). In particular, some OIC member countries (i.e., Türkiye, Malaysia, and Indonesia) made significant development in promoting gastronomy tourism offerings. There are some current practices and initiatives in progress in OIC countries (SESRIC, 2023b):

- The diverse regional cuisines and the use of locally sourced ingredients in destination marketing;
- Food trails, cooking classes, food tours, and festivals showcasing local dishes and food culture;
- Educational programs on traditional techniques, food history, and etiquette;
- Partnerships that support the local food system and expand economic opportunities.

Although the OIC countries have various cultures, landscapes, and rich foods for gastronomy tourism, there are several challenges and issues that should be considered for the development of gastronomy tourism. In particular, insufficient infrastructure, restricted availability of skilled/qualified employees, and lack of formal partnership between organizations can hamper the gastronomy tourism sector's growth (SESRIC, 2023b). Overcoming these issues in the OIC countries can lead to new gastronomy-related investments regarding building businesses (restaurants, cafes), food markets, food halls, cooking schools, culinary institutes, and production facilities (SESRIC, 2023b). Additionally, many people believe that certain OIC countries are unstable or dangerous, which deters prospective travelers from visiting these places (Alfandi, 2020). Additionally, media coverage has a major role in this (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022).

Table 2 exhibits a SWOT analysis of gastronomy tourism in the OIC countries. However, these insights should be approached with caution. While many of these do pertain to several OIC countries, they vary

in degrees of applicability. OIC countries display a broad spectrum of variation over many aspects including economy, culture, geography, and level of development.

Table 2: SWOT analysis of Gastronomy tourism in the OIC countries

Strengths +	Weaknesses –
*Rich culinary heritage: OIC countries have substantial culinary inventory, which reflects their multicultural history and geographic diversity. *Iconic dishes: OIC countries boast cuisine that features iconic dishes, to name a few: Biryani (Pakistan, Bangladesh), Couscous (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia), Hummus (Levant region), Jollof Rice (Nigeria, Senegal), and Mantu (Afghanistan, Uzbekistan), Rendang (Indonesia, Malaysia). These dishes represent only a small sample of the wide and diverse culinary traditions found in OIC nations, each reflecting the region's distinct cultural and historical influences. *UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comprises eight cities that have been designated as UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy. These cities are renowned for their contributions to cuisine and rich culinary traditions. This includes Gaziantep, Hatay, and Afyonkarahisar (Türkiye), Bukhara, (Uzbekistan), Isfahan and Rasht (Iran), Sana'a, (Yemen), Zahlé, (Lebanon). *International exposure and media presence: Several culinary vloggers have traveled to member states of the OIC to discover and present their varied culinary traditions. This includes Mark Wiens (Migrationology), who visited Egypt, Türkiye, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and Trevor James (The Food Ranger), who visited Malaysia, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Jordan, and Morrocco. *Food markets: There are plenty of traditional and modern food markets in OIC countries, e.g., Dubai Spice Souk (Dubai), Tajrish Bazaar (Tehran), Karwan Bazar (Dhaka), and Oyingbo market (Lagos). Food markets provide a chance for visitors to discover a region's culinary culture and serve as a platform for local pride. *Affordability: Most OIC countries provide affordable prices regarding food, gastronomy, and different tourism products. This increases their competitive advantage in the global market.	*Gastronomy tourism in most OIC countries is still in its nascent stages. *Inadequate marketing and promotion: Gastronomy is not largely advertised or marketed or valued type of tourism. *Insufficient documentation of culinary heritage: There is a lack of comprehensive documentation of ingredients, dishes, recipes, and cooking techniques. *Workforce challenges: One of the main obstacles to providing top-notch culinary experiences is a shortage of qualified human resources and a lack of training opportunities. *Food safety: Standards for food safety are a source of worry, especially when it comes to the systems employed in food production, processing, storage, and transportation. *Inadequate infrastructure: Notable obstacles include a lack of high-quality lodging options in some countries, challenges with the supply chain, limited accessibility, inadequate connection (such as internet services), and undeveloped infrastructure (such as roads, electricity/water supplies).
Opportunities +	Threats –
*The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member nations have been home to a wide range of worldwide and international events encompassing sports, culture, politics, economics, and religion. For example, Expo 2020 Dubai (United Arab Emirates,	*Climate change: There is a hazard from the deteriorating environment brought on by climate change. Changes in rainfall and surface temperature have made the fields drier and elevated the risk of floods. This would disturb the growing environment for agricultural items

2021-2022), UN Climate Change Conference (COP22) (Morocco, 2016), FIFA World Cup 2022 (Qatar, 2022), G20 Summit 2015 (Türkiye, 2015). Moreover, upcoming future events that are expected to take place in OIC countries include the World Expo 2030 Riyadh (Saudi Arabia, 2030), and the 2027 AFC Asian Cup (Saudi Arabia, 2027). Spain, Morocco, and Portugal have been chosen as the joint hosts for the 2030 FIFA World Cup. Additionally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has put in a proposal to hold the 2034 World Cup of men's football. These events indeed provide a remarkable opportunity to market and promote gastronomy tourism. Planning for this should start from now. *Knowledge transfer: OIC countries can learn from each other. Knowledge transfer of best practices in gastronomy tourism can foster and elevate gastronomy tourism across the OIC members. *Infrastructure, culinary education, and worldwide recognition are all areas that may be improved. *Promoting agriculture and supporting regional farmers and livestock producers: OIC countries with their natural resources and funds can guarantee a robust agriculture sector that offers a steady supply of fresh, high-quality foodstuffs, which are necessary for authentic culinary experiences, as local goods and ingredients are a major asset for gastronomy tourism. *Strengthening Synergy: There is also an obvious need to foster collaboration and integrate efforts between the public and commercial sectors to participate in more effective planning and implementation of marketing and promotion activities. *Cultural legacy documentation and digital archiving should be utilized to preserve the culinary legacy. Exploiting programs such as Google Arts & Culture can help with this. This platform collaborates with museums, cultural institutions, and organizations worldwide to digitize and transmit cultural artifacts, artworks, and historical sites. It provides virtual tours, high-resolution images, and in-depth explanations, making cultural treasures accessible to everyone with an internet connection. Egypt has already had experience in this regard through the "Taste of Egypt" initiative.	and the geographic distribution of crops in some countries. Rising sea levels represent another threat to some countries. *Competing against close countries that share comparable gastronomy is a concern.

Despite potential issues, the countries of OIC have a significant opportunity to benefit from the gastronomy tourism market. One of these is the increasing awareness of Muslim-friendly and halal tourism (Biancone et al., 2019). Considering the Muslim population across the globe, the market size is projected to reach US$ 417.6 billion by 2034, growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.6% from 2024 to 2034 (Future Market Size, 2024). Although some countries (i.e., Malaysia,

Morocco, and Türkiye) receive a significant share of this market, more destinations in Asia, Africa, and Arab countries of OIC should attract visitors to their regions. Thus, OIC countries can get a share of this market by promoting their halal foods and providing tourists with halal-based activities (Battour et al., 2022). Moreover, international tourists give importance to responsible and sustainable tourism (Schönherr & Pikkemaat, 2023). For this, OIC countries have the potential to offer traditional farming and practices related to gastronomy tourism (SESRIC, 2023b). OIC member countries can promote and market their distinctive culinary heritage through travel companies, culinary activities (i.e., festivals, cooking classes), and social media to raise awareness of their food culture (SESRIC, 2023b).

While OIC nations' gastronomy tourism is still developing, there is a growing focus on showcasing their members' native cuisines and culinary experiences to visitors from across the world. Furthermore, the majority of the OIC nations may become hubs of gastronomy tourism in the future if the present strengths of OIC members are strengthened through strategic plans and efforts.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.1. Development of Gastronomy Tourism Destinations

Developing gastronomy tourism is profitable for destinations as it helps capture what the place has to offer in terms of food and beverages, fosters the exchange of culture, and enhances economic development, and sustainability. By paying attention to local food and beverage, destinations can thus appeal to gourmets, support the local economy, provide innovative entrepreneurial opportunities and jobs for the residents, promote traditional cuisine, and enhance people's identities. Furthermore, gastronomy tourism complements other tourism products and acts positively toward a destination's appeal, thus contributing to the revenue and global identification of culinary destinations.

2.1.1. Gastronomy tourism resources, products, and services

The tourism experience components remain ambiguous, as is the dilemma of whether these experiences are uni- or multidimensional (Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012). Gastronomy tourism represents a subset of cultural tourism (Scarpato, 2002), and is interchangeably named culinary tourism in North America, food tourism in Australia and New Zealand, and gastronomy tourism in European publications. However, gastronomy is an essential facet of the overall tourism experience, which has even been considered a main motivation for travel recently (Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). There is a link between gastronomy and tourism destinations since local cuisines offer testable recipes, flavors, chefs, and table manners infused with culture, making gastronomy the perfect experience for tourist consumption. Henderson (2009) presents this link within the framework of three concepts: (i) food as a tourism product; (ii) marketing food to tourists; and (iii) tourism as a means of development as a destination.

Since the natural and cultural values in a specific local destination form the basis for tourism development (Du Rand & Heath, 2006), food and beverages fall within the sphere of destination development, as cuisine (foods, dishes, the methods to prepare or cook them, and serving; Richards, 2002) involves aspects related to human culture and lifestyle insofar (Andersson et al., 2017). Thus, gastronomy encompasses a broad range of study topics (Dixit, 2019), including the study of the relationship between food and culture (Kivela & Crotts, 2006), establishing strategies for the planning and marketing of culinary destinations (Okumus & Cetin, 2018), as well as investigating methods for leveraging cuisine as an attraction for tourists (Cifci et al., 2022).

Scarpa (2002) underlined that eating and drinking activities provide pleasure and happiness to people rather than the basic needs of society. Likewise, Santich (2004) notes that the gastronomic character of a country or region (diversity of food and beverages produced and consumed), culinary characteristics (country-specific dishes, region-specific restaurants and dishes) and gastronomy tourism (food and beverage-oriented tourism structure). In addition, it is well known that the local food of destinations generates such unique experiences for tourists (Tsai & Wang, 2017), which is a common feature of a positive and memorable tourist experience (Cetin et al., 2014). Modern tourists have a high tendency to experience gastronomy tourism to taste traditional flavors other than ordinary foods and to observe the production stages (Getz et al., 2014). Therefore, the positive image of a food origin-destination generated by tourists' experience with its food relates to overall travel satisfaction and destination loyalty (Cifci et al., 2022).

However, when it comes to the choice of meals in a culinary tourism destination, tourists can differ by their level of interest, or by their motivating factors. For instance, first-time travelers are likely to be more conservative in their eating habits than repeaters. Additionally, tourists may sometimes have a negative attitude toward local foods due to cultural and belief differences, hygiene concerns, or individual preferences (Cifci et al., 2022). This variation led to the emergence of subcategories within food tourism types, namely gourmet, cuisine, gastronomic, culinary, and rural/urban (Andersson et al., 2017).

In this regard, Mitchell and Hall (2004) suggested that determining tourists' levels of interest in gastronomy during travel can be conceptualized as follows: (1) Gourmet tourism, gastronomy tourism, and culinary tourism each show that food is a primary motivation for travel. (2) Moderate interest: To get a glimpse of the lifestyle of the chosen destination, tourists attend activities classed under the culinary tourism umbrella. (3) Low interest: There are several reasons as to why tourists engage in food-related activities including the entire year-round rural/urban tourism. (4) No interest: tourists perceive food and drinks as mere wants that can be obtained from a destination (See Fig. 5).

Figure 4: Importance of a special interest in food as a travel motivation
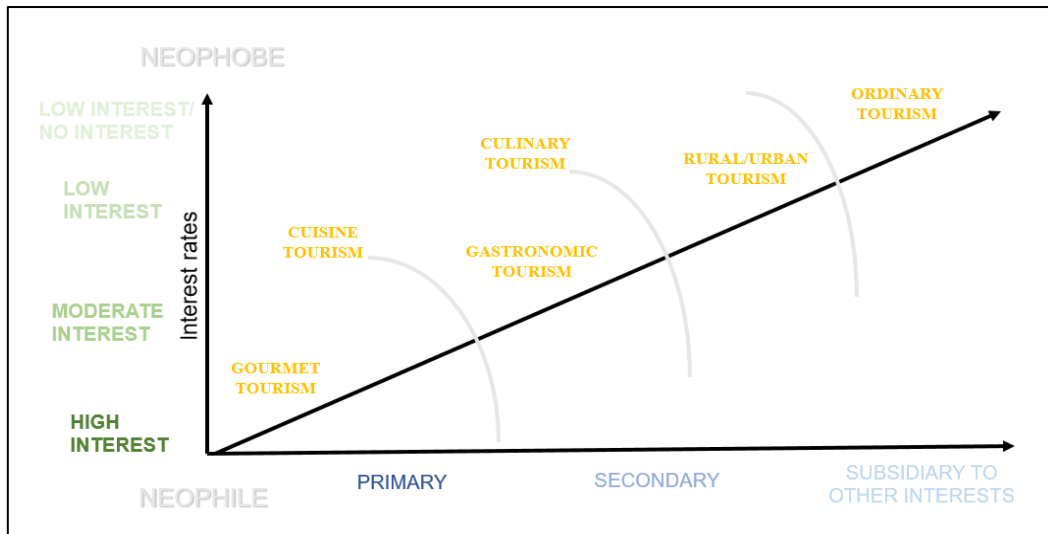
Source: Adapted from Mitchell and Hall (2004)

On the other hand, recognizing authentic food boosts the culinary identity of the destination (Okumus & Cetin, 2018). This fame affects the tourist perspective of destinations because local food is significantly associated with a destination's way of life, culture, belief, and heritage (Trubek, 2008), which plays a major role in attracting tourists and encouraging positive tourist behavior (Larsen, 2007; Lin et al., 2011). According to Quan and Wang (2004), food can be used as a tool to monetize the identity and culture of a destination and enable local producers to create value for their products by creating a tourism experience. Hence, a feeble gastronomic identity can be regarded as a disadvantage for a destination that is subject to a lack of resources (Fox, 2007).

As another authentic gastronomic phenomenon, street food has also become a part of the destination image in countries (Privitera & Nesci, 2015), as it is an essential cultural reflection of local people's lives (Cifci et al., 2022). Hence, it is a critical motive for visiting a gastronomic destination (Ozcelik & Akova, 2021). Street food is at the forefront in Asian countries, including Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia, and in these countries, responsible authorities motivate a diversity of offerings since they realize its advantages (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016) in promoting and competing with other destinations (Privitera & Nesci, 2015).

In sum, gastronomy tourism plays a role in the broader picture of cultural tourism because it provides unique experiences that are linked to local food customs and livelihoods. Its significance extends beyond providing tourists with outstanding dining experiences to building destination identities and fostering loyalty among tourists. As destinations embrace the essence of their culinary legacy and promote gastronomy as a strategic asset, they pave the road for long-term tourism growth and increased satisfaction among tourists.

2.1.2. Environmental analysis of gastronomy tourism

Environmental analysis of gastronomy tourism entails identifying internal and external factors that can influence the industry. This technique examines both environmental and socio-economic factors, including ecological impacts, cultural dynamics, and economic dependencies. By scrutinizing these elements, stakeholders can better understand the intricate interactions shaping gastronomy tourism, paving the way for informed decision-making and sustainable management practices.

There is a rising discourse centered on the concept of "returning to nature," prompting a critical assessment of the local food phenomena (Sims, 2009). This return is critical in enabling individuals to sidestep urban life's negative aspects and driving a shift in tourism expectations and preferences towards quietness, calmness, and a return to nature. Thus, modern tourists are more likely to conserve traditional values that are consistent with their likes and preferences, and they are becoming more experienced, knowledgeable, conscientious, discerning, and sophisticated (Stanford, 2006). The rise of conscientious modern tourists, marked by increased environmental consciousness and sensitivity to ecological balance, is also generating beneficial changes in their behaviors (Nyberg et al., 2022). The new class of tourists that has evolved in reaction to these quantitative changes is marked by an ethical orientation to consumption, sensitivity to ecological balance, a focus on authentic values, and a preference for more immersive and active travel experiences (Tricarico & Geissler, 2017).

Undoubtedly, cultural values are also on the edge of extinction with the globalization process, and the sustainability of cultural values is now being questioned, as well as the necessity for conservation (Scott, 2010). Food and beverage culture, which is a concrete expression of abstract cultural history, has also received its share of the circumstances. With globalization, a monotonous food culture focused on fast food emerged, while local and traditional gastronomic qualities began to fade. However, gastronomy tourism can lead to the integration of sustainable supply chains, as well as the development of employment and economic growth in related sectors and the supply chain itself (Eastham, 2019). Food and beverage may refer to ingredients grown or processed to reflect the regional characteristics of a destination (Ignatov & Smith, 2006). These foods and beverage can also increase a destination's sustainability and uniqueness, strengthen its economy, and create hospitality businesses (Lin et al., 2011).

Based on the economic contribution of gastronomy tourism, sustainable gastronomy is a concept that is based on environmental sustainability while protecting and improving the economic condition of society (Scarpato, 2002). Since it is a tourism activity that develops local people's lives and supports agricultural activities economically in the region (Yurtseven, 2011), having the support of residents in culinary destinations is essential. Because gastro tourists are more prone to experience the richness of folk traditions through culinary. By getting acquainted with locals, tourists, therefore, can reach their quest for authenticity and fulfill their desire to learn about the tangible culture of the visited culinary destinations (Diaconescu et al., 2016). Hence, gastronomy events that bring local

people and tourists together are important in terms of host and guest engagement. On the other hand, gastronomy tourism is mostly associated with agricultural tourism that offers commercial enterprise on farm areas for education, enjoyment, and/or active involvement in the production phases of food and beverages (Diaconescu et al., 2016). Tourists get the opportunity to learn more about the way of production in culinary destinations, participate in the production process of cultivation/harvesting, and contribute to the economic development of gastronomy tourism by easing important economic, cultural, and environmental problems (See Figure 6).

Figure 5: The impact of Agri-based gastronomy tourism
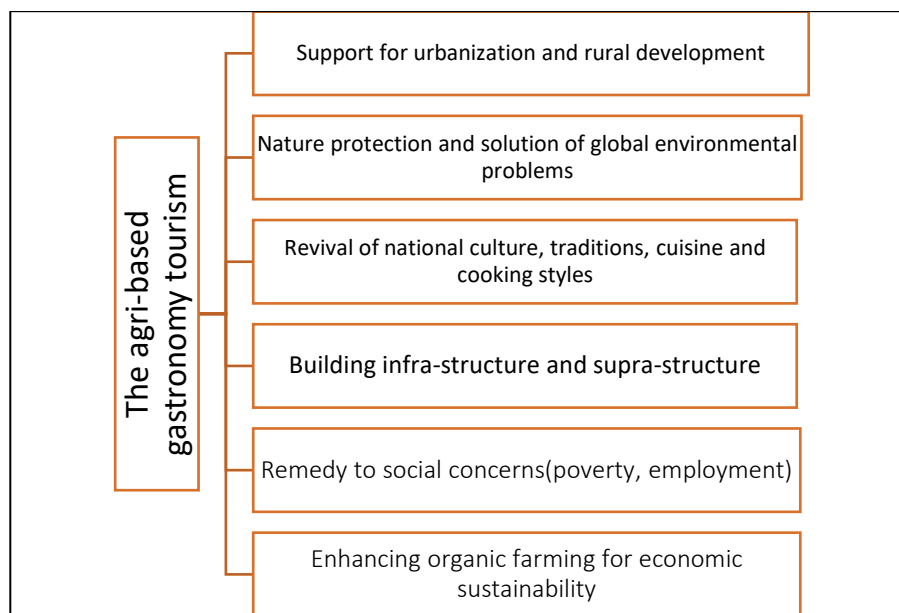
Source: Adapted from Pehin Dato Musa and Chin (2022).

From an environmental point of view, the promotion of gastronomy tourism activities in rural and peri-urban zones may provide a solution to the problems of new urban expansion. Thus, gastronomy tourism is considered one of the directions of sustainable socioeconomic development for local communities in peri-urban and rural areas, without negatively affecting bio- and geographical diversity (Gonzalez-Alejo & Neger, 2024). Given the large share of gastronomy in the travel budget, which reaches third (Hall & Sharples, 2003), the development of gastronomy tourism can also prevent temporal and spatial concentration in the destinations and attract visitors identified as 'quality tourists'. Hjalager and Johansen's (2013) study, focusing on visitors to natural parks in the United States, revealed that up to 81% of tourists expressed a desire to sample locally sourced cuisine as well as showed willingness to pay premium prices for this type of culinary experience.

This strategy also aligns with the World Tourism Organisation's (WTO) twelve specific objectives for sustainable tourism, namely economic viability, local prosperity, employment quality, social equity, visitor fulfillment, local control, community wellbeing, cultural richness, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency, and environmental purity. These goals are relevant to gastronomy tourism in a variety of ways, including promoting the development of local, small-scale tourism

businesses that purchase locally sourced goods, utilize ingredients and energy efficiently, and preserve their traditional gastronomic culture as an integral part of their destinations' cultural heritage.

In essence, the critical need to reconnect with nature highlights a major shift in tourist paradigms, with tranquillity, authenticity, and ecological awareness taking precedence. This shift in tourist tastes, typified by a rising awareness of environmental stewardship and a desire for immersive experiences, represents an important turning point in the tourism industry. Concurrently, as industrialization and globalization threaten the survival of traditional values, cuisine appears as both a victim and a remedy.

Despite the advance of homogenous fast-food culture, gastronomy tourism serves as a beacon of hope, promoting the preservation of local culinary history while boosting long-term economic growth. Gastronomy tourism emerges as a powerful force for positive change by promoting locally sourced ingredients, supporting small-scale businesses, and adhering to the principles of sustainable development outlined by the World Tourism Organisation and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Gastronomy tourism promotes the preservation of local culinary traditions while also adhering to the ideals of sustainable tourism, paving the way for a more peaceful cohabitation between humans and nature.

2.1.3. Building infra-structure and supra-structure for gastronomy tourism at destinations

The development of infra-structure and supra-structure for gastronomy tourism at focal destinations is critical in both attracting tourists (pull factors) and fulfilling their needs through distinctive gastro experiences (push factors) (Mak et al., 2011). Infrastructure refers to physical infrastructure, logistical infrastructure, and digital infrastructure while supra-structure consists of destination marketing, tourist information and guidance, local, and community engagement, regulatory framework, culinary education and training, gastronomic events and festivals, routes and itineraries, food safety and quality control, community-based tourism initiatives (Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Ignatov & Smith, 2006) (see Fig. 7). Hence, investing in culinary infrastructure and services can allow destinations to adapt to the different demands and motivations of gastronomy tourists, increasing their appeal and competitiveness in the global tourism industry. Largely, food acts as a powerful motivator for travel, attracting people who seek out distinctive experiences. Along with other considerations, food is a key factor that shapes potential tourists' decisions about where to travel (Jiménez Beltrán et al., 2016).

Figure 6: Infrastructure and supra-structure for gastronomy tourism at destinations
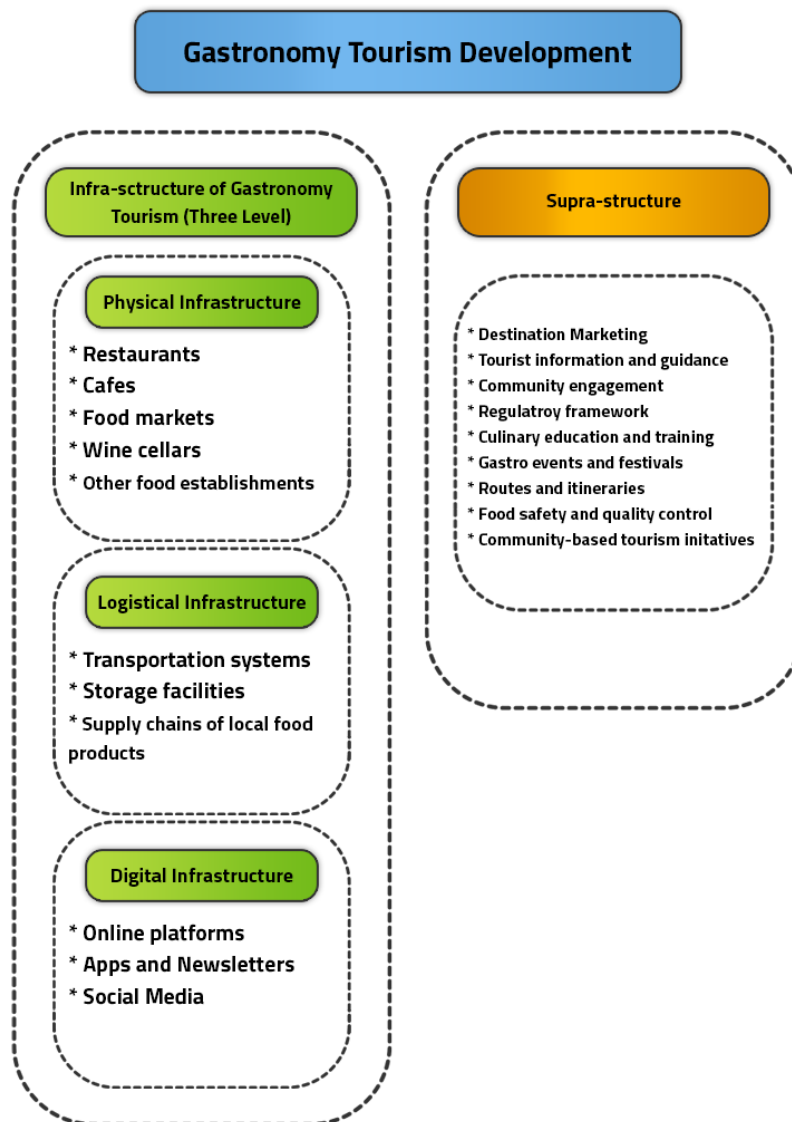
Source: Adapted from Ignatov and Smith (2006), and Chaney and Ryan (2012)

The effective and efficient development of gastronomy tourism offers significant benefits to all related sectors. At the same time, it has the potential to provide opportunities for the development and improvement of the welfare level of all regions. In this context, it is important to first investigate the resources of gastronomy tourism to determine possible development strategies and competitive advantages (Horn & Tsai, 2012). In terms of travel, gastronomy is directly related to culture and social identity, serving as an important tool for transferring cultural characteristics to different individuals and societies, and acting as a source of curiosity and attraction (Rand & Heat, 2006). Concerning gastronomy tourism, authentic food and beverages strengthen the tourist value of a destination (Mckrecher et al., 2008), and increase tourist demand for the destination (Gyimóthy & Mykletun,

2009), and competitive advantage. Many countries with a diverse and vibrant food culture use food as a way of marketing their destination from other tourism zones.

Gastronomy extends beyond just dining experiences to include the materials and equipment used in the kitchen, product knowledge, how products are consumed, different usage areas, cooking, storage, presentation, and the meaning and importance of products in the context of society. The development of gastronomy tourism requires a framework involving a process. The strategic development-focused gastronomy tourism framework, including push and pull factors proposed by Chaney and Ryan (2012), is depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 7: Process of strategic gastronomic tourism development
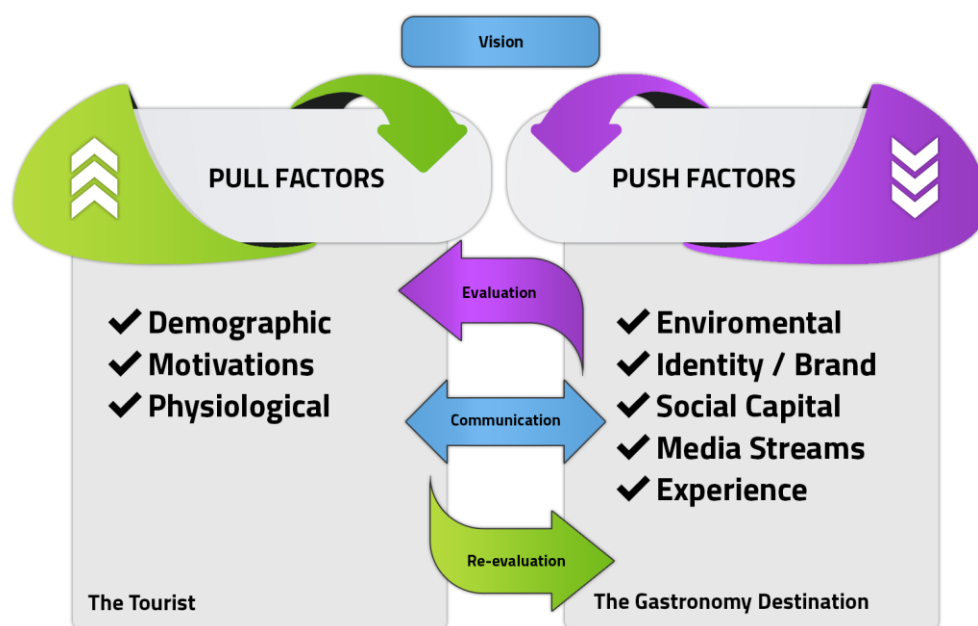
Source: Adapted from Chaney and Ryan (2012)

Food and beverage establishments are among the leading revenue-generating sectors in the tourism industry. Tourists spend more on food and beverages during their travels than in their daily lives. Thus, while gastronomy was previously seen as a complementary tourism activity in tourism literature, it has now become a shining star in the tourism industry. According to Goolaup and Mossberg (2016), socializing with friends and family while eating is a crucial part of the travel experience. Discovering new dishes/flavors at a destination is especially notable since such experiences in other countries are unique and provide prestige to visiting visitors (Fields, 2002). The types of gastro experience vary during travel and might cover sensory, cultural, and social experiences. Tourists' opinions, emotions, and the characteristics of the food form the basis of gastronomy tourism. Thus, tourists may dabble in food tourism occasionally, but it is rare for anyone to be a dedicated food tourist all the time (Getz et al., 2024).

2.1.4. Capacity Building in gastronomy tourism

It is essential to distinguish gastronomy as two interconnected concepts: practical and theoretical gastronomy. This conception clearly bifurcates gastronomy science between cuisine applications and the study of food, which extends the history of gastronomy and the physical and chemical understanding of culinary techniques and processes (Cifci & Demirkol, 2023). As a practice, gastronomy represents the application of science and the exercise of know-how, which together constitute a culinary art. In this regard, 'practical gastronomy' refers to the processing and preparing of raw food and putting it into edible and visually appealing products that have national, regional, and cultural characteristics. This involves the cooking techniques and skills necessary to come up with food commodities that are in harmony with the specific culinary culture of a specific culinary tourism destination (Gillespie, 2002, p. 3).

On the other hand, 'Theoretical gastronomy' involves studying eating and drinking, production/preparation, and how, where, when, and why food and beverage are consumed, implicating the philosophies, beliefs, and values influencing gastronomic practices (Cifci et al., 2020). These, in turn, refer to the social, cultural, historical, and political study of dining, or the analysis of traditional cuisines. Thus, this distinction should be addressed in the creation of new curricula and in the work of culinary educators or academics (Cankül, 2019).

Various universities around the world have introduced gastronomy programs in their faculties and higher education institutions. The gastronomy programs have been a subject in diverse disciplines, including tourism and hospitality, food engineering, agriculture, and art. However, the study of gastronomy has more relevance to the tourism and hospitality field. Hence, it is endowed with the responsibility of developing new products and services, the preparation and presentation of food using advanced methods, and exploiting on digital communication and marketing to showcase such products and services (Caraher & Seeley, 2010). The study of gastronomy has a multidisciplinary nature as the tourism and hospitality field (Horng & Lee, 2009), involves art, science, rules/norms, people's lifestyles, beliefs and values, climate, geography, agriculture, commerce, trade, and industry (Santich, 2004).

Along with the universities' gastronomy programs, there are many courses, training, and workshop opportunities offered in various culinary destinations. The National Institute of Cookery in London, Le Cordon Bleu and l'École Professionnelle de Cuisine et des Sciences Alimentaires in Paris are the well-known leading institutions. These gastronomy-related courses typically attract tourists to discover the history of local dishes, and how to cook them and use their authentic ingredients before consuming them (Agyeiwaah et al.,2019). However, despite the abundance of culinary schools for providing a hands-on lived experience for tourists (Prayag et al., 2020), gastronomy cannot match art, which offers a commitment to imagination at cultural, artistic, political, and scientific excellence rather than replicating the same contents (Hegarty, 2011). Therefore, the inclusion of art and philosophy becomes significant in developing and enriching educational programs in the field of gastronomy.

Similarto all fields of education, the purpose of gastronomy education is to graduate students who can reason, ask questions, and contribute to the creation of new knowledge. Thus, reflecting this goal, technology in all potential aspects must be taken into consideration in the educational process in terms of planning and implementation of gastronomy education (Brown et al., 2013).

A study by Albayrak (2022) in Türkiye revealed that a significant number of academicians in gastronomy departments are not specialized in fields of gastronomy and have limited gastronomy-related scientific studies. This means that educational institutions are urgently required to prepare themselves to meet their obligations and responsibilities instead of just transferring general information from the curriculum to the students (Santich, 2004). Engaging other teaching staff from technology-based departments and disciplines and ensuring that the industry professionals teach the courses can be a solution to the problems arising from non-tech-friendly educators.

Furthermore, gastronomy education should be examined and developed through a system of feedback used frequently to determine its relevance and outcomes. Therefore, as Oney (2016) highlighted internship and workplace training have to be effective through the integration of universities with the sector (Seyitoğlu, 2019). Communication channels have to be built with sectors of hospitality and tourism for the effectiveness of culinary curricula (Müller & Harrington, 2009). As Hertzman and Stefanelli (2008) noted, this communication has to establish professional skills for gastronomy education through professional chefs, seminars, and courses both for the enhancement of the education output and the student's career in obtaining professional skills. In this regard, some efforts to cooperate with the industry can be developed via applications (Tsai et al., 2017) such as internship contracts, on-the-job training agreements, participation in gastronomy competitions, research projects, consultancy services, workshops, and seminar-style courses (Zopiatis et al., 2014).

Capacity building can also involve initiatives to engage local communities and businesses. Some of the approaches that would engage and profit the local community and business include:

-Development initiatives: Creating and offering chances for businesses to grow would be highly appreciated by business owners and operators. Learning from the Italian example, CLUB ITALIA can be beneficial. CLUB ITALIA provides all private tourist sector operators with the opportunity to grow and market their operations on an international scale. CLUB ITALIA keeps private operators updated about changes in the global demand market. They may also attend workshops/roadshows, fairs, webinars, and any other event where many international visitors are interested in the Italian tourist industry by joining CLUB ITALIA.

-**Empowering local communities through food festivals:** Food festivals have been acknowledged by UNESCO as an integral component of destinations' intangible cultural heritage (Pizzichini et al., 2022). During festivals, local communities and local products become a major vehicle for propagating the culture of a place (Pizzichini et al., 2022). In Italy, for example, sagre are community-based cuisine

festivals that are typically held in rural locations in smaller centers. Sagre are well-attended because they provide a rare opportunity to have a high-quality, inexpensive meal prepared by valued local women and men with extensive home cooking experience in an atmosphere of festivity, laughter, and conviviality (Ascione & Fink, 2021). Such events can utilize and boost locals' sense of pride in their food and cooking traditions, ensuring strong local engagement.

-Culinary education opportunities: The establishment of culinary schools can contribute massively by training skilled chefs to preserve local culinary traditions. Individuals from the local community can be encouraged to join. Institutions offering this education can also engage local communities in their activities, e.g., seminars and workshops, benefiting from their culinary traditions.

-Participation in decision-making: Engaging all stakeholders, including the local community and businesses, in data gathering, processing, and decision-making enhances teamwork, openness, and accountability within destinations, which in turn increases ownership of the tourism development process (Stephenson, 2014).

-**Participation in culinary heritage documentation and archiving**: Local communities and businesses can actively participate in culinary heritage documentation and archiving projects. Local communities represent depositories of knowledge regarding dishes, recipes, and cooking techniques. This will also empower local populations by bringing attention to the value of preserving and advancing distinctive culinary, cultural, artistic, and sustainable tourist resources.

2.1.5. Investment facilitation in gastronomy tourism

Local culture, tradition, arts, cuisine, and the natural environment of rural places are increasingly becoming popular as a part of creative economy-based development strategies (Rachão et al., 2018). Many destinations have put their cultural identity at the center of their development plans (Tricarico & Geissler, 2017). Thus, various new stakeholders (e.g., municipalities, seed and livestock producers, farmer federations, local chefs, and gourmets) are increasingly engaged and searching for intersectoral and interregional collaborations to produce innovative agro-food products/services.

These collaborations also become a development strategy to utilize the impact of food in territorial dynamics by the European Commission for developing regional umbrella brands for European Union sustainable agro-foods (Cavicchi & Stancova, 2016). Likewise, the UNWTO has also underlined the gastronomy tourism dimensions, such as culinary traditions in terms of tourist visits (UNWTO, 2023). Similarly, the OECD investigated the relationship between the Creative Economy, gastronomy, and tourism, underlining how culinary creativity has become an important issue in international tourism. UNESCO now considers creative city networks on an equal footing with tangible heritage, including gastronomy (UNESCO, 2024). In this sense, organizing food-based festivals (e.g., harvest, vintage) or events (e.g., workshops, competitions, shows, and exhibitions) can also sustain the liveliness of gastronomy destinations (Duarte Alonso & Liu, 2011).

The improvement of gastronomy tourism with investments produces a diversity of food and beverage products, thereby triggering commercial benefits for food and beverage enterprises in terms of operating as a business organization (Yurtseven, 2011). These positive changes in the industry allow many people to venture into new food-related businesses and organizations through innovative entrepreneurship opportunities. Along with the entrepreneurship activities in the formal economy, local chefs and gourmets' entrepreneurial activities in the meal-sharing economy (e.g., food tours, cooking and dining together, kitchen training) have also become essential for culinary marketing (Kahraman et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to offer tax deductions or exemptions, entrepreneurship support, training, and consultancy services to stakeholders who contribute to agro-tourism-oriented gastronomy tourism. In this respect, it would be appropriate for the continuing education centers of universities or the education departments of local administrative units to undertake these tasks.

In addition to supporting new entrepreneurs, it is important to protect existing enterprises and guarantee their sustainability when considering global crises (Demirdelen Alrawadieh & Cifci, 2021). As previously mentioned in Mitchell and Hall's (2004) gastronomy tourism typology, gourmets have a high interest in authentic food and even make their travel plans accordingly. Considering the role of restaurants as representatives of the destinations to attract gourmet tourists, international restaurant rating systems (e.g., Michelin, The World's 50 Best Restaurants) become important in this regard (Cavus et al., 2024). Therefore, gastronomy tourism managers should increase the number of award-winning and star-rated restaurants by introducing international restaurant rating systems to their countries and ensuring that their existing restaurants comply with the criteria of these rating systems.

Marketing destinations through their culinarians is of great value for succeeding in attracting many tourists. This strategy has been used proved successful in San Sebastian, Spain. In addition to the region's specific ethnic foods, molecular gastronomy-oriented foods prepared with modern culinary techniques have attracted great attention (Cifci & Demirkol, 2023). Therefore, as Cifci et al. (2020) stressed, kitchens especially those established in universities for practical gastronomy applications, must be essentially transformed into culinary laboratories. Students have to create new-generation foods with science-based cooking techniques rather than only applying classical recipes. In this respect, some modifications to science-based cooking techniques in the curriculum at universities are urgently recommended.

2.2. Marketing Gastronomy Tourism Destinations

Gastronomy tourism is often regarded as a fusion of two components– culinary experience and tourism potential— that invite tourists to taste the newly discovered areas of the world. Promoting gastronomy tourism destinations requires comprehensive strategies to make them more appealing to tourists and easily accessible. This multifaceted process begins with market research, aimed at identifying consumers' perceptions and behaviours in food tourism. Partnership with the local

stakeholders (e.g., businesses, restaurants, food producers, and suppliers) is essential for developing the destination's identity through food. Apart from increasing its reach, marketing strategies are also intended to create demand by promoting the range and desirability of local foods through various media. Thus, proper selection and management of the competitive distribution channels make sure that these experiences reach the targeted audience.

Furthermore, branding is indeed central to the development of a clear image of the destination as a culinary paradise. Promotional activities such as narrative communication through new and conventional platforms are, therefore, critical in presenting the various stories and cultural heritage attributed to the culinary product of the identified destination. Lastly, promoting gastronomy tourism destinations requires a matching of supply and demand, along with enhancing the appreciation and discovery of various cuisines among travellers around the world.

From a marketing perspective, gastronomy tourism can be fostered if adequate marketing strategies are used. These are elaborated below:

-Digital marketing: Developing ties between firms and customers through Internet platforms is known as a digital marketing approach. Digital marketing encompasses several areas, such as influencers, content, e-commerce, and e-mail direct marketing, in addition to social media marketing. The primary responsibility of a digital marketer is to leverage social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to accelerate consumer engagement and connection. Social media platforms are valuable resources for social connection as well as information about travel (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022).

-Gastrodiplomacy: Gastrodiplomacy is a type of public diplomacy that blends cultural diplomacy, culinary diplomacy, and country branding to make foreign culture visible via taste and touch. It involves the use of food in the country's branding, creating a convergence of culinary culture with foreign policy (Suntikul, 2019). A country's brand is influenced by its tourism image, which reflects the unique attributes of the location as perceived by visitors. Globally, national governments have been using comprehensive gastro-diplomacy campaigns to promote their national food brands in recent years. These efforts utilize the appealing, sentimental, and sensory components of food as a tool of soft power through coordinated policy actions. International industrial fairs are among the most potent instruments of promoting cultural and gastrodiplomacy, e.g., SIAL Paris (Salon International de l'Alimentation), Foodex Japan, Thaifex – Anuga Asia, and Gulfood.

-Familiarization Trip (Fam Trip): FAM trips are an important aspect of marketers' business strategies since they promote and brand a destination. Since travel agencies and the media are regarded as the main opinion leaders who affect tourists' decisions when selecting a place, these trips are arranged for them (Kaurav & Sharma, 2017). The Italian National Tourist Board planned an

exclusive Fam Trip for 12 prominent Mexican travel operators, intended to highlight the relevance and need for boosting tourism to Italy as a destination.

-**Storytelling**: Destination storytelling is seen as a strategy to improve the reputation of destinations. The primary benefit of a business's ability to tell a compelling tale is that customers get engaged, contribute, and design their own experiences (Liberato, Liberato, Nunes, Ferreira, 2023). Storytelling goes beyond just "telling a story", or merely reciting a list of events in chronological order. It includes "all the processes of seducing a tourist, the cultural and ritual exchanges between visitor and host, the tourist narratives on which the identities of people, places and brands are built" (Liberato et al., 2023, p. 57).

Digital storytelling may serve as a platform for collaborative experience development and draw tourists to the location and patrons of the company (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022). Digital technologies are being used more often by libraries, archives, and museums to convey stories and develop mobile applications (apps) for cultural heritage content (Liberato et al., 2023), and there is a potential for their use in marketing and promoting gastronomy tourism as well. An example of this was the outcome of a collaboration between "La Cucina Italiana" and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, I Racconti delle Radici, which narrates the history of the cuisine of Italians who emigrated to America between the end of the nineteenth century and the seventies of the twentieth century.

-**Leveraging influencers for culinary promotion**: Extending an invitation to food bloggers, vloggers, and influencers to sample and record the local cuisine to use their material to improve the nation's marketing and promotion campaigns.

-**Showcasing culinary richness at international travel shows**: Participation in international travel shows, such as the Arabian Travel Market and the ITB Berlin (Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin), is used to promote cuisine and highlight the variety and richness of the destinations' tourist attractions.

2.2.1. Enhancing quality and quantity of gastronomy tourism demand

As competition between tourism destinations increases, it is becoming increasingly common to develop local food and beverages to create gastro-tourism demand (López-Guzmán & Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012; Frieds, 2003). In this sense, gastronomy plays a major role in developing new goods and services (Richards, 2002), by preserving the uniqueness of the region via traditional recipes and eating customs passed down through the generations (Ruiz et al., 2020). The heritage holds cultural and gastro wealth, and lifestyle, thus, while food and beverages in destinations serve to cover a basic need of tourists, it also provides an impetus for experimentation; i.e., willingness to travel to eat (Richards, 2003).

The terminology of "gastronomy" (viz., the combination of raw foods, techniques of cooking dishes, table manners, and customs) is, therefore, appreciated as a part of the cultural identification of a specific region. It reflects regions' history, tradition, and people and, in cases such as "Ceremonial Keşkek tradition in Türkiye", represents an intangible cultural heritage of humanity recognized by UNESCO in 2011 (UNESCO, 2024) and becomes a point of attraction. According to Tikkanen (2007), this is also considered to be part of the cultural environment through which the visiting individuals can familiarize themselves with it or interact; as one aspect used during the promotion of tourism; with respect to local economic growth; and in terms of how it affects both regional economics and consumption trends. This implies that one must understand these variables related to food for tourist attraction purposes since they are principles guiding local development (Fox, 2007).

Moreover, gastronomy tourism prospers in regions where indigenous cuisine and authentic food products deeply intertwine with close by cultures (Riley, 2005). As stated by Okumus and Cetin (2018), food holds great capability for riding tourism growth, necessitating robust advertising techniques to enhance tourist numbers. Furthermore, gastronomy tourism highlights the utilization of local components, the excellence of primary products, the perpetuation and dissemination of conventional culinary strategies, and the gratification derived from the culinary throughput. However, the prosperity of culinary tourism demands giant assets. The provision of exceptional dining businesses (e.g., restaurants, cafes, food kiosks) is an obvious need.

Uncontrolled increase in fast food consumption and rejection of McDonaldization: Decreasing interest in fast food establishments that are standardized at a global level due to the adoption of consumers in more and more countries and sectors. Movements such as Slow Food and Cittaslow have an impact on this trend.

Increasing awareness of tourists: Tourists pay more attention to where the food they eat comes from, how it tastes, and the quality and safety of the food. This conscious consumption leads tourists to choose more local and quality food (Seo et al., 2017).

Household change: Household change resulting from human relocations leads to increased tourist demands. This change leads to tourists' new food preferences and interest in gastronomic tourism.

Increasing demands of tourists and increasing the value of goods: Increasing demands of consumers cause the value of goods to increase. This leads to greater diversity and quality offered in gastronomy tourism. Based on the contemporary consumer trends whereby customers look for genuine and realistic experiences, the market for quality products and food specializing in a particular region increases. As a result, geographic locations must endeavour to add different dimensions to the dishes they provide, from the native preparations to the exciting new hybrids that will appeal to the refined palates of the tourists.

Increasing number of partnerships and strategic alliances in tourism for marketing and product innovation: The increasing number of partnerships and strategic alliances in tourism enables new product and service offerings in gastronomy tourism. For example, in increasing tourist demand and magnifying the value of foods within a destination, gastro-diplomacy—essentially the ability to use food as a form of cultural and diplomatic interaction—is a critical factor (Suntikul, 2019). This way destinations are in a better position not only to attract tourists who are interested in exploring the local food but also to build better rapport with the target audience through appreciation of the culture and tradition in taste.

Role of Celebrity Chef: The role of the celebrity chef and media ensures that tourists go to that chef's restaurant to satisfy their curiosity. For example, many tourists visit Ferran Adria's restaurant in Barcelona (Demirkol & Cifci, 2020).

Power of social media: Social media allows potential tourists to easily learn where and what to eat in a destination. This offers an opportunity to discover new places and foods in gastronomy tourism through existing narratives (Wong et al., 2015). Furthermore, the target groups or the relevant stakeholders defining this area are influencers and food enthusiasts, posing tempting stories and recommendations on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. In this regard, influencers utilize their massive followers and collaborations with tourism offices and locally-owned restaurants to create awareness of the regional delicacies and less-known or less-visited experiences or locations in gastronomy tourism (Ingrassia et al., 2022). Together, influencers and foodies harness the potentiality of social platforms, which are visually rich, and share memorable travel experiences as well as transform the feel of food experiences and relationships across the world.

Additionally, projects together with food routes can exemplify coordinated endeavors. These routes integrate educational, promotional, and recreational elements (Alonso, 2013), which include events like food fairs, in addition to endorsements from entities like the Michelin Guide, that could validate the distinction of nearby gastronomy on provide (Smith & Xiao, 2008). Incorporating authentic food resources within cultural and environmental frameworks, gastronomy tourism necessitates the involvement of numerous stakeholders, inclusive of food business, accommodations, and travel agents (Rachão et al., 2019).

2.2.2. Connecting gastronomy tourism supply with demand at the destination
The core of gastronomy tourism stems from agriculture, culture, and tourism (Du Rand & Heath (2006). Each of these factors provides chances and activities for promoting and establishing culinary tourism as a key attraction and experience within a place. Agriculture provides the basic commodity, food; culture adds historical depth and authenticity; and tourism provides the required infrastructure and services, combining the three to create the gastro-tourist experience. These key components serve as the foundation for gastronomy tourism's integration into the larger tourist paradigm.

Gastronomy tourism stands out as an important factor in destination selection among today's tourists (Kivela & Crott, 2005). Tourists not only want to experience new adventures by revisiting places they liked before or discovering new places but also to experience local flavors and be engaged with the local culture. Therefore, when marketing plans for destinations are made, gastronomy-specific attractiveness elements should be emphasized, and appropriate supply opportunities should be encouraged to offer these food experiences to tourists. In this respect, marketing strategies should increase the demand for gastronomic tourism by promoting local culinary culture and emphasizing the importance of gastronomic events and festivals (Horng & Tsai, 2012).

Numerous studies also highlight the meaningful relationship between destination marketing strategies and gastronomy. For example, Seyitoğlu and Ivanov (2020) examined the link between gastronomy and marketing and discussed how destinations can develop marketing strategies to promote local food culture. Similarly, Hall and Sharples (2004) emphasized the benefits that gastronomy tourism provides to destinations in rural areas (e.g., local entrepreneurship, equal income distribution, and increase in product quality and production promotion) and touched on how these can be increased with concrete marketing strategies (Boyne & Hall, 2004). These academic studies provide an important basis for understanding the impact of marketing plans on gastronomy tourism demand.

Consequently, gastronomy tourism takes a critical position among the marketing strategies of destinations today. Marketing strategies can contribute to the development of gastronomic tourism by focusing on the interest in food culture and advertising gastronomy events. In this sense, international sources are important sources of academia for this relationship along with leadership to introduce the importance and influence of marketing strategies on gastronomy tourism. For example, UNESCO now considers creative city networks on an equal footing with tangible heritage, including gastronomy (UNESCO, 2024). The UNWTO has also underlined the gastronomy tourism dimensions, such as culinary traditions in terms of tourist visits (UNWTO, 2023). Similarly, the OECD investigated the relationship between the Creative Economy, gastronomy, and tourism (OECD, 2012), underlining how culinary creativity has become an important issue in current world tourism.

2.2.3. Positioning for gastronomy tourism products, routes, and destinations

In the context of gastronomic tourism, numerous culinary destinations can be established in areas with fertile soil, favorable climate, and abundant water resources. For example, many elements such as local herbs, spices, recipes, local products, cooking styles, presentation, and table manners are important sources for tourists to learn about the lives and cultures of individuals in a certain geography. Taking sustainable measures that will not cause cultural erosion in the production of these elements plays an important role in determining and maintaining the tourism potential of a destination (Zain et al., 2023). These products generally consist of local culinary heritage, traditional

dishes, local flavors, and local products. For this reason, it is important not to turn people into objects of commercialization and not to mislead the tourists in their search for real authenticity,

It is, therefore, necessary to support local industries, support markets for local foods, and involve locals in tourism so that they can promote gastronomy tourism products. For instance, Japan, specifically Kyoto, can be identified as a gastronomic tourism destination owing to the richness and diversity of Japanese traditional food. Informally known as the 'Kitchen of Kyoto', Nishiki Market is an interesting place for tourists eager to taste traditional Japanese cuisine. Also, tea houses and tofu restaurants in Kyoto are some of the tourist attractions that are famous among travelers.

On the other hand, gastro-tourism routes, which have become popular in recent years and are organized by gastro-guides, attract great attention (Csapó & Wetzl, 2016). Gastronomy tourism routes allow tourists to simultaneously discover gastronomic experiences in a particular region and experience the region through the eyes of local people, sometimes with local people in the sharing economy or with guides trained in the relevant field, who know the region well. These routes often include local restaurants, produce, markets, farms, museums, and other gastronomic hotspots. In this respect, to successfully position gastronomy tourism routes, it is necessary to identify unique and attractive gastro points that will attract the attention of tourists and to develop strategies that enable these determined points to produce sustainable products (Richards, 2002).

For instance, the Tuscany region of Italy with famous olive oils. for example. is a great example of gastronomy tourism. In addition, gourmet restaurants in various towns and villages of Tuscany are other different elements that attract the attention of tourists. Another example is the Istanbul Grand Bazaar, which has shops containing a variety of foods as well as many products specific to the country. However, during the COVID-19 period, tourism businesses in Türkiye, just like other food businesses, have suffered deep wounds. From this perspective, it can be said that it is essential to take effective measures during crisis periods (Demirdelen Alrawadieh & Cifci, 2021).

It is well-known that gastronomy tourism destinations can now be one of the main reasons for tourists to visit a particular region. When these destinations are examined, they are generally places with a rich food culture, various local restaurants, and plenty of gastro-geographical activities. Given this perspective, the unique gastronomic features of destinations need to be emphasized to position gastronomy tourism destinations successfully and stand strong against competitors (Pike, 2016). For example, Ffood events are essential drivers that contribute to an individual's decision to visit Burgundy. In addition, gourmet restaurants, local product markets, and production farms in various villages of Burgundy attract the attention of gastronomy tourists.

2.2.4. Segmentation in Gastronomy Tourism

Segmentation in gastronomy tourism aims to reach target audiences more effectively by slicing the market in line with the different gastronomic preferences, needs, and expectations of tourists (Correia et al., 2009). This segmentation can play an important role in the process of determining and positioning gastronomy tourism products, routes, and destinations (Kivela & Crotts, 2005). For example, it would be more meaningful to design the products by looking at the tourist typologies that the country hosts or aims to host. It might be fastidious for French gourmets, who are sensitive about the use of spices, to respond to Indian cuisine, which exaggeratedly uses spices.

On the other hand, it is known that religious beliefs determine people's eating habits. It would also be beneficial to consider religious elements such as halal cuisine for Muslim tourists and kosher cuisine for Jews (Yousaf, 2022). For instance, it cannot be a successful segmentation strategy if a destination that wishes to differentiate itself by wine tourism wants to welcome Muslim visitors. In addition, knowing whether tourists visit alone or with family members, their average age, and the gastronomy culture of the region may be important for effective segmentation. All these elements are important factors in determining the marketing strategies of tourism businesses and destinations (du Rand & Heath, 2006); hence, DMOs should raise awareness among all stakeholders regarding the segmentation of tourism hosted or targeted.

DMOs employ various methods of culinary iconography, including, but not limited to, advertisement campaigns, travel and tourism promotion, packages, brochures, and pamphlets, among others. These can develop the culinary image of the place. These are promotional materials that can be employed to build a representation of a given travel destination and the foods and drinks available there, which may compel tourists to travel to that location. Chang and Mak (2018) reveal tourists' perceptions of gastronomy in destinations in three ways: "organic image", "stimulated image" and "complex image." The organic image is reflected in tourism information sources such as news, geography books, and magazine articles, as well as tourists' social? that developed based on the information about gastronomy and local cuisine that they receive from their surroundings. A stimulated image can be obtained from food tourism information such as official tourism sites, travel blogs, and travel agency brochures. The complex image is created by tourists who experience gastronomy and tourism products within the scope of their direct visits to the destination. For example, the presentation of food and drink in the media can shape or reshape the natural image of a destination and attract the attention of a tourist audience.

Given the points raised thus far, it becomes clear how crucial segmentation will be in gastronomy tourism. The different preferences and needs of different types of tourists within gastronomy tourism can be divided into various segments, such as those seeking specific gastronomic experiences and those seeking luxury restaurants and gourmet experiences. Tourists may have demographic characteristics, travel behaviors, interests, and preferences (Martín et al., 2020). For example, one group of tourists may want to experience traditional local cuisine, while another group

may seek more upscale restaurants and fine-dining experiences. Therefore, tourism businesses and destinations can appeal to a wide audience by offering a variety of tourism products and experiences for different segments. This segmentation also enables tourism businesses and destinations to better serve their target audiences and gain a competitive advantage (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021). It can also help them better analyze the demand intensity for their products and develop effective price policies to achieve high profits. It also contributes to making the tourism experience more satisfying by enabling tourists to have personalized experiences. For example, the number of heart and diabetes patients around the world is increasing every day, and calorie regulation of food, taking into account different types of global diseases, can have a positive effect on the purchasing behavior of tourists.

Another criterion that helps to decide on segmentation is geographic and cultural factors. Tourists from different areas/geographies can have different food choices (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019). For instance, Asian tourists seek to taste spicy and exotic meals, whereas European tourists seek to taste meals that are European traditional. Therefore, offering special gastronomy tourism packages and experiences for different regions can be part of the segmentation strategy. The concept of segmentation strategies in the context of tourism can be exemplified through studies conducted in specific destinations. For example, a segmentation study conducted in the Basque Country of Spain offered a variety of tourism packages and experiences for tourists who want to experience traditional Basque cuisine (Dancausa Millán et al., 2021). These experiences have increased tourist satisfaction by appealing to different segments and increasing the tourism potential of the region.

Consequently, segmentation in gastronomy tourism could provide positive results. Governments and responsible authorities strive for a finer segmentation of target markets and clients, which is essential for marketing by tourism companies and locations and for raising levels of tourist satisfaction. Segmentation in gastronomy tourism is of critical importance to the tourism industry and if implemented successfully, can both increase tourist satisfaction and contribute to local economies and cultures.

2.2.5. Competitor analysis in gastronomy tourism

As a part of further competitive analysis in gastronomy tourism, it becomes crucial to assess the strengths of a particular gastronomy tourism destination (Dirlik & Karsavuran, 2019). This facilitates understanding the competitive advantages and disadvantages of the destination in comparison with its rivals. Moreover, the competitors' analysis must be carried out constantly, and the trends and innovations in the context of gastronomy tourism must be closely monitored (Tiwari et al., 2023). The elements of competitor analysis of gastronomy destinations are illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 8: The elements of competitor analysis of gastronomy destinations

Source: authors' own creation

Determination of Competitive Destinations: The first step for competitor analysis is, of course, to identify regions with similar characteristics that can rival the destination itself. Even though there is evidence that globalization causes more similarity in the world, it is not valid for gourmet tourism (Cavicchi & Stancova, 2016). This can significantly contribute to the competitiveness of the destination and supports the idea of tourists valuing local culture. Therefore, while enhancing the destination competitiveness, "glocalization" and building the local 'delicatessen' should be taken into consideration (Chang et al., 2011). For example, competing destinations for Italy's Tuscany region might include France's Burgundy and Spain's Basque Country. These destinations can compete with Tuscany with their rich gastronomic heritage and tourism opportunities. On the other hand, Türkiye and its neighboring countries such as Azerbaijan, Greece, and Bulgaria may have some common values in terms of gastronomy tourism due to their Mediterranean climate and common historical background.

Determination of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT): Identifying rival destinations and revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the competitors is critical; subsequently, it is important to determine the opportunities and threats with a SWOT analysis. This can contribute to creativity in developing strategies that can help identify the unique experiences and competitive advantages the destination can offer tourists (Gonda et al., 2021). For example, while the recognition of Indian cuisine can be described as a strength of India, its infrastructural deficiencies can be described as a weakness.

Development of Marketing Strategies: According to the World Food Travel Association (WFTA), there is an increasing trend of people consuming gastronomic ingredients while traveling. This is attributed to several reasons, such as the fast development of media and social media related to food, the farm-to-table trend among mass-affluent travel brands, and the growing availability of high-profile events that support local food cultures (World Tourism Organization, 2012). For example, the fact that a destination has a unique culinary culture may indicate that this feature should be emphasized in marketing campaigns. For example, Istanbul, being a historical city, has been home to more than one civilization and, therefore, has a cosmopolitan culinary approach. This feature represents an important strategic advantage in terms of marketing Istanbul as a culinary destination.

Monitoring Innovations and Trends: To gain a competitive advantage in gastronomy tourism, it is important to follow constantly evolving culinary concepts and trends. Understanding this notion can help identify new gastronomic tourism products, experiences, and marketing strategies (Caporaso & Formisano, 2016). For example, a culinary trend such as the use of molecular cuisine to create new products for healthy nutrition may offer opportunities to diversify and improve the destination's gastronomy tourism products. It might be argued that, despite their traditional value, typical dishes that entice visitors to return should not be served all the time. In conclusion, it should be known that many studies emphasize that gastro-tourists are basically looking for new tastes and food experiences.

2.2.6. Creating and managing distribution channels in the gastronomy tourism market

Determining effective distribution channels and efficiently managing them plays a critical role in fostering the value of gastronomy offerings, hence contributing to the success of gastronomy destinations. Like in other tourism business, a synergy among different stakeholders within the travel and tourism ecosystem is needed to create and manage distribution channels in the gastronomy tourism market. Specifically, offline and online travel agencies, governmental bodies, and entrepreneurs can play a crucial role (Lin & Mao, 2015).

Travel Agencies: Travel agencies (Tas) provide a range of services including orientation of destinations to tourists with a focus on gastronomy tourism, development of diverse tour packages, and coordination of travel itineraries (Demir, 2002). TAs are best equipped to serve destination orientation needs and provide information on gastro-attractions, local specialties, and culinary

culture (Demir, 2002). One of the main reasons for this conception is the need for a specialized form of knowledge for individual tourists who want to go beyond regular sightseeing tours. Thus, travel agencies are largely able to identify and target specific tourist segments interested in gastronomy tourism by understanding refined differences in each destination (Yentür & Demir, 2022). Another value added by travel agencies to gastronomy tourism is through creating tour products focusing on the gastronomic aspect. These packages may involve visits to favorite restaurants, food markets, and markets selling food artisanry shops (Cankül & Demir, 2018).

Apart from that, many of such tours introduce potential customers to producers and chefs, food makers and preparers, and provide information regarding food preparation traditions or the importance of certain recipes. In addition, the cooperation with experts in gastronomy and local guides is an important distinguishing feature of the agencies aimed at dedicated gastronomy tourism. They should also provide tourists with the assistance of professionals who have great insights into the local food specialties, produce, and culinary practices. Even during food-related events, agencies may hire famous chefs for food preparation demonstrations involving local products or commission food historians to give background information as they conduct food tours.

Furthermore, such travel agencies have a significant responsibility in mobilizing culinary tourism for sustainability and boosting local supply chains. This also works hand in hand with the idea of combating environmental degradation and supporting community welfare, as they focus on sourcing food from sustainably operating food producers and supporting local eco-friendly establishments. In addition, travel agencies can also play a role as intermediaries that provide unique, informative, and valuable food experiences for tourists with a choice and variety of food cultures around the world (Çalışkan & Yılmaz, 2016). In this context, they meet the tourists' demand in terms of food and beverage needs while enriching the economy and enhancing the cultural vitality of destinations worldwide.

Online and Offline Channels and Strategic Partnerships: Gastronomy tourism offers opportunities for both online and offline sales channels. Strategic partnerships to be established by gastronomy destinations represent the collaborative environment established between destinations and travel agencies, restaurants, or local producers. Uniting all stakeholders around common goals is the basic principle of effective destination management. For example, a strategic partnership between a cheese producer and a fine-dining restaurant not only brings new customers to the producer but also enriches the restaurant's menu.

Another strategic partnership can start by ensuring that prestigious rating systems such as the Michelin Guide come to the destination, creating an important channel for the development of gastronomy tourism. These systems identify the best restaurants in the world and direct gastronomy enthusiasts to these restaurants. Michelin stars, in particular, contribute to the international recognition of restaurants and attract the attention of tourists. For example, a Michelin-starred

restaurant can increase the gastronomic tourism potential of the destination and encourage tourists to visit this destination. Special rating systems, such as the world's best desserts and street foods, also play an important role in promoting gastronomy tourism. These systems identify the best examples of a particular flavor or dish and encourage tourists to try these. For example, a list of the world's best ice cream parlors can help holidaymakers enjoy an authentic ice cream experience in Italy.

The ranking of restaurants also plays an important role in gastronomy tourism. Ranking contributes to the international recognition of destinations and their becoming preferred destinations for gastronomy tourism. The impact of these systems is felt in both online and offline channels. Through online platforms, tourists can easily access these ratings and learn about destinations. In offline channels, these ratings of restaurants can be used in promotional and marketing activities. For instance, designating a restaurant with a Michelin star can enhance its prestige and stimulate tourists' desire to visit (Bertan, 2020).

2.2.7. Identifying and utilizing suitable marketing communications and branding for gastronomy tourism products and destinations

The most basic rule for marketing gastronomy tourism products and creating culinary destinations successfully is branding. Branding is critical to attracting tourists and promoting the destination. Therefore, choosing the most appropriate marketing communication channels and determining the value-creating elements of the brand are the first steps in creating an effective marketing strategy for gastronomy tourism. In this respect, paying attention to the elements listed below is important for an effective culinary destination marketing strategy.

Target Audience and Market Research: The first strategic step in marketing gastronomy tourism products and destinations is to identify the markets or segments of interest and collect market data. Among them, it is necessary to identify which groups will be interested in visiting the region, which gastro elements can attract them, and which channels of communication are optimal. For instance, Frochot (2003) outlined numerous examples of food and beverage images that could be adopted in advertising communication for destination positioning appeals.

Storytelling and Experience-Oriented Marketing: Given that gastronomy tourism is based on the search for tastes and a search for identity, creative approaches such as storytelling and experience marketing are highly effective (Fusté-Forné & Masip, 2019). When a destination's foods and traditional dishes are promoted, storytelling should be integrated. These stories help capture the attention of tourists by focusing on the differences of the place. Moreover, chefs, restaurants, and food and beverage manufacturers can help improve their images. According to Castillo-Villar (2020), local chefs who are proud of their cities and aim to promote their cuisine using local ingredients and the organization of gastronomic events form the basis of the development of new cuisines.

Digital Marketing and Social Media Strategies: Digital marketing placemaking and social media communication in gastronomy tourism also help to appeal to thousands of people. Promotion of the

destination can be done through writing articles on the opportunities and unique food experiences offered in the destination through the internet, blogs social network sites, and digital marketing (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022). Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube platforms are well suited for sharing videos and photos, and interesting information can be found about the destination (Vukolic et al., 2022).

Collaborations and Events: Destinations marketing collaborations and events in gastronomy tourism are one of the key objectives of gastronomy tourism. One simple way is the cooperation with local restaurants or chefs, as well as cooperation with local producers – all this improves the gastronomy of the destination (Duarte Alonso, 2016). It can also persuade a tourist to visit the destination through hosting activities, for example, food festivals, culinary shows, and culinary reality shows.

Sustainability and Local Participation: Environmental responsibility and, in particular, the active participation of residents are crucial factors in gastronomy tourism promotion (Rivza et al., 2022). Purchasing food that has been produced locally and cuisine whose ingredients are produced locally has a positive effect on the economy and the well-being of the planet. Further, social involvement in gastronomy tourism provides chances for the destination to be managed sustainably, and for tourists to engage with the culture (Ozturk, & Akoglu, 2020)

2.3. Managing Gastronomy Tourism Destinations
Gastronomy tourism is a cultural, traditional, and historical search through food, and has to be managed so that added value for tourists and hosts is maximized. Gastronomy is a work of art that reflects the spirit and identity of a destination. While tourists discover the flavors of a new place, they delve into that region and learn about its history, culture, and lifestyle. Local recipes, handicrafts, festivals, and local products reveal the originality and charm of a destination. At the same time, gastronomy tourism supports local businesses and producers, adding economic vitality to a region. Hence, gastronomy tourism requires a comprehensive approach that contributes in an integrated way to the tourism industry of the destinations; thereby, managing gastronomy tourism should closely align with sustainability principles.

2.3.1. Maximizing added value for tourists and hosts from gastronomy tourism
Gastronomy tourism is not only about eating but also an enchantment experience in tune with the culture and spirit of culinary destinations (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1999) which deepens emotional bonds and encourages cultural exchange (Kahraman et al., 2023). In this way, gastronomy is at the center of our social interactions and communication activities (Ramírez-Gutiérrez et al., 2021). Time spent at the dinner table is filled not only with empty plates but also with memories and meaningful moments shared. Therefore, gastronomy is not only a way of nutrition but also a part of the human experience, adding flavor and depth to life (Santich, 2004). It encompasses exploring the aromatic flavors of street foods by vendors to fine dining in high-end restaurants. It also offers one of the most

enjoyable ways of feeling the culture, heritage, and traditions of a nation through its cuisine (Sthapit et al., 2024).

For tourists, gastronomy tourism is an opportunity to enrich their cultural knowledge at the dining tables. Learning about local cultures and tasting the food is generally the key to comprehending the territories and, thereby its people and life (Hall & Sharples, 2004). In this regard, engaging in various food-related tours as well as practical cooking classes can enhance their knowledge and passion for local foods. Rousta and Jamshidi (2020) found that local food consumption values (e.g., taste/quality value, health value, price value, emotional value, and prestige value) have an undeniable influence on tourists' attitudes toward local food. According to Strickland and Williams (2024), value co-creation relates to novelty, food service, quality of service staff, overall ambiance, and other possible factors that could provide memorable experiences. Through these values in gastronomy tourism, tourists return to the same place or recommend the place to others.

Moreover, hosts have also an equal share in enhancing the added value of gastronomy tourism (Cifci & Sengel, 2024). Okumus et al. (2007) highlighted that local food conception provides authentic value, which can be an effective promotional tool when they are not treated with negative attributes in tourism destinations. With authenticity, making the experience personal, and building relationships, hosts can share special moments with their guests, which provides a deep social interaction experience (Stone et al., 2018). Some studies (e.g., Kahraman et al., 2023) in the tourism and hospitality area showcase that an effective host-and-guest interaction creates value for both parties in terms of knowledge exchange and cross-cultural learning. At this point, particularly, authenticity is the foundation of memorable gastro exposure (Sthapit, 2017). Through the meals, hosts can display the genuineness of their cuisines and products, prepare the meals using traditional ways of cooking, and gain economic returns through food sales (Tiwari et al., 2024). A study by Cifci and Sengel (2024) showcases that local chefs are also proud of their culture and have a propensity to reflect the identity of their nation through food business ideas.

To sum it up, personalized experience enhances the value of gastronomy tourism. The guest's unique interests mean that the hosts can keep catering to them according to their choices or needs to make them feel special. Specific services, like separate menus and cooking shows, make tourists feel distinctive and appreciated, transforming a meal into an exciting event. Therefore, the essence of gastronomy tourism is the interaction between the tourists and the hosts. An amicable atmosphere helps hosts to bring people together and create a friendly environment that encourages communication. Gastronomy tourism promises an asymmetric voyage of exploration for the tourists and the hosts. Through the authenticity and individuation of the offer, but also the construction of close relationships, both can gain the utmost value from this gastronomic experience, transforming every meal into a cultural crockery.

2.3.2. Sustainable gastronomy tourism development: Processes and policies

Sustainable gastronomy involves how gastronomy is represented by its main stakeholders and takes into account the impacts to address the needs of all stakeholders, including the industry, consumers, and the environment (Alonso et al., 2018). Concerning the fact that sustainable gastronomy tourism is a growing trend in the global tourism industry, the processes and policies that enhance its development should be discussed in covering the major aspects of sustainable development (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Unlike other tourism types, gastronomy tourism is more prone to raw materials (e.g., food and beverages) and arguably requires minimal infrastructure (Williams & Williams, 2022).

Harrington and Ottenbacher (2010) identified six key success factors that influence the establishment of a gastronomy tourism development strategy: identifying a plan, coordinating the stakeholders, forming authority, providing local goods and services, fulfilling the quality standards' specifications and marketing the area as appreciated by tourists. In this regard, to establish a solid process for effective policies, the sustainability dimension of gastronomy tourism has to be better identified (Tomazzoni et al., 2021). Here below, three sustainability dimensions of gastronomy tourism are outlined (Razpotnik Visković & Komac, 2021):

Geographical-Environmental Aspect: It entails the proper utilization of nature's resources such as the sustainable retention of the biological resources through geographical and environmental conservation procedures. This contributes to the enhancement of responsible tourism, or tourism that is sustainable, measuring its impact on people and the environment (Yaşar & Gümrükçü, 2022). The sustainable environmental perspective of gastronomy tourism development is the conservation of ecology characteristics, particularly minimizing the danger of food production negatively impacting the natural environment (Fontefrancesco & Corvo, 2019). It also includes encouraging organic farming, supporting local food chains to curb hefty food miles, and fostering the management of food waste through optimum channels (Lombardi & Costantino, 2020). Sustainable gastronomy also enables the correct and effective use of renewable energy resources. In this context, water saving, and effective waste management come to the fore.

Socio-Cultural Aspect: It focuses on the issue of sensitive measures that require respect for people and their way of life. It involves adapting to accept the unique socio-cultural characteristics of host communities to maintain the cultural strength and values of the community (Yaşar & Gümrükçü, 2022). Therefore, socio-cultural sustainability focuses on ensuring that the culture of the people is respected, social inequality is minimized and community involvement in the destiny of gastronomy tourism destinations is encouraged. This means promoting local cooking and culinary culture, encouraging indigenous beverages and dishes, and inclusion of local food practices in gastronomy tourism development. Moreover, sustainable gastronomy tourism development focuses on the cultural aspects of both hosts and guests and helps them achieve cultural connection and togetherness to share and understand each other (Timothy, 2015).

Economic Aspect: For a long-term sustainable strategy in tourism aligned with gastronomy, there is a need to develop a sustainable economic model. This strategy ensures that the benefits of tourism reach the people within the country where such tourism activities are being experienced, this is due to employed persons and economic contribution (Yaşar & Gümrükçü, 2022). Economic sustainability of gastronomy and tourism development includes generating employment, promoting innovation in food services for culinary enterprises, and the fair distribution of the realized tourism revenue (Sjölander-Lindqvist et al., 2021). This matter entails the fostering of independent food producers for agriculture and preparation of delicacies, undertaking awareness creation and capacity development for the improvement of culinary proficiencies for chefs and food businesses, and other ways of engaging and empowering small producers in the gastronomy tourism chain.

To make gastronomy sustainable, designing and implementing sound policies and regulatory measures is the first process for the effective growth of sustainable gastronomy tourism (Alexander, 1991). The process of establishing policies and regulatory measures requires a resource-based theory perspective, which should be based on food and culture (Aydın, 2019). Since gastro-tourists have more expenditures compared to regular tourists, destination authorities value this matter to boost locals' economic welfare by facilitating job growth, skilled workforces, and elevating local living standards (Kuang & Bhat, 2017).

Responsible tourism authorities, as well as the local communities, can coordinate and come up with policies that can be used to increase the sustainability of tourism. This may include incentives for adopting eco-certification and sustainable practices, regulatory measures especially for zoning of land for agricultural and other uses in order to protect biological diversity, and providing financial assistance towards the development of gastronomy-based tourism initiatives. In addition, international organizations and industry associations need to continue to provide a platform for knowledge exchange and benchmarking in the context of gastronomy tourism sustainability.

For the development of sustainable gastronomy tourism, it is necessary to apply a multifaceted approach based on the three important dimensions: geographical-environmental, socio-cultural, and economic. By introducing sustainability concepts, gastronomy tourism destinations may improve their sustainability, preserve natural and cultural heritage, and generate positive impacts for locals. In the future, cooperation, creativity, and dedication to sustainability will be paramount when continuing to further develop gastronomy tourism in a world that is constantly evolving.

2.3.3. Key performance indicators and governance measures in gastronomy tourism destinations

Gastronomy tourism is gradually destabilizing within the sub-segments of tourism because of the increasing importance of tourist experiences regarding the consumption of food. Gastronomy tourism destinations accord the varied cultural, national, and regional food and food traditions within which

the gastro tourists seek authentic interactions or mere exposure (Nair, 2021). However, for gastronomic destinations to be sustainable and successful, the proposed governance procedures and KPIs must be implemented. The next section delineates key types of possible governance measures, which were extracted from existing literature (Finkler et al., 2021):

a) Indicators of the environmental dimension: Ecological footprint resulting from food production and consumption is one of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used in environmental sustainability (Bschaden et al., 2024). For example, waste-management initiatives such as recycling or better approaches to handling waste, increased buying of local produce, and food processing and preparation that are done using minimal energy are examples of sustainability strategies. Much has been planned by for the World Food Travel Association as it moves towards the creation of a sustainability code through destination membership (The World Food Travel Association, 2024).

The Costa Rican case is worth mentioning here, as it embraced and pioneered the concept of sustainability and eco-tourism. Currently, sustainability forms the core selling product of the food tourism in Costa Rica with unique selling points that include cooking classes because of the presence of multiple microclimates; cloud forest cuisine; organic farming; regional food of Costa Rica; wildlife and nature of Costa Rica; farm-stays.

Global and national governments and tourism authorities should also formulate policies to structure the promotion and advancement of gastronomy tourism (Gasparini & Mariotti, 2023). They may also encompass policies that seek to encourage culinary business, measures that govern the handling, preparation, and selling of food, and others that promote and support cultural practices. For instance, Italy outlined its "Strategic Plan for Tourism," where the government has included different measures to enhance food tourism because it forms a significant segment of international tourists' interest (ETurboNews, 2023). In this regard, it is also key to understand the responsibilities of DMOs in managing and marketing gastronomy tourism at the destination level. These organizations workwith public and private entities to create marketing initiatives, food fairs, and conviviums, and improve the facilities for food tourism (Pivčević & Lesić, 2020).

b) Indicators of the socio-environmental dimension: Key Tourism Attractions (KTAs) of gastronomy tourism destinations often focus on the promotion of culinary heritage and culture, with KPIs as support for the promotion of local food products with traditional cooking practices and Indigenous Peoples Culinary Traditions— a prime agent being the UNESCO's protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Notably, the Mediterranean diet which entered the list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010 is one of the primary points of interest for gastronomy tourism in Italy, Greece, Spain, and other countries (UNESCO, 2010). This intangible cultural heritage is one of the most commonly used sources of gastronomy tourism destinations in Italy, Greece, the southern part of France and Spain, and other Mediterranean regions.

Moreover, tourism organizations, entrepreneurs, and non-governmental organizations can use collaborative efforts such that community members have a stronger stake and feel an increased sense of belonging to their neighborhoods (Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2021). The international organization "Slow Food" has its roots in Italy and is currently receiving ERC (The European Research Council) support for new projects; it has made the socioeconomic involvement of all population segments instrumental in promoting gastronomy and creating sustainable regional rustic food production systems.

However, the public sector should not act alone in the development of gastronomy tourism destinations. Private investors can contribute to the development of culinary tourism through the provision of infrastructure, marketing, and human capital improvement (Geoffrey Deladem et al., 2021). Through the coordination and cooperation of resources and knowledge originating from both public and private sectors, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can make gastronomy tourism destinations more competitive and appealing to potential visitors. For example, the collaboration between the Thailand Tourism Board and street food sellers could make Thailand a country with a mouthwatering culture and a variety of street foods for gourmets (Leff, 2019).

c) Indicators of the economic dimension: Economic factors evaluate the level of contribution or influence of gastronomy tourism to the economy. These include the revenues generated from all food-coupled operations, the number of persons engaged in the food sector, and the amounts invested in food-related facilities (Alhothali et al., 2023). For instance, there is an income volume in gastronomy tourism that may contribute favorably to the GDP of the Basque Country of Spain by supporting restaurant businesses, food markets, culinary schools, and colleges.

Another economic quantitative indicator is tourist satisfaction in which visitors' perceptions and feelings about gastronomy tourism destinations are reflected. Some of the most common techniques used are questionnaires, feedback forms, and online posts containing customer feedback. A few examples of drivers with higher satisfaction ratings include the great variation, quality, and relevance of the cultural food experience with dining destinations. For instance, Kyoto in Japan, famous for Kaiseki meals and tea ceremonies always receive good feedback from tourists who come for a cultural culinary encounter.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that branding and marketing play a crucial role in placing gastronomy tourism destinations in the global market (Okumus & Cetin, 2018). Destination branding campaigns emphasize distinguishing features, such as gourmet foods, cultural events, and gastronomic tourism to appeal to the target consumers. Hence, social media platforms, food blogs, and culinary tourism websites are used in marketing gastronomy tourism destinations to potential visitors. For example, the "Gastronomy Route" that Peru has established promotes the country's cuisine where people can learn about and taste traditional Peruvian dishes, e.g., ceviche and drinks, e.g., pisco sour (ViewPeru, 2024). Similarly, as highlighted in the Global Muslim Travel Index 2023,

cultivating brand loyalty for OIC countries around the Halal food (using halal ingredients or segregation of cooking) concept can be a logical strategy (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2023).

2.3.4. Structures to identify and engage stakeholders in gastronomy tourism

Gastronomy tourism destinations require the engagement of various stakeholders in the development and management of the destinations for sustainability (Henriksen & Halkier, 2015). Stakeholders play the greatest role in gastronomy tourism, as they represent all the people, groups, and organizations that have a stake in the subject or activity in consideration, in this case, gastronomy tourism (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Stakeholder mapping plays a critical role in identifying the people an organization interacts with and depends on, as well as in figuring out the most effective way to include stakeholders (Williams et al., 2014).

The identification of the parties involved in gastronomic tourism signals the beginning of the second phase, which is constructive interaction and engagement. Therefore, identifying the right stakeholders is important to create opportunities for them to participate effectively in gastronomy tourism planning and destination management processes (Sotiriadis, 2015; Tomazzoni et al., 2021). The stakeholder mapping analysis allows one to single out the key stakeholders and the existing relationships between them in the context of the tourism industry (Lalicic, 2018; Rodríguez–Herrera & Pulido–Fernández, 2015). Based on prior studies (e.g., Björk, 2000; Buhalis & Fletcher, 1995; Roxas et al., 2020), on tourism stakeholder maps, a five-point framework indicating the actors, which entail cooperation and interaction to pursue sustainable tourism, is proposed (see Fig. 10).

Figure 9: Pentagon model of gastronomy tourism stakeholders
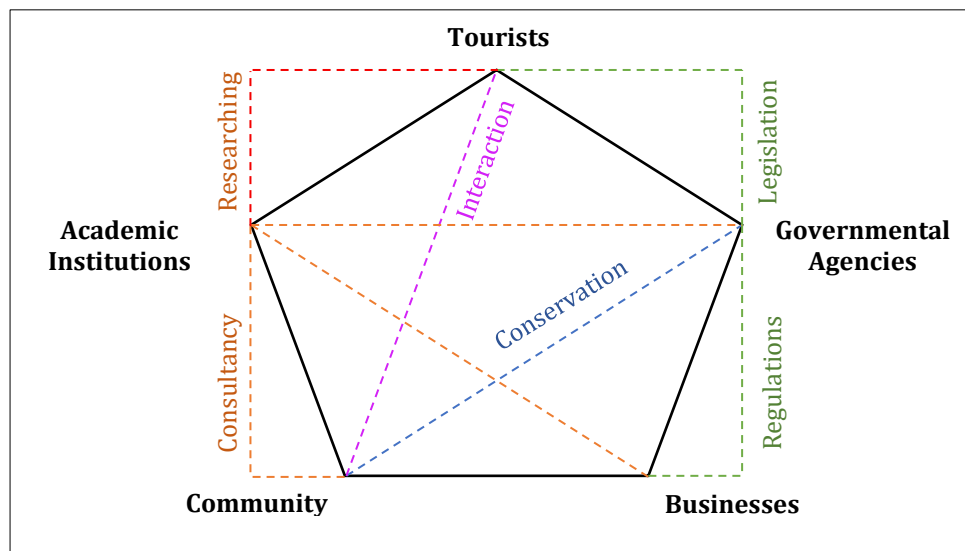
Source: authors' own creation

Community: The Community represents inhabitants staying within and near the gastronomy tourism destinations. They are well-informed about the problems associated with infrastructure development, traffic, and cultural and ethnic identity issues (Suna & Alvarez, 2021). Residents are among the most

significant stakeholders in discussions on gastronomy tourism planning, management, and development. Thus, their participation is undeniable for effective tourism planning (Cifci et al., 2023). Consultation sessions may include public meetings, survey research, focus groups, and online platforms where the public may provide thoughts and input to destination management.

Tourists: Tourists can dictate what kind of food services and products should be produced and demanded according to the livelihood opportunities of destinations. They can also demand certain policies to visit specific destinations (Roxas et al., 2020) like hygiene and sanitation in food service establishments.

Tourism Enterprises and SMTEs: Industry players that get implicated directly in gastronomy tourism include restaurants, food producers, tour operators, hotels, and other related service providers. They play this role in destination marketing, product development as well as the delivery of services that define the visitor experience. For effective marketing, OIC countries can benefit from Halal-certified food or Muslim-friendly restaurants (Hosseini et al., 2019), accommodating the dietary requirements of tourists (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2023). Furthermore, a halal food and restaurant guidance or rating system can be a good marketing strategy akin to Michelin guide.

In addition, various forms and workshops to be held regularly for stakeholders can increase information sharing and cooperation opportunities among them. Planning these events around specific topics or projects will allow stakeholders to express their possible concerns, exchange ideas, and propose solutions together. Guiding partnerships and networks among stakeholders can promote collaboration and collective action in gastronomy tourism. Public-private sector partnerships, sector associations, and collaborative platforms facilitate joint ventures, resource sharing, and advocacy efforts (Geoffrey Deladem et al., 2021).

Government Agencies (National/Local): Ministries, departments, and local, regional, and national governments are involved in policy formulation in gastronomy tourism. These authorities are charged with the responsibility of approving planning and development, implementing and enforcing planning standards, and supporting tourism operations. In many cases, local and international NGOs, communities, and cultural groups, clamor for environmental conservation, social justice, and cultural promotion in food tourism destinations. It is of significant importance to address, those as they are involved in the advocacy for responsible tourism and consumerism.

Academic Institutions: Scholars from higher institutions and culinary schools, and research institutions offer their know-how and research to gastronomy tourism through research proposals and training. Such advisory committees comprised of academicians may offer important advice on gastronomic tourism policies, strategies, and projects. These commissions will guarantee that multiple perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. It can also help in coordinating

between academia and the industry in terms of problems and prospects facing the sector (Rinaldi et al., 2022).

2.3.5. Suggested model(s) of gastronomy tourism governance within OIC tourism destinations

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has gathered 57 member countries that are located on four continents making it unique in cultural practices, food, and tourist attractions. The tourism sector in OIC has its merits, and challenges and requires certain models of governance for opportunities in gastronomy tourism to be explored acknowledging the sociology and economics involved (Devi, 2023).

Cultural Diversity: These diverse culinary traditions and gastronomic heritages as showcased are evidence of the many and varied cultural endowments among OIC member countries. However, the simultaneous strands of different cooking cultures and diets for the united gastronomy tourism concept can be challenging.

Economic Disparities: Regarding the issue of gastronomy tourism, there are some OIC member states whose economies may be significantly different, hence implying the development and competition of this sub-sector (Qoir, 2023). It also seems that some countries are not ready to support culinary tourism; hence there will be a need to make very special interventions for the sector and also build the capacity of the sector as well.

Tourism Infrastructure: tourism infrastructure plays a crucial role in enhancing the appeal and accessibility of tourist destinations in the OIC region including transport, lodgings, and food facility amenities. The concept of the ideal governance model, therefore, underlines the significance of prioritizing investment in infrastructures as well as planning development.

Socio-cultural Sensitivities: More often than not, socio-cultural considerations play a role within OIC destinations where site-specific inclinations regarding eating habits, strict adherence to religious traditions, or etiquette concerning hospitality exist. For governance models that would lead to the ideal and well-coordinated experience in gastronomy tourism, these frameworks have to find their way through this intricate setting.

Destination tourism development strategies generally focus on the creation of more complex tourism product portfolios rather than simple ones (McKercher, 2016). This approach works through grouping of activities and places for developing a rural tourism product such as a tour or a route, encouraging cooperation among the local regions and actors (Spilková & Fialová 2012). In this regard, Šmid Hribar et al., (2021) describe stakeholder networks in different tourism sectors by outlining various stakeholder categories and their reasons for engaging in tourism. Likewise, Razpotnik and Visković (2021) draws attention to gastronomy events. It discusses how gastronomy can provide a

quality of place in urban settings in terms of identity traits such as diversity, vitality, novelty, creativity, and permissiveness. Thus, analyzing the networks of stakeholders implicated in the organization and participation of such occasions, the current report expands knowledge about gastronomy and food as technologies of social inclusion and communal participation beyond mere economic value. Drawing from best practices and existing governance frameworks, several factors for gastronomy tourism governance are suggested for OIC destinations:

Regional Collaboration and Coordination: Cultivating regional partnerships and cooperation in tourism within the OIC member countries extends the experience exchange, enhances human capital development, and enables coordinated marketing strategies (Musleh et al., 2023). International organizations like the Islamic Development Bank (ISDB) and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) help in the harmonization and cooperation of gastronomy tourism governance (Hall et al., 2022).

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Involving the private sector in the development of gastronomy tourism through PPPs leads to increased investment, entrepreneurial initiatives, and creative ideas. Policy support, funding instruments, and regulatory adjustments are examples of ways that governments can apply pressure to unlock private sector interest (Lente et al., 2021). For instance, PPPs can enhance the production of culinary tourism assets such as food production facilities, training institutions, and culinary-themed attractions.

Cultural Heritage Preservation: The conceptual framework for gastronomy tourism should incorporate elements of exogenous governance that will enhance the cultural and historical legacy of original food preparation practices, dishes, and culinary practices and ceremonies. There is no doubt that by working with cultural associates and museums, it is possible to protect such intangible cultural assets connected with food and gastronomy in a local area. UNESCO's Creative Cities Network and Intangible Cultural Heritage lists offer guidelines for the identification and protection of gastronomic heritage within OIC destinations.

Apart from meeting the spiritual, and cultural expectations of Islamic tourists, Aji et al. (2020) highlight a possible risk of Muslim tourists' concern with Islamophobia in their travel to non-Islamic destinations. Therefore, OIC destinations should enhance the traveling environment in general by encouraging the spirit of the host nations' hospitality. Some of these components include Halal-recognition eating places, proximity to prayer centers, Muslim-friendly hotels & residences, Halal food & prayer places in arrival-departure terminals and airports, and compelling heritage & experience. Indonesia, Türkiye, and Malaysia were named as the top three destinations for Muslim travelers in line with the Global Muslim Travel Index 2023, proving the countries' serious intention to focus on catering to the needs of such tourists.

Destination Branding and Marketing: This is particularly imperative concerning the branding and marketing of OIC gastronomy tourism destinations (Ihsanoglu, 2009). The use of social media influencers and gastronomy-themed campaigns as well as available online platforms increase the exposure of the destination and can lead to increased international arrivals. For instance, the concept of "Taste of OIC" can promote rich and diverse OIC food which will attract food tourism to visit OIC countries. In this regard, Nurrachmi's (2019) assertion seem germane;the awareness of halal food among tourists enhances the demand for the halal food industry.

Stakeholder Engagement and Empowerment: The governance models must consider stakeholder management and involve the people with the power to give input on how they are being governed. Similar to multi-stakeholder platforms, advisory committees, and community organizations contribute to the growth of gastronomy tourism initiatives for Muslim-friendly tourism (Kharrazi, 2022). Training, development of community-based programs, or support of tourism development projects enables locals to build capacity and share value within gastronomy tourism.

The proposed models of gastronomy tourism governance within the OIC countries must capture the context-specific factors that relate to cultures within the region, socio-economic imbalances, and other socio-cultural factors. Thus, it can be proposed that viable governance models can enhance sustainable and inclusive gastronomy tourism development in the OIC region by encouraging regional integration, developing public and private partnerships, protecting cultural assets, branding and marketing destinations, and incorporating stakeholders profitably. By embracing multilateral and integrated approaches, OIC destinations stand a better chance of harnessing the leveraging prospects of gastronomy tourism as an economic, cultural, and developmental enabler.

2.3.6. Performance assessment and indicators in gastronomy tourism destination management

Due to the constantly changing market environment, destination management in gastronomy tourism has to be implemented, monitored, and evaluated continuously to make tourism sustainable and competitive (Williams & Williams, 2022). Evaluation of performance and indicators are implementation aids to evaluate the efficiency, efficacy, and perpetuity of the management strategies for gastronomy tourism destinations (Liu, 2012). Based on several studies (e.g., Castellani & Sala, 2010; Tomazzoni et al., 2021), the effective performance assessments of gastronomy tourism destinations have been identified as fellow:

Tourism Planning: Planning provides information that determines the nature of analyzing the internal and external strengths or weaknesses also known as SWOT factors that are useful in the identification of gastronomy tourism destinations. It is used in establishing crucial strategic developmental goals of the overall resource distribution for the improvement of the competitiveness and attractiveness of the desired tourist destination. A study by Yıldırım and Tekeli (2022) shows that gastronomy tourism has three main sources, including gastronomic products, gastronomic routes, and

gastronomic events. Gastronomic products have both geographical and non-geographical identities. Gastronomic routes include local eateries, outlets of sale for local products, and farms where local products are grown. Gastronomic events involve home-cooking tours, festivals, museum visits, and cooking classes. Therefore, when planning gastronomy tourism, these three basic elements that are important for gastronomy tourism should be taken into consideration.

Quality Improvement: Through performance assessment, destination managers can evaluate the areas that require innovation and enhancement when developing gastronomy tourism offerings, services, and experiences. This way, destinations can both reduce imperfections contributing to dissatisfaction or complaints and improve the quality to improve customer loyalty and repeat visitation, as well as word of mouth. Specifically, the Michelin guide is one of the best interpreters for displaying destination quality through the large number of starred restaurants (Huang et al., 2023). Hence, gastronomy tourism managers should expand the number of star-rated restaurants in their country by implementing international restaurant rating systems and ensuring that their current restaurants meet the standards of these rating systems. On the other hand, geographical labeling of traditional and regional flavors, slow gastronomy, and green gastronomy concepts should also be taken into consideration as important elements to increase quality (Lai et al., 2019).

Sustainability Monitoring: The evaluation of performance helps to track the indicators of sustainable development of gastronomy tourism, namely environmental impact, socio-cultural, and economic (Bampatsou et al., 2022). Promising tourism destination management strategies assist in the reduction or total elimination of negative impacts on the communities, resources, and culture, supporting sustainability and program stability. In this regard, assessing the Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) is one of the important issues for maintaining the sustainability of a destination (Castellani & Sala, 2010). The ten principles of the European Charter may also inspire the identification of priorities for the development of gastronomy tourism in OIC countries.

Stakeholder Engagement: Performance assessment is a way to involve government, enterprise, locals, employment rate, and the number of total tourist arrivals and their expenditures in the decision-making about the destination (Bampatsou et al., 2022). Engaging all stakeholders in data gathering, processing, and decision-making enhances teamwork, openness, and accountability within destinations, which in turn, increases ownership of the tourism development process (Stephenson, 2014). In this sense, the consultation services provided by local authorities are very important (Castellani & Sala, 2010). Consultancy services from relevant departments of universities are especially important in the context of academic support.

According to the study of Ferreira and Perks(2020), the performance and efficiency indicators enable an evaluation of the success of the management strategies employed in the tourism destination. Some essential KPIs in gastronomy tourism destination management can include:

Visitors Data: Information on visitors' arrivals, length of stay, and expenditures helps in determining the demand for gastronomy tourism and the economic contribution to the economy. Measures of visitors' expenditure per capita as a proportion of GDP rate the economic effects and outcomes.

Offerings/Experiences: Evaluating the range, markers, and origin of foods and food experiences is crucial for optimizing destination development and appeal. It will also guarantee the safety and security of food and provide food standardization. Further, quarterly and annual targets on the number of restaurants, food festivals, cooking classes, and food tours, as well as visitors' satisfaction ratings refer to the culinary attractiveness and tourists' interest in the destinations.

Preservation: Metrics applicable to efforts in maintaining and promoting cultural heritages and culture-related assets – cultural foods and culinary tourism – are vital for evaluating the sustainability of destinations. Indicators such as gastronomy cultural tourism destinations, participation in cultural events, cultural tourism, and enhanced stewardship of cultural tourism also speak to destination cultural sustainability (Musleh et al. 2023).

Environment: Thus, by assessing the life cycle assessment (LCA) indicators related to wastes generated, energy used, and carbon emissions the environmental consequences of gastronomy tourism destinations can be determined. Other tangible factors, such as embracing environmentally friendly measures, and certificated sustainable food products, to name but a few, reveal the level of green consciousness of the destination. Thus, it is necessary to assess the level of community engagement, capacity, and leveraging, as well as gain from gastronomy tourism to facilitate social inclusion and equal development.

For performance evaluation in gastronomy tourism destination management, many instruments are available, such as (Du Rand & Heath, 2006):

Surveys/Interviews: Research data on tourist choice behaviors, satisfaction, and the perception of gastronomy tourism destinations are collected from cross-sectional and longitudinal visitor questionnaires as well as focus group discussions and interviews with key informants. The gastronomy tourism quality can be evaluated by using a measurement tool to specify and quantify perceived quality levels. For example, the well-known SERVQUAL scale can be used by stakeholders. The importance-performance analysis (IPA) can also be used to assess the importance of different activities to underpin tourism development in OIC countries, as well as the industry's perceived performance concerning gastronomy tourism activities.

Economic Impact Analysis: The multipliers of the direct and indirect impact of gastronomy tourism on the economy as well as the induced effects are calculated using tools such as input-output models and other models of economic multipliers.

Cultural Heritage Evaluations: Evaluation of destination cultural identities and relevance to gastronomy tourist destinations is done through the engagement of cultural heritage experts and

assessment of the intangible cultural heritage assets such as traditional food recipes and preparations and related practices.

In tourism destination management within the framework of gastronomy, studies on performance assessment and indicators are critical for measuring destinations' competitiveness and sustainability and for evaluating the involvement of relevant stakeholders (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016). These actions are helpful in enabling destinations to evaluate how they are faring, identify any lapses, and make sound decisions aimed at enhancing the prospects of their gastronomy tourism products and services when they monitor specific aspects of visitation and spending, food and other tourist experiences, cultural identity, sustainable resource use, and ways through which beneficiaries are made to benefit from tourism (Suna & Alvarez, 2021). Tourism based on gastronomy might have important social and economic opportunities for communities, as well as contribute to cultural valorization and the preservation of cultural assets, all of this through strict results measurement tools and more effective communication with the various actors involved.

Figure 10: Gastronomy tourism management model
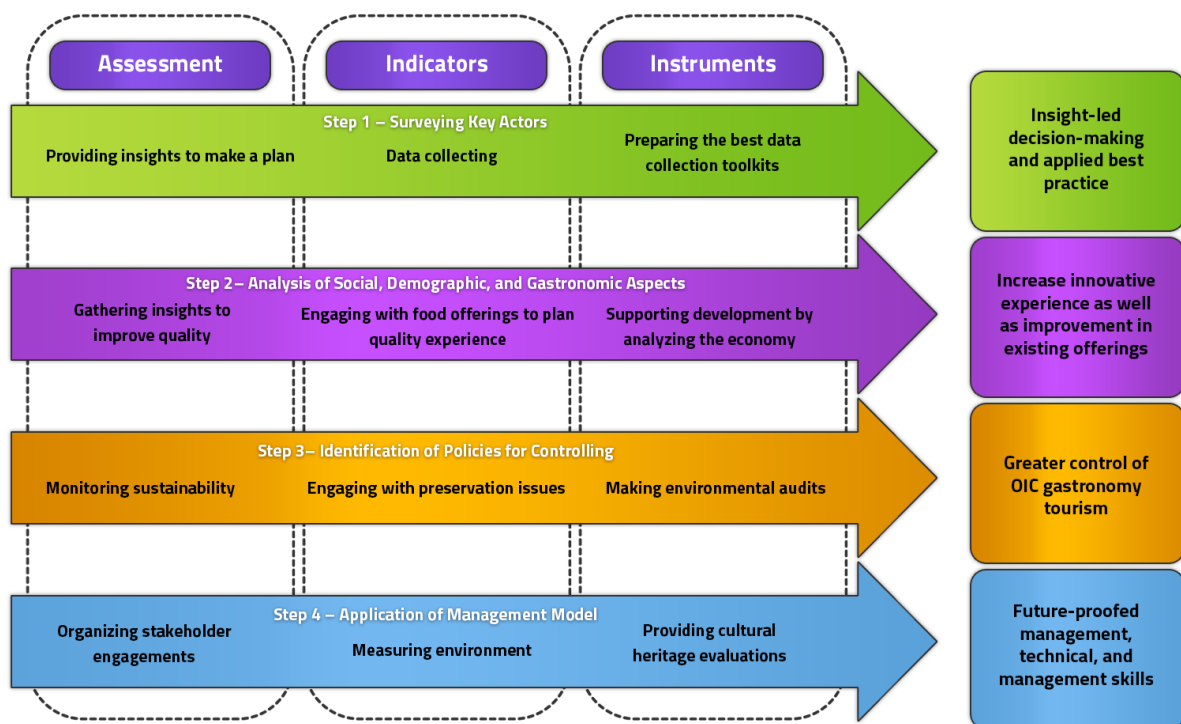
Source: authors' own creation

3. METHODOLOGY

The following section will focus on the research approach, sampling, data collection methods, and data analysis employed in the present study. The research is based on a mixed-methods sequential explanatory study. The qualitative phase is used to inform and guide the quantitative phase.

3.1. Case Study Approach

The study draws on a mixed-method approach to understand the current status and predict the future potential of gastronomy in OIC countries and provide recommended practices for gastronomy tourism and its branding. To achieve the study objectives, an extensive review of the literature addressing gastronomy tourism has been conducted. This review of the literature is also underpinned by drawing on the experience of OIC Member Countries and other non-OIC destinations. Following this stage, a field study based on sequential qualitative-quantitative enquiry has been conducted involving qualitative and quantitative data collection from Uganda and the Maldives; two OIC Member Countries that are also registered to the COMCEC Tourism Working Group. To understand existing best practices in creating, managing, and marketing gastronomy tourism, three countries, namely, Türkiye, Egypt (as OIC countries), and Italy (as a non-OIC country) are also used as desk-based case studies (See Fig. 12). Following us a brief rationale for the selection of these case studies:

Uganda: As a small East African country, Uganda has experienced some growth in international tourist arrivals from 1.2 million in 2012 to 1.8 million in 2023. Uganda has over 56 tribes with unique and diverse cultures that is reflected in gastronomy and food traditions. The diversity in food stems from three distinct origins of these tribes who are able to grow varieties of food, with each tribe being distinct in terms of taste and variety of cuisine as well as their cooking styles. Including Uganda as a field-based case study is beneficial to draw conclusions to similar destinations in the African Group. It is also noteworthy that Uganda is registered to the COMCEC Tourism Working Group.

The Maldives has gained significant success in the international tourism market by promoting the natural beauty of its tropical islands. In 2023, the Maldives welcomed over one million international tourists mainly from Russia, India, and the UK. As a Small Island Destination, tourism is the key to the Maldives' economic development. However, tourism in Maldives seems to have been traditionally developed under a one-island-one-resort concept. This has created tourist enclaves that limit the distribution of tourism benefits among local communities. One way to broaden economic linkages and increase tourism yield is by broadening visitor experiences through gastronomy. While the Maldives is predominantly known as a sea-sand-sun destination, recent reports also indicate a growing interest in local food offerings. This is unsurprising given the richness of the Maldivian cuisine and its cooking styles. Including the Maldives in this study is therefore an opportunity to suggest real-life policy recommendations to diversify tourism offerings through gastronomy. The case study is also useful for

benchmarking with similar Asian Group OIC countries. The Maldives is also registered to the COMCEC Tourism Working Group.

Figure 11: Country case studies involved in the report
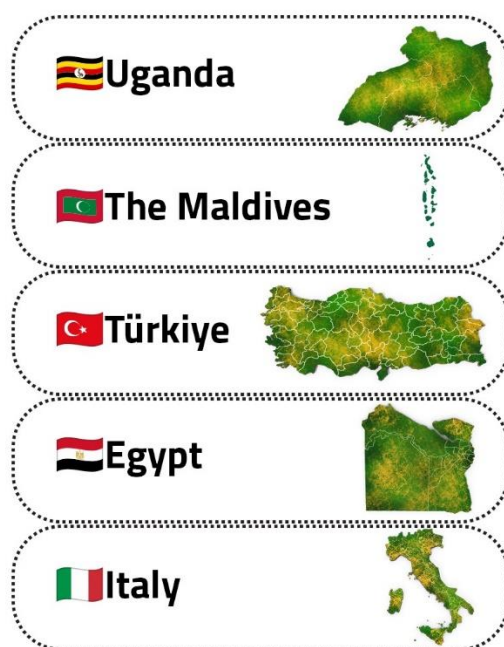
Türkiye is a major tourist destination that hosted over 52 million tourists in 2023. Apart from its rich natural and cultural assets, the growth of the Turkish tourism industry is also attributed to its renowned rich and diverse gastronomy heritage. Recently, the term "Turkish hospitality" has gained recognition even in academic debates with general reference to generosity and welcoming gastronomy experiences (Cetin & Okumus, 2018). Türkiye has an extensive list of food and drinks that are included in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Türkiye is also positioned in a highly competitive market with strong competing destinations (Spain, Greece, and Italy), hence elevating the importance of gastronomy tourism as a path to enhancing destination competitiveness. Overall, Türkiye is a useful and highly rich case study to exploring the characteristics of gastronomy tourism, its contribution to destination competitiveness, as well as understanding best practices in developing, marketing, and managing gastronomy tourism.

Egypt: Despite some internal challenges, Egypt has hosted around 15 million international tourists in 2023. Egypt has been chosen due to the vital role of tourism in its economy. The tourism and hospitality industry in Egypt contributes roughly 11.4% of the country's GDP and creates 12.6% of the country's direct and indirect job possibilities. Of all sources of income, it accounts for 20% of the foreign exchange revenue, making it the most significant. According to the ministry of tourism and

antiquities, with a total of 14.906 million travelers, 2023 saw record-breaking rates of incoming tourism to Egypt, surpassing the previous record of 14.731 million tourists set in 2010 (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2024). With a noteworthy 6% year-over-year rise in tourist arrivals during the first 50 days of 2024, Egypt's tourism industry is off to a promising start in 2024 (Abi Farraj, 2024). With an environment dominated by local small and medium hospitality enterprises, Egypt's hospitality traditions are closely tied to food consumption. The country's cuisine reflects its history, geography, and cultural influences including Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and Levantine flavours. Egyptian cuisine is viewed as a blend of food recipes that reflect the unique authenticity of the country. Egyptians were pioneering in extracting oils from olive, caraway, linen seeds, lettuce, sunflower and sesame seeds. Egypt's Red Sea ports were also the entry gate for spice to Europe for a long time, making it easy for various spices to leave its mark on Egyptian cuisine throughout the years. Exploring the case of Egypt is useful as it will inform policy for both Egypt as well as other similar destinations in the Arab Group. It is also noteworthy that Egypt is registered to the COMCEC Tourism Working Group.

Italy is one of the top ten international tourism destinations in terms of tourist arrivals. Italy– according to the World Tourism Organization data – is the third most popular European country in terms of international tourist arrivals (Vergori & Arima, 2020). Moreover, Italy was confirmed as the second most popular overnight travel destination in Europe and the fifth most popular worldwide in 2023 (Mancini, 2024). The top source markets in 2021 were Germany (17.1%), France (14.5%) and Austria (9.3%) (OECD, 2022). Italy's travel and tourism industry generated €215BN, or 10.5% of the country's overall economic output, last year, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) 2024 Economic Impact Research (EIR), highlighting the industry's prominence as the backbone of the Italian economy (WTTC, 2024). Additionally, the industry demonstrated its importance as a source of employment in 2023, shattering previous records and creating almost 185,000 new positions nationally, or one in every eight jobs. This increased the overall number of jobs to 2.97 million (WTTC, 2024). With foreign expenditure rising by 19% annually to reach €51.4BN, the rebound in foreign visits to Italy has been exceptionally robust and has broken previous records, underscoring Italy's appeal as a top travel destination worldwide (WTTC, 2024). WTTC predictions indicate that the next ten years have an especially promising future. It is anticipated that by 2034, the sector would have contributed an unprecedented €270BN to the Italian economy, greatly bolstering the country's GDP (WTTC, 2024). Italy is included as one of the non-OIC case studies due to the fact that the country is viewed as a popular and mature gastronomy tourism destination. As early as 1985, the Italian government introduced an agro-tourism policy to oversee the process of food production activities oriented towards tourism. Gastronomy is viewed as one of the main sources of economic development in various Italian regions. Cooking classes have also become popular in Italy creating income to locals while also fostering gastronomy destination image. Recently, gastronomic tours are

increasingly combined with other activities such as cultural tours, cycling, and walking. In sum, Italy is a useful non-OIC case study to draw best practices and policy recommendations for OIC countries.

3.2. Qualitative Stage

At stage one of the present study, a qualitative study has been conducted to explore means of developing and branding gastronomy tourism destinations within OIC. The study also aims to explore key challenges and barriers to gastronomy tourism, while also identifying strategies and tools that can be used to overcome these challenges these barriers.

3.2.1. Semi-structured Interviews with relevant stakeholders and industry experts

To collect the qualitative data for the present study, in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders including national officers, policymakers, hospitality enterprises, hospitality and tourism experts, and private sector representatives in Uganda and Maldives.

A convenience sample technique was adopted, and snowball sampling was also employed when recruiting informants became challenging; especially in the Maldives. Efforts were also made to capture the views of various stakeholders with close interest in gastronomy tourism including food and beverage facilities, lodging businesses, travel agencies, as well as tourism experts and practitioners (e.g., academicians, tourism officials). Semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of nine weeks between 30 April to 10 July 2024. Interview protocol and questions were determined following an extensive review of the relevant literature (e.g., Piboonrungroj et al., 2024; Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020; Kumar, 2019; Yang et al., 2020; Okumus, 2021).

Informants were asked several questions to understand the current status of gastronomy tourism and predict its future potential. Specifically, informants were asked to talk about the key barriers/challenges hindering the creation, management, and marketing of gastronomy tourism and the potential role of governments in addressing these barriers/challenges. An attempt was also made to explore informants' understanding of success factors in gastronomy tourism destinations. The data collection process was completed with a satisfactory level of theoretical saturation being achieved following 22 in-depth interviews (10 in the Maldives and 12 in Uganda). All interviews were conducted using informants' native languages (e.g., English and Maldivian). The interviews were digitally recorded (after obtaining consent), transcribed, and content analysed in order to identify common themes. A general profile of the informants is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: General profile of participants

Code	Country	Gender	Age	Education	Field
P1	Uganda	Male	47	Ph.D.	Hotel manager & Assistant lecturer
P2	Uganda	Male	40	BA	Product development & Investment officer
P3	Uganda	Female	30	BA	Senior tour consultant
P4	Uganda	Female	32	BA	Administrator in a university
P5	Uganda	Male	45	Ph.D.	Lecturer
P6	Uganda	Male	57	Ph.D.	Director in food and beverage sector
P7	Uganda	Female	24	BA	Head chef in a restaurant
P8	Uganda	Male	42	BA	Manager in a hotel
P9	Uganda	Female	35	MA	Senior product development & Research officer
P10	Uganda	Female	28	BA	Tourism officer
P11	Uganda	Male	33	BA	Tourism officer
P12	Uganda	Female	37	MA	Senior Tourism Officer, Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities
P13	Maldives	Male	40	BA	Bakery owner
P14	Maldives	Male	56	BA	Former senior director at the Ministry of Tourism
P15	Maldives	Male	32	BA	Executive chef in a hotel
P16	Maldives	Male	39	BA	Assistant Director of food & beverage in a hotel
P17	Maldives	Male	39	BA	Food and Beverage
P18	Maldives	Male	56	BA	Operations manager in a hotel
P19	Maldives	Male	35	BA	Restaurant manager
P20	Maldives	Female	47	MA	CEO in a travel agency
P21	Maldives	Male	35	MA	Executive Director
P22	Maldives	Male	33	BA	Deputy managing director

Source: Authors' own creation

3.2.2. Thematic Content Analysis

The study employs the six-stage thematic content analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts were read multiple times by members of the research team with extensive expertise in qualitative research. Initial coding and theme identification were discussed and agreed upon. To enhance the reliability and credibility of the analysis, as well as to facilitate a deeper understanding of the findings, extensive authentic in vivo quotations were utilized (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

3.2.3. Findings

The qualitative data from tourism practitioners and tourism experts in both the Maldives and Uganda highlights the crucial role of the tourism industry in contributing to the economic growth of these two

OIC countries. This is unsurprising given that the total contribution of travel and tourism to the Maldives' GDP is 29% (Adedoyin et al., 2023) and 7.7% to the Ugandan GDP (Uganda Investment Authority, 2024). Interestingly, however, gastronomy tourism as a niche tourism type is perceived to be overall neglected or at a very early stage of development at best. The following sections outline in detail the key challenges hindering gastronomy tourism, capture the potential success factors, and explore the role of government in overcoming these challenges and contributing to the success of gastronomy tourism.

3.2.3.1. *Gastronomy tourism in OIC countries: state-of-the-art and key stakeholders*

Drawing on qualitative data collected from national officers, policymakers, hospitality enterprises, as well as hospitality and tourism experts in the Maldives, and Uganda, gastronomy tourism seems to be perceived differently in these two OIC countries. While informants in both cases agree on the significant potential of their culinary heritage and cooking traditions in fostering gastronomy tourism, they diverge in terms of the actual state-of-art of gastronomy tourism as a market within the broader tourism industry.

As "*The Pearl of Africa*" [P7, P10], Uganda seems to have developed some attention to gastronomy tourism. There seems to be a recognition of food as a core element contributing the diversification of the tourism offering through gastronomy tourism. This recognition is emerging at both local and institutional levels.

P11 notes:

"*Gastronomy tourism in Uganda is a vibrant and evolving sector, deeply rooted in the country's rich and diverse culinary heritage. Our gastronomy products have their origins in traditional dishes that reflect the cultural influences of various ethnic groups across Uganda. Over time, these traditional recipes have been reimagined and modernized to cater to both local tastes and international visitors seeking unique culinary experiences*".

When compared to other tourism types, however, gastronomy tourism does not seem to be a priority, this is well captured in P3's words: "*Gastronomy is not really a largely advertised or marketed or valued type of tourism in this country. We haven't really had much of any training […]. The current focus is primarily on culture tourism, eco -tourism, and wildlife tourism*".

This is unsurprising given that Uganda as a destination, like many OIC African destinations, is a maturing tourism destination attracting a small share of the international travel market.

On the other side, informants from the Maldives perceive gastronomy tourism to be at a very early stage of development. P16 mentions: "*Gastronomy tourism in the Maldives is still in its nascent stages but holds great potential given the country's rich culinary heritage and unique island environment*"

There is a general feeling that gastronomy tourism is underdeveloped since the Maldives is heavily perceived and actually considered as a sand-sun-sea destination. This is captured by P13: "*everyone talks about the Maldives' sun, sand, and seas, everyone talks about the Maldives as a honeymoon destination, who talks about our food? No one!*"

Another significant factor hindering the development of gastronomy tourism has to deal with accessibility issues among the islands. This is captured by P14's words: "*The biggest challenge is that people cannot reach to areas where the food is*".

Regardless of its development, informants seem to agree on the role of culinary heritage and cooking traditions in fostering the overall tourism experience and thus boosting the tourism industry. Additionally, for informants (notably from Uganda rather than the Maldives), local cuisine and cooking traditions are perceived as a key source of national pride and self-identification. This is well captured in p10's words:

"*the formation of gastronomy products and destinations often involves leveraging Uganda's rich culinary heritage, which includes traditional dishes, such as matoke, luwombo, and the famous Rolex. These local delicacies have been passed down through generations and are now being showcased to the world through gastronomy and tourism. In Nwoya, we are proud to be home to some of the best boiled goat and other local dishes, which attract visitors from far and wide. Our district is also known for its high-quality produce, including shea butter and peanuts, which is used to create unique gastronomic experiences*".

In terms of the key stakeholders involved (or to be precise, are perceived to be involved) in the development of gastronomy tourism in these two OIC countries, eight key stakeholders are frequently mentioned. These are governmental bodies, local farmers, hospitality businesses (restaurants), travel trade businesses (e.g., travel agencies), gastronomy celebrities (i.e., chefs), educational institutions, cultural institutions, NGOs, and local communities (see Fig. 13). The role of the government and national tourism boards is particularly underscored by most informants. For instance, P9 notes:

"*The government has a significant role in promoting and packaging gastronomy tourism products. The Ministry of Tourism and the Uganda Tourism Board are key players in linking regions and creating a cohesive tourism product. They also integrate wildlife experiences with cultural and culinary experiences, partnering with local communities near national parks*".

The findings also show that cultural institutions are "instrumental in promoting and preserving culinary traditions, organizing food festivals and creating awareness about the country gastronomic potential" [P11]. NGOs are also appreciated as a key player in promoting gastronomy tourism P10 mentions:

"We are also seeing a surge in interest from individuals and NGOs, who are passionate about promoting gastronomy tourism. For example, Mlinza Farm is a great example of a local initiative that promotes food tourism and showcases the best of Ugandan cuisine".

Figure 12: Key stakeholders contributing to the development of gastronomy tourism
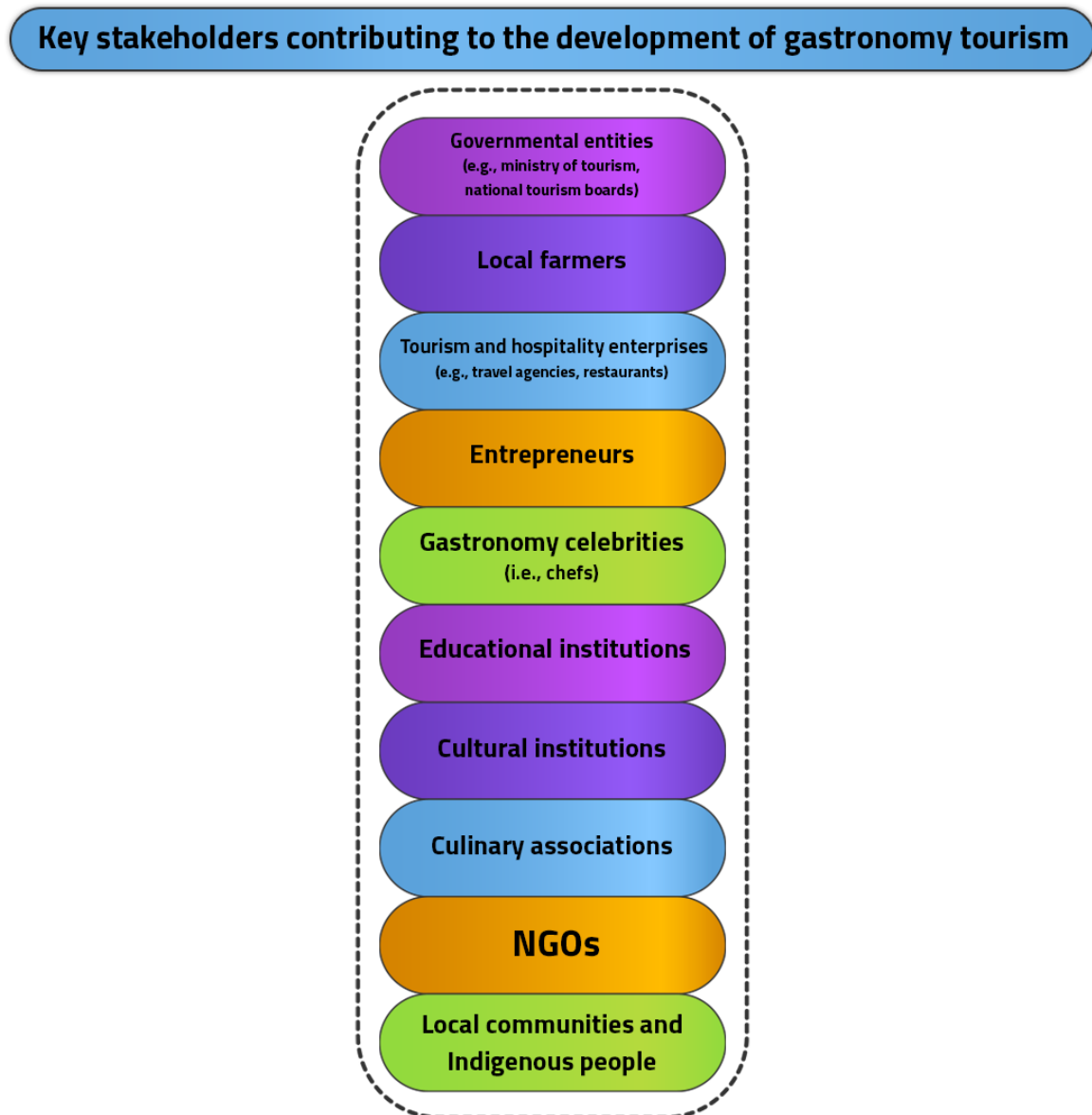
Notably, informants seem to agree on the complexity of the relationships involved in gastronomy tourism. This is well captured in P9's words: *"the value chain of gastronomy tourism in Uganda is extensive. It starts with farmers growing Ugandan food and includes those trading these items, all the way to the cooking process"*.

Similarly, P13 notes that "*local chefs are key players but must be supported by the government*".

3.2.3.2. The process of developing gastronomy tourism in destinations

The qualitative data reveals that the process of developing gastronomy tourism involves various elements/stages including (i) identifying existing gastronomy resources, (ii) capacity building, and (iii) benchmarking.

Informants seem to agree on the importance of identifying gastronomy resources in destination as the initial step in developing gastronomy tourism. P18 mentions:

"*for destination to develop gastronomy tourism, they need to identify their culinary assets, including local ingredients, traditional recipes, culinary talent, and cultural heritage. This involves conducting research, engaging with local communities, and assessing market demand for gastronomy experiences*"

Capacity building is also viewed as an important element. P19 comments:

"*training is also important because we need people who are well trained in cooking, and I believe the Maldives lacks in skilled human resources with adequate culinary knowledge. We need people to go to culinary colleges and receive formal culinary training. This is important because the younger generation chefs are not so familiar with the traditional foods that used to be prepared in the Maldives*"

Benchmarking is viewed as a crucial element in the process of developing gastronomy destination. P16 notes: "*it is vital to learn from successful gastronomy tourism models in other countries, such as Thailand, Japan, and Italy, to understand best practices in creating compelling culinary experiences*".

Informants also highlight the need for a knowledge-based approach to gastronomy development with a well-defined strategy, P9 mentions:

"*developing gastronomy tourism doesn't necessarily require a lot of capital, though it can vary depending on the scale at which you want to operate. At a basic level, it can be quite simple and low-cost. For instance, you could have a farm where visitors come, prepare a meal, and then leave. However, for a more structured approach, the process is different. First, you need to initiate the idea and decide on the specific aspect of gastronomy you want to focus on. Do you want to offer just the end product, which is the food, or do you want to provide a full experience where clients join you from the garden to the kitchen to the plate? Once the idea is developed, it needs to be conceptualized properly to determine the necessary funds, marketing strategies and potential partners required for the product. After this, you would typically run a demo or pilot to test the concept. For example, you might invite a small group of people for a half-day tour to get feedback. If the concept works and receives positive reviews, you can then organize it properly and prepare for a launch. Gastronomy tourism products can be both formal and informal. Sometimes, it starts with a simple idea, like opening a restaurant, which later evolves into offering cooking classes or a farmer's market focused on local cuisine. Ultimately, gastronomy tourism can be an add-on to an existing product or a standalone venture. If it's an add-on, it involves integrating gastronomy elements into an already existing product to attract a different clientele.*"

3.2.3.3. Characteristics of successful gastronomy destinations

Informants were asked about their perceptions of the key characteristics of successful gastronomy destinations. Based on the content analysis of the data, 12 themes were identified and classified under three broad categories, namely, food-specific attributes, destination-specific attributes, and miscellaneous (See Fig. 14).

Figure 13: Characteristics of successful gastronomy destinations
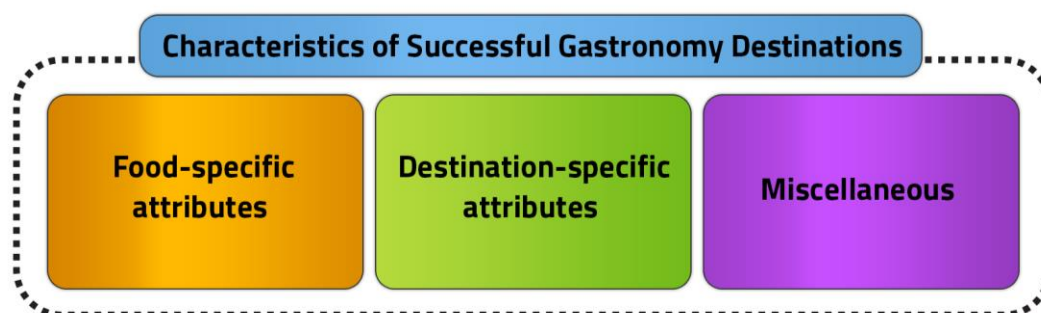
In terms of food-specific attributes, authenticity, richness of culinary heritage, diversity of gastronomy offerings, high-quality ingredients, and storytelling were frequently mentioned as key factors central to the success of gastronomy destinations. The majority of informants view the authenticity of gastronomy offerings as a key indicator of a successful gastronomy destination. This is well captured in P8's words "*Successful gastronomy destinations offer authentic culinary experiences that reflect local culture and traditions".*

Other success factors are more destination specific including effective marketing and branding activities, adequate infrastructure, sustainability, and integrating gastronomy in tour programs. Specifically, there seems to be a large agreement on the role of effective marketing in fostering gastronomy tourism. This is well captured in P16's words: "*successful gastronomy tourism destinations are capable of utilizing various marketing channels to promote the destination's culinary appeal, ensuring a strong, consistent brand message*".

Infrastructure is also mentioned as an important factor. P10 notes: "*another critical factor is accessibility and a visitor-friendly infrastructure. This includes not only physical infrastructure, such as roads, but also digital connectivity, such as stable Internet access. This ensures that tourists can easily navigate and explore culinary offerings, share their experiences, and remain connected".*

Sustainability is also highlighted as a key factor. P18 notes:

"*sustainability is increasingly important in gastronomy tourism, with visitors seeking environmentally friendly and socially responsible dining options. Successful gastronomy destinations prioritize*

sustainable practices, such as sourcing local ingredients, reducing food waste, and supporting local communities".

Other factors crucial to the success of gastronomy tourism destinations involve locals' sense of pride of their food and cooking traditions, strong local engagement, and collaborative stakeholders. P10 notes:

"*successful gastronomy destinations recognize the importance of collaboration and stakeholder engagement. This means involving local farmers, food producers, community members and tourism authorities in the development and promotion of a destination's culinary offerings. By working together, these stakeholders can create a cohesive and sustainable approach to gastronomy tourism that benefits everyone*"

When asked if they perceived their countries (i.e., the Maldives and Uganda) as successful gastronomy destinations, informants were overall sceptical highlighting that it is rather early to suggest that despite the existent potential. This is captured in P8's words:

"*Uganda is on the path to becoming a successful gastronomy destination. We have a rich culinary heritage and diverse offerings that appeal to food enthusiasts. However, there's still room for growth in terms of infrastructure, culinary training, and international recognition*"

Relatedly, informants were asked to categorise their countries (i.e., the Maldives and Uganda) based on their current stage in the life-cycle of gastronomy tourism (infancy, growth, maturity, decline). Unsurprisingly, the majority agree that the destinations are in the infancy stage. It is noteworthy that documenting culinary traditions is often viewed as a milestone to understanding the level of development of gastronomy tourism. This is captured in P15's words:

"*Currently, I would say it [the Maldives] is still in the infancy stage. Although we have some documentation, we also lack detailed historical backgrounds for our products. For example, we haven't traced the origins of traditional Maldivian dishes or identified key individuals with culinary skills. We don't have comprehensive documentation that can be used to trace these traditions*"

3.2.3.4. Marketing gastronomy destinations: strategies and communication channels
An attempt was made to understand to what extent gastronomy tourism is being marketed in the Maldives and Uganda as two OIC countries. Overall, there seems to be a general agreement on the weakness of marketing efforts geared towards fostering gastronomy tourism and positioning food at the heart of tourism landscape. P13 notes:

"*I believe promoting gastronomy tourism remains very limited because everyone talks about the Maldives as a sun-sand-sea destination. Whoever knows anything about our food? everyone talks about the Maldives as honeymoon destination. So I can see no strategies to promote gastronomy and food tourism*".

Confirming this. P16 mentions: "*The Maldives is marketed efficiently as a luxury and honeymoon destination, using high-impact visuals of its beaches, resorts, and underwater scenery*".

In terms of the communication channels used to promote gastronomy tourism, social media, culinary events, partnerships with influencers, and collaborations with international food and travel media are frequently cited.

P19 mentions:

"*Collaboration is crucial, it is important to collaborate with, for example, TV shows to host their programs such as MasterChef which can bring a lot of benefits. In the Maldives we had hosted MasterChef Sweden to promote gastronomy tourism. This was a mega hit I believe. As far as I know, this event attracted a lot of guests to Meeru Island Maldives where the episode was hosted*".

3.2.3.5. Barriers to gastronomy tourism in OIC member states
One of the key objectives of this study was to understand the key barriers or challenges facing gastronomy tourism in OIC countries. The content analysis of the qualitative data has resulted in 22 themes classified under four categories (see Fig. 15).

Marketing challenges involve inadequate marketing strategies, insufficient marketing and branding efforts, and lack of international awareness of gastronomy tourism in OIC countries. Despite existing potential, OIC countries seem to fall behind in terms of marketing their gastronomy tourism. Insufficient marketing efforts are viewed as the key reason beyond the lack of international awareness of the existing gastronomy potential and inherently the limited international market share. This is well captured in P11's words:

"*the foremost among these challenges is the inadequate marketing and international recognition of Uganda's rich culinary heritage. Despite its diverse and flavourful cuisine, Uganda struggles to effectively promote itself as a gastronomic destination on a global stage. This lack of visibility limits its appeal to international travellers seeking authentic culinary experiences*".

The qualitative data also shows that *human resources* represent a significant barrier to gastronomy tourism. Specifically, informants highlight lack of skilled human resources, skill gaps, and lack of targeted training opportunities as key barriers hindering gastronomy tourism. P8 notes: "*we have clear skills gaps among hospitality staff in terms of delivering high-quality culinary experiences*".

Infrastructure refers to elements necessary to the development and growth of both tourism in general and gastronomy tourism in particular. Informants underscore underdeveloped infrastructure (e.g., road, electricity/water supply), limited accessibility, weak connectivity (e.g., internet services), limited number of quality hospitality establishments, supply chain challenges, limited access to local ingredients, and inadequate food safety standards as significant barriers.

Other important barriers were also mentioned and classified as miscellaneous. These include climate change, tourism enclave, loss of traditions, seasonality, high taxes, high import costs, limited community engagement, limited government support, and limited support to agricultural activities.

Enclave tourism is apparently is significant challenge undermining the potential of destination in creating, developing, and promoting gastronomy tourism. This more relevant to the Maldivian case rather than the Ugandan case. P13 notes: "*Once the tourist arrives to the resort [in the Maldives], they are just stuck in the resort, they are no longer going out the island to try these types of foods that are available within the local communities*".

Figure 14: Barriers to gastronomy tourism
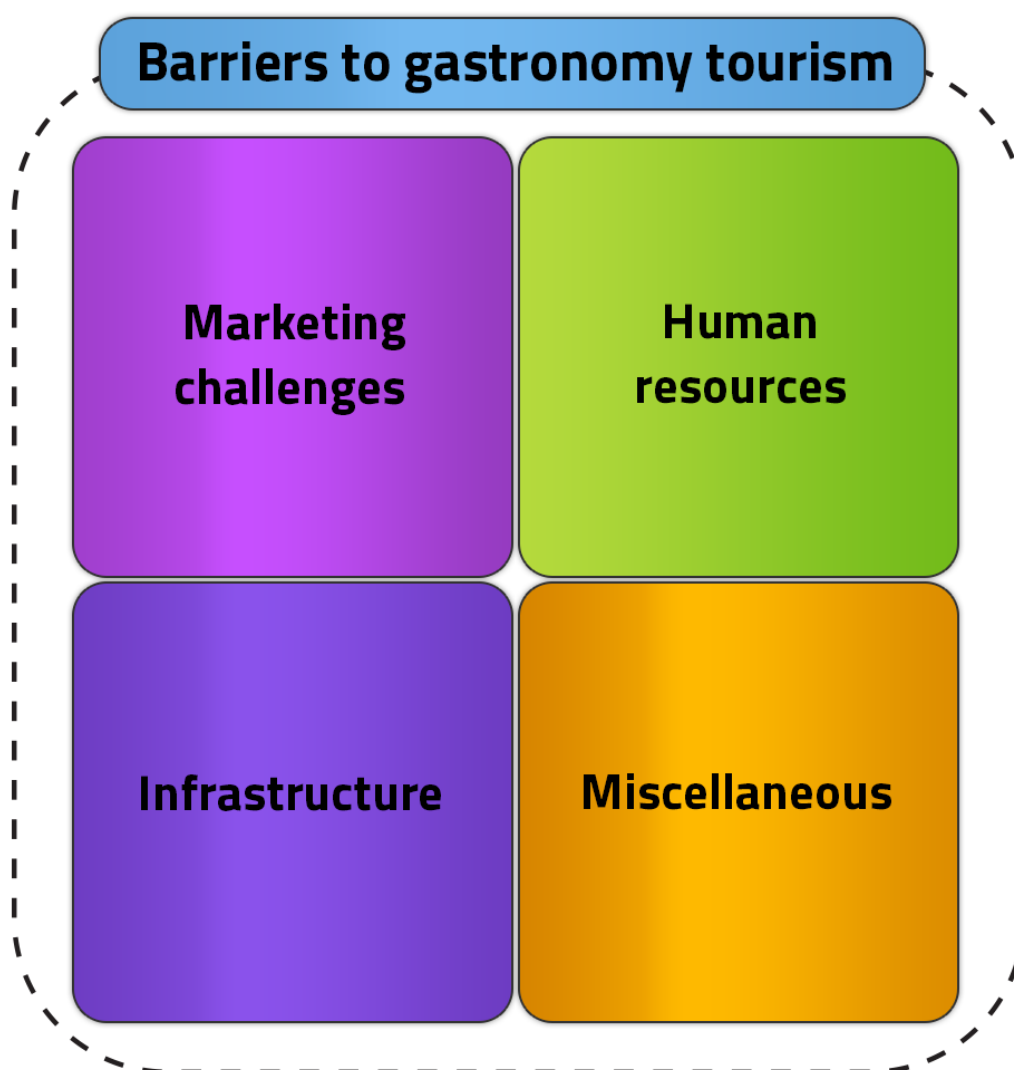
Others highlight seasonality and supply chain challenges as potential barriers. P8 mentions: "*seasonality and logistics challenges can impact the supply chain of fresh local ingredients*"

3.2.3.6. The role of the government in overcoming barriers and fostering gastronomy tourism in destinations

As mentioned earlier, informants widely agree that the government, through official authorities (national tourism boards, ministries of tourism) is the key stakeholder in creating, developing, and marketing gastronomy tourism. After exploring key barriers and challenges hindering gastronomy tourism, informants were enquired about their perceptions of the role of the government in overcoming these barriers and challenges and how governments can contribute to the development and growth of gastronomy tourism. The content analysis of the data suggests that the role of the government can be classified into three broad categories labelled as *financial support*, *administrative/logistic support,* and *policy-level support* (see Fig. 16).

Figure 15: The role of the government in developing gastronomy tourism

In terms of *financial support*, informants highlight various tools that can directly and indirectly influence, in a positive way, gastronomy tourism development. These tools include tax reduction on agricultural activities, incentives for local producers, supporting farmers, and adequate financial resources for promotional/marketing activities. For instance, P7 mentions: *"the government should invest enough money in agriculture. The ministry of agriculture should put in more energy to support farmers. Also, lowering the tax on agricultural items and* [food] *producers is vital".* P4 notes: "*Government-led awareness* [marketing] *campaigns are crucial to promote Uganda's gastronomy tourism offerings among international tourists and travel trade*". The need to support local farmers is also frequently highlighted. P12 notes: "*The government should incentivize and support local agricultural initiatives to enhance the availability and quality of locally sourced ingredients*". Overall, there is a wide agreement on the need of fostering a supportive environment underpinned with efficient marketing and adequate financial resources to stimulate growth and competitiveness in gastronomy tourism.

Administrative/logistic support is also frequently mentioned as a key way to address existing barriers and foster gastronomy tourism. Specifically, informants underscore the importance of facilitating public-private partnerships, establishing and maintaining partnerships with international culinary

associations, engaging different stakeholders (e.g., universities, and culinary institutions), contributing to organizing regional and international food events, supporting initiatives to document culinary heritage and cooking traditions, and enforcing food safety standards. There is wide agreement on the potential role of the government in facilitating strong public-private partnerships as well as international partnerships to foster gastronomy tourism. P12 notes: "*the government should work towards fostering robust public private partnerships* [„.]. *These partnerships can facilitate joint marketing campaigns, infrastructure development, sustainable tourism".*

Policy-level support refers to mid-term and long-term actions that would eventually contribute to the development of gastronomy tourism. These include identifying regions with high gastronomy tourism potential, investment in culinary education and training, encouraging entrepreneurship and the food and beverage sector, and supporting community-based tourism. For instance, encouraging venturing in food and beverage in general and fine dining in particular is viewed as a path to fostering gastronomy tourism in the destination. Again, the role of the government is perceived as crucial in supporting entrepreneurial activities. Confirming this, P9 mentions: "*Connecting entrepreneurs with financing options specific to gastronomy can empower them to innovate and enhance their offerings, motivated by a clear understanding of market demand*".

3.3. Quantitative Stage

Based on the qualitative stage, a survey was designed and conducted on a sample of 231 hospitality and tourism experts, policymakers, hospitality and tourism business owners, and other stakeholders interested in gastronomy tourism in OIC countries. The survey looked into barriers/challenging hindering gastronomy tourism in OIC countries as well as success factors. Perceptions of strategies and tools used by governments to support gastronomy tourism were also measured. The findings as descriptive statistics are presented both in reports for each case country as well at the policy recommendations.

3.4. Case countries

Three case countries were chosen based on their geographical representation from the official three Regional Groups of the OIC Member States. Egypt was selected from the Arab Group, Türkiye and the Maldives from the Asian Group, and Uganda from the African Group. For the sake of comparison and benchmarking, Italy was selected as a non-OIC country. The contribution of tourism and travel industry to the GDP as well as the potential of gastronomy tourism were used to identify these countries. This section will provide an overview of each case country with a focus on gastronomy tourism, its development and characteristics, challenges hindering gastronomy tourism, and factors contributing to the success of this niche market. Finally, policy recommendations customized for each country are presented.

3.4.1. Case Country-The Maldives
3.4.1.1. General Outlook
The Maldives, located in the Indian Ocean with a long coastline of around 644 km, is one of the main tourist destinations for the 3S Tourism (Sun, Sea, and Sand) in the world where tourists enjoy crystal-clear lagoons, coloured corals, and warm seas. In 1972, the first resort was established and since that time tourism started to play a fundamental role in Maldivian economy in terms of earning foreign exchange and creating job opportunities for local people (Kundur, 2012). The tourism development had been planned based on the Quality Tourism Strategy that succeeded in increasing the number of tourists from 42.000 in 1980 to more than 800.000 in 2010 with occupancy rates of over 95% (Scheyvens, 2011). The number of arrivals recorded more than 1.7 million of tourists in 2019 contributing to around 59.6% of employment. This number slightly decreased in 2022 reaching around 1.67 million tourists, however, the tourism industry kept its position as the main contributor to the Maldivian GDP by 29% (Adedoyin et al., 2023).

Tourist Arrivals to Maldives, 2000-2021
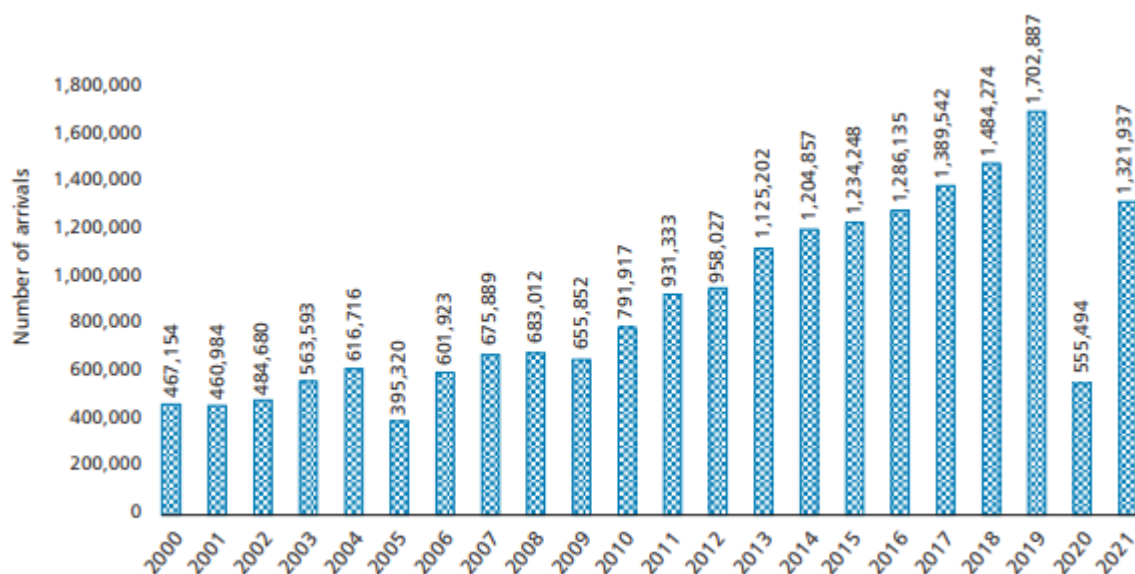
Source: Maldives Ministry of Tourism

Through five phases of development, the tourism industry has become the backbone of the Maldives economy, which witnessed an average growth of 7.4% in the period between 1986 and 2014, rendering it a middle-income country by 2011. However, economic prosperity is not shared by all communities and islands in the country. This depends on their level of participation and active involvement in the tourism industry, rendering the growth lacking in social inclusivity (Giampiccoli et al., 2020). This might be imputed to the adopted policy of separation between resort islands and those inhabited by Maldivian people in an attempt to reduce the negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism

and protect the local human environment from the so-called "cultural pollution" resulting in segregating some local people from the participation in the enclave tourism economies that is based on "one island -one resort" concept (Scheyvens, 2011). Later, the government has established Maldives Tourism Development Corporation with 45% share held by the government and 55% sold to Maldivians to spread the benefits of tourism and reduce their unfairly distribution and launched several Tourism Master Plans to expand the benefits to all Maldivians including, women in particular (Sathiendrakumar et al., 2021). The new corporation has been awarded eight islands with the aim of bringing tourism to all Maldivians (Shakeela et al., 2009). In 2008, the Atoll and Island Councils were launched as part of the decentralization strategy and the strict enclave tourism policy was modified to increase the local communities' involvement in the industry by giving them the opportunity to develop guesthouses leading to a considerable growth in the number guesthouses in the country (Bowen et al., 2017). To raise awareness about the negative impacts of climate change (e.g., global warming and natural disasters) on the Maldivian Islands, an underwater cabinet meeting was held in 2010 to show the expected threats caused by environmental degradation (Scheyvens, 2011). This is particularly important considering the fact that the Maldives is one of the lowest-lying countries, with islands around 3 meters above sea level, putting them at risk of disappearance under the ocean (Buckley et al., 2017).

The Maldivian model suffers from the concentration of tourism in few areas of country causing disparities in the generated income, the availability and access to the social services, infrastructure and quality of life between the different regions. This situation forced Maldivians to relocate to the capital city of Male in quest for better life in terms of services and opportunities (Shakeela et al., 2009). Another challenge to the Maldivian tourism industry is the high economic leakage attributed to resort repatriate profits as well as the reliance on foreign workers, who are sometimes paid higher wages compared to the local employees due to the lack of skilled local labor (Amira, 2009). The Maldivian tourism industry is marked by the significant presence of foreign investors and operators, which reduces the economic benefits gained by the local people (Shakeela et al., 2016).

Regarding the core tourism Maldivian products, the Maldives attracts leisure and relaxation, honeymooners, and diving experience seekers from international tourist markets, mainly India, Russia, and the European markets, including the UK, Germany, Italy, and France (Maldives Ministry of Tourism, 2023). The tourists are received by resorts, and each resort occupies an island that is accessible only for locals who work there (Sathiendrakumar et al., 2021). These resorts offer several activities, including shark diving (Zimmerhackel et al., 2019), cruising, watersport activities (water skiing and surfing, snorkeling, windsurfing), fishing, excursion trips to other islands, and health-related recreational activities (Muneeza et al., 2020).

Gastronomy tourism, like many other types of tourism, including heritage and cultural tourism, has not taken the deserved position in the Maldivian tourism industry, as attention is mostly paid to the country's image as a tropical island destination (Amira, 2009); however, tourists visiting the Maldives

enjoy the gourmet cuisine in overwater restaurants offering mainly international food dishes (Maldives Ministry of Tourism, 2023). Table 4 presents a SWOT analysis of Gastronomy tourism in the Maldives.

<div align="center">Table 4: SWOT analysis of Gastronomy tourism in the Maldives</div>

Strengths +	Weaknesses –
*Rich culinary heritage: The Maldives has a rich culinary heritage and unique island environment resulting in traditional seafood dishes *Diverse culinary appeal: Maldivian cuisine combines flavours from India and Sri Lanka, and incorporates Arabic and African influences, making it attractive to tourists from various cultural backgrounds. *Culinary showcases: The Maldives hosted MasterChef Sweden as a strategic initiative to boost gastronomy tourism.	*Gastronomy tourism in the Maldives is still in its nascent stages. *The Maldives' strong association with sun, sand, and sea: The Maldives is heavily perceived and considered as a sand-sun-sea destination. *Luxury-focused marketing with limited gastronomy promotion in the Maldives: The Maldives is marketed efficiently as a luxury and honeymoon destination, using high-impact visuals of its beaches, resorts, and underwater scenery. However, gastronomy is not promoted. *Lack of promotion strategies: There is a lack of strategies to promote gastronomy and food tourism. The official website of the Maldives Tourism Board does not display much information about the traditional food. *Insufficient documentation of Maldivian culinary heritage: There is a lack of comprehensive documentation of Maldivian ingredients, dishes, recipes, and cooking techniques. *Lack of local produce and ingredients: Many of the ingredients are imported from other countries including some vital local items for the Maldivian cuisine. *Accessibility: Accessibility is an issue in the Maldives due to its nature. Tourists may not be able to access the local culture because of the natural formation of the country, which is dispersed over many islands. *Enclave tourism: This is a significant challenge undermining the potential of destination in creating, developing, and promoting gastronomy tourism. *Workforce challenges: Maldives lacks skilled human resources with adequate culinary knowledge. *Underrepresentation of local cuisine: The heavy reliance on foreign chefs in island resorts contributes to the neglect of Maldivian cuisine, as many lack the experience and knowledge of local ingredients and traditional cooking methods. *Preference for Western cuisine: Despite the rich heritage of Dhivehi cuisine, Maldivian

	resrts tend to prioritize Western food over local dishes, limiting the incorporation of traditional cuisine in the tourism industry.
	*The lack of communication between the gastronomy businesses and tour operators: This represents an obstacle facing gastronomy tourism development in the Maldives.
	*Similarities with neighbouring cultures: The distinctions between Maldivian cuisine and that of its neighbors are blurred due to shared products and cooking methods.
Opportunities +	**Threats –**
*Investing in research on new farming techniques to produce fresh ingredients in the Maldives to reduce importation.	*Climate change poses a threat to the islands. Rising sea levels are a sad fact that the Maldives must deal with. By 2050, 80% of the Maldives may be uninhabitable, according to scientists.
*Cultural-Heritage-Documentation-and Digital-Archiving (CHDD) provides a tool to preserve Maldivian culinary heritage. Exploiting initiatives like Google Arts & Culture can prove useful in this. This platform works with museums, cultural institutions, and organizations worldwide to digitize and disseminate cultural items, artworks, and historical places. It offers virtual tours, high-resolution photographs, and thorough descriptions, making cultural treasures available to everyone with an internet connection.	*Competing against close countries that share similar gastronomy is an issue. The limited original Maldivian items along with similarities in the dishes and the cooking techniques with some close cultures have hindered the efforts to differentiate the local Maldivian cuisine and expose the cultural food identity.

Creating a connection between culture and tourism can boost the local involvement and participation in the economic growth (Rasheeda, 2012). In the Third Tourism Master Plan (2007-2011), the need to incorporate the local culture and heritage along with the traditional 3S tourism has been raised to pave the way for communities' engagement in the tourism industry by producing handicrafts and other locally-made stuff (The Maldives Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2007). The Fourth Tourism Master Plan (2013-2017) stated clearly that "The Maldives has always been, and continues to be, a high-end sun and sand destination" confirming that relaxation, honeymoon, and diving are the most targeted market segments, thus, any product shifts are not required (The Maldives Ministry of Tourism Arts & Culture, 2013). The Fifth Tourism Master plan (2023-2027) has identified several goals to boost the tourism industry in Maldives among them those related to offering new products and experience including gastronomy tourism. Thus, a specific strategy has been adopted to promoting the Maldivian cuisine to the tourist markets through defining a list of local food from all Maldivian atolls, ensuring the safety and quality standards for local cuisine, setting a marketing strategy for Maldivian cuisine, and enhancing the quality of human resources through running training programs (The Maldives Ministry of Tourism, 2023b).

3.4.1.2. Gastronomy Tourism in the Maldives, its development and characteristics

After decades of adopting the enclave tourism model in the Maldivian atolls that are not inhabited by local people, the Maldives made some reforms that allowed locals to run guesthouse businesses outside the traditional luxury resorts. The increase in the number of these guesthouses helped to flourish the environment in which tourists interact with local people and the cultural traditions and performances, including experiencing the Maldivian cuisine (Shenaan et al., 2021). However, the poor and infertile soil in the Maldives led traditional Maldivian cuisine to rely heavily on the rich marine environment, resulting in traditional seafood dishes such as dried and smoked fish, often paired with coconut palm products (Shenaan et al., 2021). The fresh tuna is served with rice, chili, and lime in the main dish called "garudhiya." The Maldivian cuisine has been affected by some neighbouring cultures through traders and visitors, especially India and Sri Lanka, as well as the Arabic and African flavours, dishes, and cooking techniques that contributed to shaping the Maldives cuisine.

The travelers coming from around the globe have also added several elements to the food culture in the Maldives; however, many of the ingredients are imported from other countries (Ambelu et al., 2018), including some vital local items for the Maldivian cuisine that were traditionally produced by the Maldivian farmers but have now become scarce, like curry leaves and coconut milk (Amira, 2009). The Maldives produces not more than 10% of the needed food requirement, putting at risk the whole national food security (Ministry of Environment and Energy, 2017). In addition, the prevailing presence of imported food products affects not only the authenticity of the offered items but also the sustainability of the tourism industry (Waseema, 2017). During the thematic session on gastronomic tourism in Maldives held in 2022, a question was raised on which dish should be the first to be announced as The National Dish of Maldives (Hotelier Maldives, 2022). Moreover, there are several stakeholders and entities engaged in managing, developing, and marketing gastronomy tourism in the Maldives. Some of these are highlighted in Table 5.

Table 5: Indicative examples of gastronomy tourism associations/platforms in the Maldives

Name	Core Aims/Activities	Website
Chefs Guild of Maldives	Aims to elevate the Culinary Arts in Maldives. Endorsed by the World Association of Chefs Societies (WACS)	www.chefsguildofmaldives.org/
Restaurant Association of Maldives	Aims to represent the local hospitality businesses.	www.ram.org.mv
Maldives Fishermen's Association	Aims to develop the Maldivian fishing industry by educating, providing incentives, facilitating market options, gather and disseminate information about new technologies to the local fishers in Maldives.	www.mfa.org.mv

Source: Authors' own creation

The Maldivian local cuisine, traditionally known as Dhivehi Cuisine, has not been well incorporated in the tourism industry where resorts prefer the western food rather than introducing the local dishes. Actually, the official website of the Maldives Tourism Board does not give much information about traditional food in terms of recipes and cooking techniques (Ashish et al., 2015). The island resorts offer many international food items from Italian, Mediterranean, Thai, and other world cuisines while Maldivian cuisine items are rarely introduced, this is also reflected in the marketing campaigns where the use of Maldivian cuisine items in promoting the destination is limited (Amira, 2009). The overwhelming dependence on foreign chefs in the island resorts could be among the most important reasons behind rendering Maldivian cuisine less represented and even neglected due to the lack of experience and knowledge in the local food items and the required cooking methods. Another issue is that tourists were not able to access the local culture because of the natural formation of the country, which is dispersed over many islands (Amira, 2009). The lack of communication between the gastronomy businesses and tour operators along with the inefficient transportation system are also among the obstacles facing gastronomy tourism development in the Maldives (Fathimath et al., 2011). The limited original Maldivian items along with similarities in the dishes and the cooking techniques with some close cultures have hindered the efforts to differentiate the local Maldivian cuisine and expose the cultural food identity (Amira, 2009). Despite these challenges, the Maldives also organize significant food and gastronomy-related events. Table 6 presents some of these events.

Table 6: Key gastronomy and food festivals in the Maldives

Name	City	Central theme/Highlight dish
The Culinary Challenge	Hotel Asia Exhibition, Male	For suppliers of the hospitality industry to display and promote their products and services in the Maldives.
The Young Chef competition	Male	Where each of the five contestants had to prepare one main course dish and one dessert
The Food and Hospitality Asia Maldives Exhibition	Male	To showcase the finest in food, hospitality, and culinary arts, enriching both the Maldives and the broader South Asian region.
The national culinary competition of the Chef's Guild of Maldives	Male	Chefs will compete and display their skills ahead of an internationally recognised panel of Judges.
The Urbanco Maldives Food Carnival	Male	Displaying local and international cuisine
The Maldives National University Food Fair	Male	To showcase and promote food and beverages produced by locals.
The Nova "Community Street Food Festival".	Nova island.	A wide range of dishes from the Maldives, Mauritius, Thailand, India, China, Morocco, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka.

Source: Authors' own creation

As mentioned earlier, the Maldives is included in this study as a field case study. Therefore, the following sections are based on quantitative data collected from a sample of 77 respondents involving tourism practitioners and tourism experts. The general profile of the respondents is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Descriptive profile of respondents (The Maldives sample)

Gender	N	%	Marital Status	N	%
Male	51	66.2	Single	43	55.8
Female	26	33.8	Married	34	44.2
Total	77	100.0	Other	0	0.0
			Total	77	100.0
Age	N	%			
18-24 years old	15	19.5			
25-34 years old	19	24.7	Education	N	%
35-44 years old	12	15.6	High school graduate or less	31	40.3
45-54 years old	19	24.7	College graduate/undergraduate	24	31.2
55-64 years old	12	15.6	Master's Degree	5	6.5
65 and above	0	0.0	Doctoral degree	6	7.8
Total	77	100.0	Professional qualification	11	14.3
			Total	77	100.0
Type of Business /Current role	N	%			
Restaurateur	5	6.5			
Hotelier	60	77.9			
Tourism expert	9	11.7			
Travel agent	3	3.9			
Total	77	100.0			

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.1.3. Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in the Maldives

The quantitative data collected from the tourism practitioners and tourism experts in Maldives show that gastronomy tourism is generally challenged by a set of issues including lack of adequate support to local farmers and livestock breeders, enclave tourism, and inadequate hospitality services standards). (See Table 8). These are largely in line with the qualitative data collected in the Maldives at stage one of the present study.

	Mean	Std. D
Lack of adequate support to local farmers and livestock breeder	3.71	1.43
Enclave tourism (i.e., resorts, all-inclusive hotels)	3.58	1.18
Inadequate hospitality services standards	3.58	1.15
Lack of central governmental support	3.53	1.15
Lack of authenticity due to excessive commercialization of culinary experiences	3.49	1.22
Lack of support from local authorities	3.43	1.21
Limited culinary offerings	3.43	1.33
Inadequate language skills among culinary staff	3.40	1.30
Inadequate marketing and promotion efforts	3.36	1.24
Climate change	3.35	1.23
Limited options for tourists with specific dietary needs	3.34	1.23
Lack of adequate infrastructure (e.g., quality hospitality facilities)	3.32	1.34
High costs of culinary offerings	3.31	1.18
Stringent regulations (e.g., licensing requirements, bureaucratic hurdles)	3.29	1.25
Negative stereotypes/ misconceptions about local cuisine	3.25	1.23
Concerns about food safety and hygiene	3.13	1.30

Source: Authors' own creation

The Maldives is among the key tourism destinations affected by climate change; interestingly, respondents seem to be unsure whether climate change is a barrier to gastronomy tourism. This may be due to a possible lack of knowledge on how climate change can affect agriculture and eventually food products.

3.4.1.4. Success factors of gastronomy tourism in the Maldives

As presented in Table 9, respondents in Maldives viewed destination safety, collaboration with tour operators and travel agencies to create gastronomy-focused travel packages, collaboration with celebrity chefs and culinary experts to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets, and locals' sense of pride in their food as the most important factors contributing to the success of gastronomy tourism.

Table 9: Success factors of gastronomy tourism in the Maldives

Success factors of tourism businesses and tourism experts in Maldives	Mean	Std. D
Destination safety	4.01	0.93
Collaboration with tour operators and travel agencies to create gastronomy-focused travel packages	3.95	1.16
Collaboration with celebrity chefs and culinary experts to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets	3.94	1.15
Locals' sense of pride in their food	3.88	0.85
Collaboration with food influencers to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets	3.88	1.16
Strong online presence (e.g., social media) to engage with potential visitors and showcase culinary experiences	3.87	1.15
Identifying and promoting unique culinary experiences	3.87	1.20
Perceived destination image	3.84	0.98
Engagement of local communities in gastronomy tourism initiatives	3.79	1.19
Emphasizing halal food in marketing communications	3.78	1.13
Authenticity of culinary heritage.	3.78	1.11
Availability of fresh, locally sourced ingredients	3.77	1.26
Organizing gastronomy and food festivals	3.75	1.07
Integration of culinary experiences with cultural activities (e.g., facilitating visits to local farm)	3.68	1.35
Opportunities for visitor engagement (e.g., cooking classes, food tastings)	3.66	1.18
Cross-sector collaboration (e.g., agriculture, food production, and hospitality)	3.66	1.20
Marketing gastronomy tourism offerings on government websites	3.66	1.24
Collaboration between government agencies, culinary businesses, local communities, and tourism stakeholders	3.48	1.49

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.1.5 Governmental strategies and tools to foster gastronomy tourism in the Maldives

It is crucial to understand the perceived importance of some governmental strategies to foster gastronomy tourism. As presented in Table 10, respondents view the need to engage in marketing and promotion campaigns focusing on gastronomy tourism, support culinary education and training, and develop gastronomy infrastructure to support tourism businesses as being important strategies. Interestingly, however, supporting and incentivising local farmers and livestock breeders are rated as the least important.

Table 10: Governmental strategies to support gastronomy tourism in the Maldives

	Mean	Std. D
Engaging in marketing and promotion campaigns focusing on gastronomy tourism	4.12	0.99
Supporting culinary education and training (e.g., gastronomy programmes at universities)	4.04	0.88
Gastronomy infrastructure development (e.g., culinary centres, and food hubs)	4.03	0.98
Creating spaces for local communities to showcase and sell their authentic products (e.g., food markets)	4.00	0.97
Protecting and preserving culinary heritage (e.g., traditional recipes, cooking techniques/styles)	3.97	1.18
Encouraging culinary entrepreneurship and small-scale food businesses	3.94	0.90
Participating in travel fairs and tourism exhibitions	3.94	1.00
Integrating gastronomy in tour programs (e.g., food tours)	3.94	0.95
Engaging in actions to mitigate climate change	3.86	1.27
Tax incentives (e.g., tax reduction, tax exemption) for culinary businesses	3.79	0.90
Promoting the historical and cultural significance of local foods (e.g., food and beverage museums)	3.79	1.04
Supporting food festivals and events	3.79	1.28
Funding from government authorities to invest in gastronomy tourism	3.75	0.93
Increasing visibility of gastronomy heritage through inscription on UNESCO Intangible Heritage lists.	3.73	1.09
Supporting and incentivising local small family hospitality businesses	3.73	1.32
Developing culinary trails and routes	3.69	1.13
Supporting and incentivising local farmers and livestock breeder	3.65	1.13

Source: Authors' own creation

Finally, respondents were also presented with a set of potential elements used by destinations in the process of developing gastronomy tourism. Overall, respondents seem to be unsure of the importance/value of these tools with responses fluctuating between "neutral" and "important" (see Table 11). Product development and capacity building were the most rated elements.

Table 11: Tools used by destinations in the process of developing gastronomy tourism in the Maldives

	Mean	Std. D
Gastronomy product development	3.99	0.97
Capacity building (e.g., training/education)	3.99	1.14
Branding campaigns	3.97	1.14
Product standardization	3.97	1.03
Collaboration with local communities	3.92	1.07
Market segmentation	3.01	1.05
Identifying gastronomy recourses and inventory	3.75	0.94
Gastronomy destination benchmarking	3.70	1.00
Environmental analysis	3.49	1.10

Source: Authors' own creation

Recommended practices for the Maldives

Gastronomy tourism in the Maldives is still in its nascent stages. This is due to the Maldives' strong association with sun, sand, and sea. The Maldives is also marketed efficiently as a luxury and honeymoon destination. There seems to be a missed opportunity to integrate gastronomy tourism into the existing tourism offering. There is a lack of strategies to promote gastronomy and food tourism. it is indicative that the official website of the Maldives Tourism Board does not display much information about the traditional food in the Maldives. Hence, the Maldives should consider gastronomy in its tourism strategic plans. This should be viewed as a strategic decision to move beyond mass sun, sand, and sea tourism towards a growing niche tourism.

There seems to be a lack of comprehensive documentation of Maldivian ingredients, dishes, recipes, and cooking techniques. The government as well as local NGOs could initiative to encourage robust documentation of Maldivian food heritage. Higher education institutions as well as gastronomy academies can be also involved through incentive programs to engage in the documentation process.

Despite the rich heritage of Dhivehi cuisine, Maldivian resorts tend to prioritize Western food over local dishes, limiting the incorporation of traditional cuisine in the tourism industry. The heavy reliance on foreign chefs in island resorts contributes to the neglect of Maldivian cuisine, as many lack the experience and knowledge of local ingredients and traditional cooking methods. Hence, targeted initiatives to increase awareness of local food heritage and cooking traditions should be initiated. These may involve food-related events and activities to engage local communities in showcasing their food and cooking techniques.

3.4.2. Case Country- Uganda
3.4.2.1. General Outlook

Uganda is one of the emerging tourism destinations of the equatorial countries in the eastern part of Africa (Adiyia et al., 2017). Despite high poverty rates and the over-reliance of the majority of Ugandans (80%) on farming to make a living (Lepp, 2007), Uganda has a rich cultural and natural landscape extending from the Rwenzori mountains in the west to the source of the Nile in the east that rendered the country a popular destination in the 1960s and 1970s (Adiyia et al., 2017). In 1950s, Uganda was branded as the "The Pearl of Africa" and was considered as a main African tourist destination. The Tourism industry developed significantly since that and became the third earner of foreign exchange by 1970. Later, the country suffered from violence and political instability which led to destroying tourism industry (Lepp & Harris, 2008). In the 1990s, Uganda witnessed some stability that led to the recovery of tourism activities, leading to more than 200.000 tourist arrivals in 2001, which rendered tourism one of the main engines for Uganda's economy (Adams et al., 2003). The attempts to promote Uganda was supported by the local government that invited the international media to visit and market the tourist attractions in the country. One of the initiatives was the Discovery Channel Film (Uganda: The Presidential Tour), which contributed to the increase by 50% of tourist arrivals in 2003 and reached more than half a million by 2006 and 1.2 million in 2013 (Adiyia et al., 2017). In 2019, more than 1.543.000 tourists visited Uganda, staying for an average of 8.3 days (Uganda Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, 2023).

According to the 2022/2023 Annual Report Tourism Development Performance Report (2023) issued by the Uganda Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities, over 815.000 tourist arrivals were received by 2022, compared to around 513.000 recorded in 2021. The majority of arrivals came from African countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Tanzania, with friends and family visits (38.2%) and business (15.5%) as the main drives for visiting Uganda in 2022.

Uganda has prioritized tourism industry aiming to combat poverty and enhance the local economies in the rural areas. However, more progress has been witnessed in the western part of the country that encompasses the major tourist attractions (Adiyia et al., 2017). Uganda has several national parks (e.g. Bwindi, Kibale, and Kidepo Valley) and game reserves (e.g. Budongo Forest, Katonga Wildlife, and Toro-Semliki Wildlife) that offer rich natural and cultural experience for their visitors (Manrai et al., 2020). The mountain gorilla, bird species, and national parks are all key sources for several types of tourism including adventure tourism, trekking and hiking and other nature-based tourism contributing to enhancing the competitive advantage of Uganda as a tourist destination over other countries in Africa (English et al., 2018).

Beside the natural attractions (jungle settings and wildlife), Uganda was targeting cultural tourism products, including heritage sites such as the Kasubi Royal Tombs, Mparo Tombs, and Karambi Tombs (Aporu et al., 2014), cultural activities and performances of traditional music, community walks, and local handicrafts, in an attempt to foster its image as a country rich with primitive cultures (Lepp et

al., 2011). To support local communities in developing tourism products, the government has allocated 20% of revenues generated from natural parks entrance fees to financing projects launched by local communities to alleviate the negative social, cultural, and environmental impacts on these communities (English et al., 2018).

To develop the tourism industry in the country, Uganda government tried to address certain challenges by improving the accessibility to tourist attractions, conducting training programs for national human resources to meet the labour market's urgent needs, launching marketing strategies, and developing the tourism products in collaboration with the private sector including adventure tourism and MICE Tourism (English et al., 2018). The actions taken by the government to make tourism thrive included the liberalization of economy, attracting investments in accommodation and infrastructure, and removing entry barriers and facilitating visa issuance for certain tourist markets (Ayikoru, 2015). Having said that, gastronomy tourism can be also an important product in Uganda due to the rich African cuisine and the variety of local dishes across the country that can be exploited to make the tourism industry thrive contributing to economic growth and job creation as well as enhancing the local communities in the rural areas and offering resources to support and promote the cultural heritage (Charos, 2023).

3.4.2.2. Gastronomy Tourism in Uganda, its development and characteristics
Uganda enjoys four physiographic regions with five climate patterns (equatorial, modified equatorial, tropical savanna, semi-arid, and arid climates) which play a crucial role in diversifying the vegetation landscape across the country (Ayikoru, 2015). Having different climates and environments, Uganda is gifted with diverse forms of flora and fauna that make the base for a wide range of traditional dishes that represent the various Ugandan ethnic groups (Marocco et al., 2016). However, although cultural products including food traditions are of great potential to sustain economic growth and alleviate poverty, Uganda, like other East African countries, is not effectively utilizing culture with its both tangible (e.g. heritage and historical sites) and intangible aspects (e.g. gastronomy, music, and traditional festivals) to promote the tourism industry. This might be attributed to the fact that rich cultural diversity has been always a source of instability in many countries of the region (Gogo et al., 2022).

According to Uganda Vision 2040, Tourism is considered one of the main pillars to accelerate the socioeconomic transformation. The vision has defined the tourism products in Uganda, namely, gorilla tracking, eco-tourism, faith-based tourism, water sport and rafting, mountain climbing, nature and community walks, cultural and heritage tourism, MICE, visual arts, and bird, butterfly, monkeys, and chimpanzee watching. The vision is aiming to enhance the role tourism plays in the national economy and job creation by 2040 admitting that governments did not exert the necessary efforts to boost the tourism industry in the country (Uganda Vision 2040, 2007).

Figure 16: Uganda map of tourism development
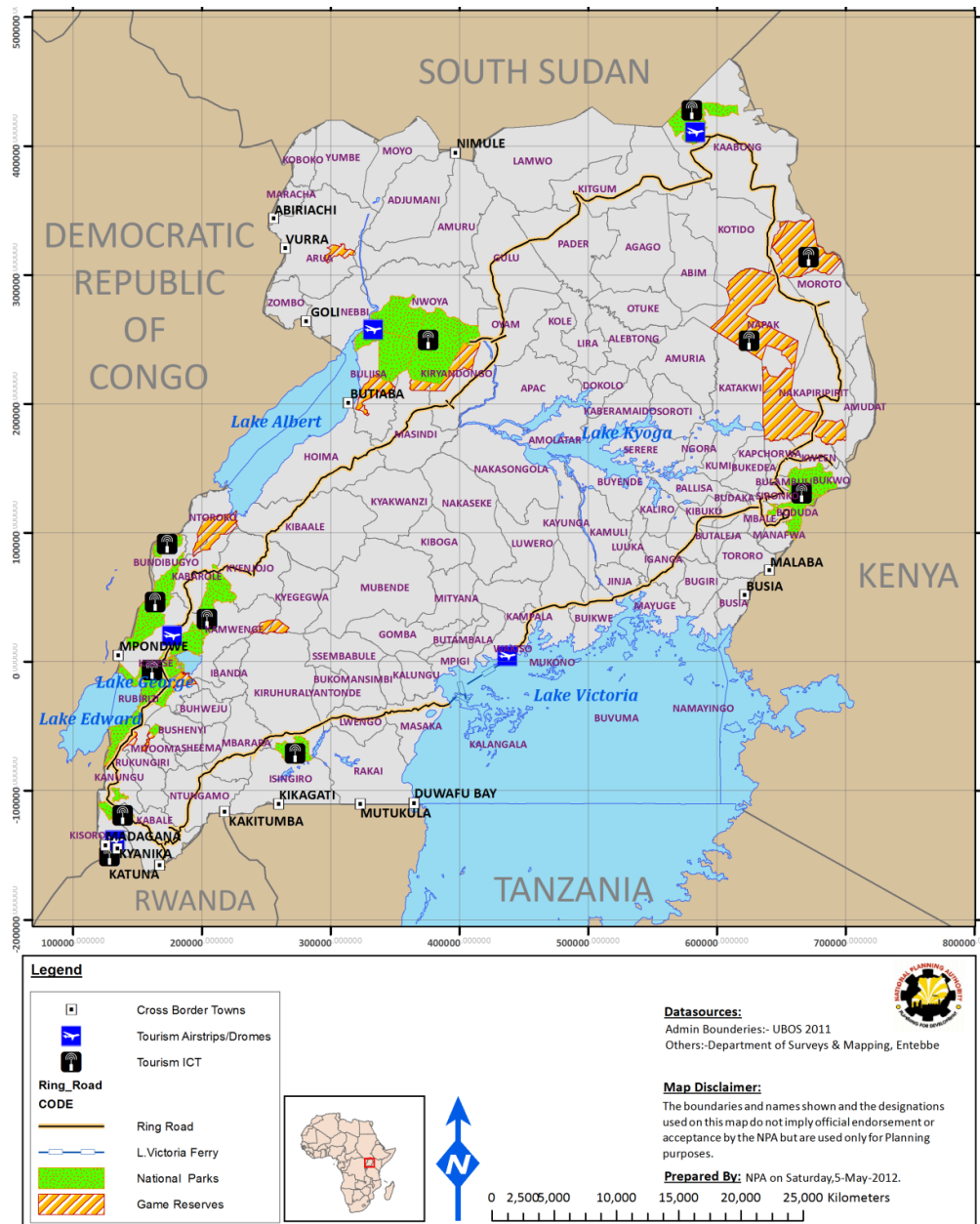
Source: Uganda Vision 2040.

Having said that, although gastronomy tourism has not been clearly targeted as one of the products in Uganda Vision 2040, it has been incorporated into the aforementioned tourism types to demonstrate the local cultural identity. In this vein, some Initiatives to promote gastronomy tourism in Uganda has taken place. For instance, the Kampala Rolex Festival for the famous Ugandan rolled chapati with eggs and vegetables was launched for the first time in 2016 and gained popularity when it was reported by

CNN as the fastest-growing fast food in Africa, the thing that made the tourism authorities include Rolex in its promotional campaigns (Mubangizi et al., 2019).

African cuisine is influenced by the different cultural groups that have their own cooking techniques and traditions and some of them were impacted by the gastronomic cultures of the colonial western countries (Oktay et al., 2018). The various African cuisines are divided according to the geographical regions. In the East Africa, cuisine is mainly made of grains and vegetables with less use of meat. In Uganda, the most traditional dish is Matoke which is prepared from the green bananas while Pomegranate is a popular juice (Gheorghe et al., 2014). The food culture in Uganda is characterized by the variation of main dishes and side dishes. The steamed bananas (matoke) are widely consumed in the country due to the large volume of banana production in central and western Uganda. The steaming process of cooking is fundamental to preparing matoke, and it is usually served at ceremonies (e.g., weddings). Maize (cooked with potatoes, cassava, and rice) is also a famous dish in Uganda (Asada, 2019).

Agritourism, which is essentially a blend of tourism and agriculture, is rapidly gaining traction in Uganda. It includes any enterprise or activity centered around agriculture that draws guests to a farm or ranch. For example, at "Farm Uganda," visitors can participate in daily activities and experience the "vibes" of the farm. They can stay overnight, as lodging is offered (Farm Uganda, n.d.).

The attempts to involve local food in the tourism industry were mainly centred on encouraging local people to get engaged in local food and beverage provision for tourists received by the Ugandan tourist sites. On the Kabaka Heritage Trail, tourists are usually interested in experiencing the local food and enjoying the traditions of cooking and preparing the dishes (Ahebwa et. al., 2016). The Akatongore Tourism Farm in Kiruhura is another example of gastronomy tourism in Uganda where both crop and cattle farming experiential tourism are offered to the tourists who can enjoy digging, planting, cooking, and preparing Ankole traditional food, milking, and preparing ghee sauce "Eshabwe" (Uganda Tourism Board, 2019). However, the fact that tourism businesses are sometimes dominated by foreign investments increases the economic leakage in the tourist destinations, the rural ones in particular (Nabukenya, 2018). Nevertheless, there are several stakeholders and entities engaged in managing, developing, and marketing gastronomy tourism in Uganda, be it affiliated with the state or from the private sector. Some of these are highlighted in Table 12.

Table 12: Indicative examples of gastronomy tourism associations/platforms in Uganda

Name	Core Aims/Activities	Website
Uganda Community Tourism Association (UCOTA)	This organization is an umbrella body that creates a platform for members' voices to be heard at all levels.	https://ugandatourismassociation.org
Uganda Hotel Owners' Association (UHOA)	This organization has over 500 members who are hotel owners. They serve traditional Ugandan dishes like matooke, luwombo and Rolex.	https://www.ugandahotels.org
Buganda Heritage and Tourism Board	This organization is responsible for promoting cultural heritage and tourism in Buganda.	https://bhtb.or.ug
Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE)	POATE is an annual tourism and travel trade show that is organised by Uganda Tourism Board. Each year the expo brings together tourism value chain actors and stakeholders under the business to business and business to customer formats for networking opportunities and business deals.	https://www.poate.co.ug/
Uganda Professional Chefs Union	An association of professional chefs in Uganda that plays a role in promoting local cuisine through competitions, training, and food events.	https://ugandaprofessionalchefsunion.org/

Source: Authors' own creation

Gastronomy tourism in Uganda faces challenges. The environmental deterioration caused by climate change represents a threat to the Uganda's natural parks and the tropical forests which are the main source of attraction to the tourism products in the country, the nature-based ones in particular, leading to a decline in revenues generated to sustain the local economy (Banana et al., 2014). Like as many other sectors, the gastronomy tourism in Uganda is prone to the negative impacts of climate change. The changes in the surface temperature and rainfall levels have increased waterflood-related risks and rendered the lands drier, which, in turn, led to disruptions in the growing conditions of agricultural products as well as the geographic distribution of crops (Nsubuga et al., 2018). Issues related to food safety and the limited knowledge of the nutritional composition and value of the traditional dishes in Uganda are also important to make the food be accepted by international tourists (Katongole et al., 2024). Despite the progress made in improving food safety in Uganda, some concerns still exist about the mechanisms used when producing, processing, storing, and transporting food

(Kankya et al., 2020). This could hinder international tourists from getting engaged in gastronomy tourism. Table 13 presents a SWOT analysis of gastronomy tourism in Uganda.

Table 13: SWOT analysis of gastronomy tourism in Uganda

Strengths +	Weaknesses –
*Culinary heritage: Traditional dishes in Uganda reflect the cultural influences of various ethnic groups, showcasing the richness of African cuisine and the diverse local dishes across the country that can be further explored and promoted. *Diverse stakeholders in Uganda's gastronomic tourism management and development: Numerous agencies and parties, both public and commercial, are involved in the management, development, and marketing of gastronomic tourism in Uganda. *Food festivals: There are some gastronomy and food festivals, e.g., Kampala Rolex Festival. *Agri tourism: Agritourism, which is essentially a blend of tourism and agriculture, is rapidly gaining traction in Uganda. *Uganda Vision 2040: Although gastronomy tourism is not explicitly targeted as a key product in Uganda Vision 2040, it has been integrated into other forms of tourism, such as cultural, wildlife, and eco-tourism, to showcase the local cultural identity.	*Inadequate marketing and promotion: Gastronomy is not largely advertised or marketed or valued type of tourism in Uganda. The current focus is primarily on culture tourism, eco -tourism, and wildlife tourism. *Uganda's underutilization of cultural heritage in tourism promotion: Uganda does not effectively leverage its cultural assets—both tangible (e.g., heritage and historical sites) and intangible (e.g., gastronomy, music, and traditional festivals)—to promote its tourism industry. *Lack of visibility: Inadequate marketing and international recognition of Uganda's rich culinary heritage limits its appeal to international travellers seeking authentic culinary experiences. *Workforce challenges: These include lack of skilled human resources, and lack of training opportunities as key barriers hindering delivering high-quality culinary experiences. *Food safety: There are concerns about food safety standards in Uganda, particularly regarding the mechanisms used for producing, processing, storing, and transporting food. *Inadequate infrastructure: Significant barriers include underdeveloped infrastructure (such as roads, electricity/water supplies), restricted accessibility, weak connectivity (such as internet services), a dearth of high-quality hospitality establishments, difficulties with the supply chain, and limited access to local ingredients. *Administrative/logistic challenges: These include regulations (i.e., licensing requirements, bureaucratic hurdles) as well as lack of adequate support to local farmers and livestock breeder. Logistics challenges can impact the supply chain of fresh local ingredients.
Opportunities +	Threats –
*Integrating wildlife experiences with cultural and culinary experiences. *There is room for growth in terms of infrastructure, culinary training, and international recognition.	*Climate change: There is a hazard from the deteriorating environment brought on by climate change. Changes in rainfall and surface temperature have made the lands drier and raised the risk of flooding. This has disrupted the growth environment for agricultural goods and the geographic distribution of crops.

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, Uganda seems to actively engaged in organizing and hosting food and gastronomy events. Table 14 presents key gastronomy and food festivals in Uganda

Table 14: Key gastronomy and food festivals in Uganda

Name	City	Central theme/Highlight dish
Luo food festival	Mukono	Variety of local foods, cooking competition, cultural dances, game activities, storytelling, face painting and kids play area
Rolex festival	Kampala	A fantastic weekend event that celebrates the Ugandan dish, Rolex, which is made of fried eggs covered in chapati (flat bread).
Uganda Food Festival	Kampala	This festival brings together food enthusiasts to enjoy a variety of local and international cuisines. It features cooking competitions, live music, and activities for families
Kampala Cocktail Week	Kampala	Focused on the art of mixology, this event features special cocktail menus, masterclasses by expert bartenders, and tasting events in some of the city's top venues
Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo (POATE) Food Festival	Kampala	Part of the larger tourism expo, this food festival highlights the best of Ugandan cuisine, promoting local food products and culinary tourism. It includes food tastings, cooking demonstrations, and cultural performances
Nyege Nyege Festival	Jinja	Known primarily as a music festival, Nyege Nyege also offers a variety of food experiences. Attendees can enjoy both Ugandan and international cuisines, making it a great place to explore diverse flavours.
Bayimba International Festival of the Arts	Kampala (though sometimes held in other locations)	This arts festival includes a significant food component, with vendors offering a variety of Ugandan dishes. It provides a platform for local chefs and food artisans to showcase their skills.
Jinja Food Festival	Jinja	Held in the picturesque town of Jinja, this festival celebrates local foods and drinks. It features food stalls, cooking competitions, and entertainment.
Kampala Restaurant Week	Kampala	This event showcases the culinary talents of chefs from various restaurants across Kampala. It features special menus at discounted prices, allowing diners to explore different cuisines and innovative dishes.
Ekyooto Cultural & Food Festival	Uganda Museum, Kampala	Local and international dishes
TOKOSA FOOD FESTIVAL		An annual event that celebrates the craft of cooking
Kampala Food Festival	Kampala	To showcase local and international food cuisines enjoyed in Uganda
All Nations Cultural Food Festival	Kampala	To showcase cultural foods in the country from all nations.

Source: Authors' own creation

The following sections are based on quantitative data collected from a sample of 75 respondents (45 tourism practitioners and 30 tourism experts). The general profile of the respondents is presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Descriptive profile of respondents (Ugandan sample)

Gender	N	%	Marital Status	N	%
Male	36	48.0	Single	38	50.7
Female	39	52.0	Married	37	49.3
Total	75	100.0	Other	0	0.0
			Total	75	100.0
Age	N	%			
18-24 years old	12	16.0			
25-34 years old	29	38.7	*Education*	N	%
35-44 years old	17	22.7	High school graduate or less	11	14.7
45-54 years old	6	8.0	College graduate/undergraduate	31	41.3
55-64 years old	11	14.7	Master's Degree	24	32.0
65 and above	0	0.0	Doctoral degree	2	2.7
Total	75	100.0	Professional qualification	7	9.3
			Total	75	100.0
Type of Business /Current role	N	%			
Restaurateur	15	20.0			
Hotelier	13	17.3			
Tourism expert	30	40.0			
Travel agent	17	22.7			
Total	75	100.0			

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.2.3. Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Uganda

As presented in Table 16, gastronomy tourism in Uganda is generally challenged by regulations (i.e., licensing requirements, bureaucratic hurdles) as well as a lack of adequate support to local

farmers and livestock breeders). Respondents overall disagree with the claim that there might be limited options for tourists with specific dietary needs.

Table 16: Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Uganda

Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Uganda	Mean	Std. D
Stringent regulations (e.g., licensing requirements, bureaucratic hurdles)	3.56	0.96
Lack of adequate support to local farmers and livestock breeder	3.56	1.02
Inadequate marketing and promotion efforts	3.40	1.10
Lack of central governmental support	3.35	1.24
Inadequate language skills among culinary staff	3.33	1.16
Climate change	3.32	1.14
High costs of culinary offerings	3.31	1.19
Lack of support from local authorities	3.24	1.11
Lack of authenticity due to excessive commercialization of culinary experiences	3.21	0.99
Inadequate hospitality services standards	3.21	1.20
Limited culinary offerings	3.21	1.23
Negative stereotypes/ misconceptions about local cuisine	3.19	1.20
Lack of adequate infrastructure (e.g., quality hospitality facilities)	3.11	1.27
Concerns about food safety and hygiene	3.11	1.18
Enclave tourism (i.e., resorts, all-inclusive hotels)	3.04	1.09
Limited options for tourists with specific dietary needs	2.64	1.04

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.2.4. Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Uganda

As presented in Table 17, respondents in Uganda viewed collaboration between government agencies, culinary businesses, local communities, and tourism stakeholders as well as organizing gastronomy and food festivals as the most important factors contributing to the success of gastronomy tourism in the country. Interestingly, emphasizing halal food in marketing communications was viewed as the least important.

Table 17: Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Uganda

Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Uganda	Mean	Std. D
Collaboration between government agencies, culinary businesses, local communities, and tourism stakeholders	4.31	0.97
Organizing gastronomy and food festivals	4.25	0.95
Identifying and promoting unique culinary experiences	4.19	0.91
Engagement of local communities in gastronomy tourism initiatives	4.19	0.98
Destination safety	4.17	0.89
Perceived destination image	4.15	0.84
Integration of culinary experiences with cultural activities (e.g., facilitating visits to local farm)	4.12	0.86
Opportunities for visitor engagement (e.g., cooking classes, food tastings)	4.11	0.86
Collaboration with food influencers to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets	4.00	0.92
Strong online presence (e.g., social media) to engage with potential visitors and showcase culinary experiences	3.99	1.15
Locals' sense of pride in their food	3.97	1.10
Authenticity of culinary heritage	3.97	1.02
Cross-sector collaboration (e.g., agriculture, food production, and hospitality)	3.88	1.13
Collaboration with tour operators and travel agencies to create gastronomy-focused travel packages	3.88	1.22
Collaboration with celebrity chefs and culinary experts to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets	3.85	1.35
Marketing gastronomy tourism offerings on government websites	3.81	0.89
Availability of fresh, locally sourced ingredients	3.79	1.24
Emphasizing halal food in marketing communications	3.37	1.10

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.2.5. Governmental strategies and tools to foster gastronomy tourism in Uganda

Respondents view the need to encourage culinary entrepreneurship and small-scale food businesses, promote the historical and cultural significance of local foods engaging in marketing and promotion campaigns focusing on gastronomy tourism and support food festivals and events to support tourism businesses. However, supporting and incentivising local farmers and livestock breeder are rated as lees important governmental strategies (see Table 18).

Table 18: Governmental strategies and tools to foster gastronomy tourism in Uganda

	Mean	Std. D
Encouraging culinary entrepreneurship and small-scale food businesses	4.29	0.94
Promoting the historical and cultural significance of local foods (e.g., food and beverage museums)	4.24	0.94
Engaging in marketing and promotion campaigns focusing on gastronomy tourism	4.21	0.82
Supporting food festivals and events	4.21	0.84
Gastronomy infrastructure development (e.g., culinary centres, and food hubs)	4.21	1.01
Supporting culinary education and training (e.g., gastronomy programmes at Universities)	4.17	0.92
Creating spaces for local communities to showcase and sell their authentic products (e.g., food markets)	4.12	0.86
Participating in travel fairs and tourism exhibitions	4.12	0.89
Protecting and preserving culinary heritage (e.g., traditional recipes, cooking techniques/styles)	4.08	0.88
Funding from government authorities to invest in gastronomy tourism	4.05	0.95
Supporting and incentivising local small family hospitality businesses	3.99	1.01
Integrating gastronomy in tour programs (e.g., food tours)	3.92	1.07
Developing culinary trails and routes	3.91	1.16
Increasing visibility of gastronomy heritage through inscription on UNESCO Intangible Heritage lists.	3.89	1.19
Engaging in actions to mitigate climate change	3.84	1.15
Tax incentives (e.g., tax reduction, tax exemption) for culinary businesses	3.76	1.08
Supporting and incentivising local farmers and livestock breeder	3.72	1.16

Source: Authors' own creation

In terms of the elements used by destinations in the process of developing gastronomy tourism, respondents agree on the value of market segmentation, gastronomy destination benchmarking, gastronomy product development, branding campaigns, identifying gastronomy recourses and inventory, and collaboration with local communities (see Table 19).

Table 19: Tools used by destinations in the process of developing gastronomy tourism in Uganda

	Mean	Std. D
Market segmentation	4.29	0.58
Gastronomy destination benchmarking	4.05	1.17
Gastronomy product development	4.04	0.81
Branding campaigns	4.04	0.92
Identifying gastronomy recourses and inventory	4.04	1.03
Collaboration with local communities	4.04	0.92
Product standardization	3.93	1.18
Capacity building (e.g., training/education)	3.87	1.01
Environmental analysis	3.84	1.10

Source: Authors' own creation

It is noteworthy that, unlike respondents in Türkiye and the Maldives, Ugandan sample seems to attribute less importance to capacity building.

Recommend practices for Uganda

Despite its potential, gastronomy does not seem to be valued type of tourism in Uganda with little development and marketing efforts being made. Unfortunately, there is a clear lack of international recognition of Uganda's rich culinary heritage limiting its appeal to international travellers seeking authentic culinary experiences. This might be due to the fact that the current focus is primarily on culture tourism, eco -tourism, and wildlife tourism. Uganda can build on its strong food heritage and cooking traditions to engage in active development and promotion of gastronomy tourism.

Interestingly, while capacity building is viewed as less important during the field study, this does not mean that Uganda does not suffer from some workforce challenges including lack of skilled human resources as well as lack of training opportunities hindering delivering high-quality culinary experiences. Therefore, there is a scope to shift attention to human resources development through developing new culinary programs and enhancing the quality of existing ones to ensure strong human resources outcomes that can support the development of gastronomy tourism.

As in several OIC countries with less resources, inadequate infrastructure is a significant barrier to the development of tourism in general and gastronomy tourism in particular. Underdeveloped infrastructure (such as roads, electricity/water supplies), restricted accessibility, weak connectivity, a dearth of high-quality hospitality establishments, difficulties with the supply chain, and limited access to local ingredients are core challenges. Development plans should therefore consider addressing infrastructure issues as a strategic goal foster gastronomy tourism development

3.4.3. Case Country- Türkiye

3.4.3.1 General Outlook

Türkiye has grown in popularity as a key tourist destination attracting over 49 million foreign tourists in 2023 (TÜİK, 2024). While high tourism demand may not (and perhaps should not) be

the sole indicator of success, Türkiye is ranked third in terms of tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2023a) and 7th in terms of tourism revenues. For the first time, Istanbul has been ranked as the world's top destination in 2023. These metrics are indicators of how resilient the Turkish tourism industry is in the aftermath of the pandemic. Recent reports show that Türkiye is among the few countries that have fully recovered their pre-pandemic levels (UNWTO, 2024a). To meet the increasing demand, sustaining quality service provision through tourism and hospitality businesses is crucial to achieving and sustaining the competitiveness of Türkiye as a tourist destination. Alongside its rich cultural heritage and the diversity of the tourist product, Türkiye has a strong tourism infrastructure and superstructure. As a key component of the tourism ecosystem, food and beverage sector has also witnessed significant growth over the past decade. Turkish cuisine has gained growing popularity and international recognition. This has resulted in increasing public debate on the need to promote gastronomy tourism to increase Türkiye's share of the international tourism market and the growing gastronomy tourism niche market.

Overall, the importance of gastronomy tourism in fostering destination development is widely acknowledged (Gálvez et al., 2017). In fact, gastronomy is listed as one of the priorities within the UN Tourism Organization's product development project (UNWTO, 2024b). As a popular tourist destination, Türkiye has significant potential to harness the power of gastronomy as a driver of tourism competitiveness. Gastronomy Tourism in Türkiye can play a vital role in the development and growth of the tourism industry, contributing to the country's image. Therefore, supporting gastronomy tourism in Türkiye through fostering a conducive environment is likely to further contribute to the competitiveness of the destination. This cannot be achieved without identifying key barriers and challenges hindering gastronomy tourism, tackling these barriers and challenges, while also fostering and building on success factors through developing efficient strategies to enhance the role and contribution of tourism in the destination competitiveness of Türkiye.

3.4.3.2. Gastronomy Tourism in Türkiye, its development and characteristics
To understand the development of tourism gastronomy in Türkiye, it is necessary first to briefly track tourism development in the country. This is necessary given that gastronomy tourism is a niche market that is largely dependent on overall tourism development in the destination.

Despite various yet fragmented efforts to harness the power of tourism since the 1960s, it was not until the 1980s that tourism gained recognition as sector with the potential to drive economy and growth in Türkiye. During this phase, the implementation of the Tourism Encouragement Law in 1982 catalyzed the advancement of tourism, leading to significant increases in tourist arrivals and tourism revenues (Yolal, 2016). This era marked a transition towards economic liberalization, accompanied by corresponding reforms in tourism policies, substantial

infrastructure development (e.g., road and airport construction), vigorous marketing initiatives, and the implementation of tourism incentives. These concerted efforts played a pivotal role in positioning Türkiye as a prominent global tourist destination. Subsequently, Türkiye has experienced substantial growth as a preferred destination for various segments of the travel market, including leisure travelers, business visitors, and enthusiasts of cultural and heritage experiences (COMCEC, 2021). Notably, while Türkiye welcomed a modest 16.4 million tourists in 2003, the number surged to over 49 million by 2023.

Gastronomy tourism in Türkiye has emerged as a significant niche within the broader tourism industry, capitalizing on the country's rich culinary heritage and diverse gastronomic traditions. Over the years, Türkiye has witnessed the development and evolution of gastronomy tourism, driven by factors such as increasing global interest in culinary experiences, growing appreciation for authentic cultural immersion, and strategic tourism marketing efforts. Türkiye's gastronomy tourism is characterized by its vast culinary repertoire, which reflects the country's multicultural history and geographic diversity. From the vibrant street food stalls of Istanbul to the traditional Anatolian dishes of rural villages, Turkish cuisine offers a sensory journey through centuries of culinary tradition. Key elements of Türkiye's gastronomy tourism include the utilization of locally sourced ingredients, the preservation of traditional cooking techniques, and the promotion of culinary diversity across different regions. Furthermore, gastronomy tourism in Türkiye extends beyond mere gastronomic experiences to encompass cultural exchange, community engagement, and sustainable development. Through culinary tours, cooking classes, food festivals, and farm-to-table experiences, visitors have the opportunity to explore Türkiye's culinary landscape while supporting local communities and preserving cultural heritage. As Türkiye continues to position itself as a leading gastronomy tourism destination, efforts to enhance infrastructure, promote culinary authenticity, and foster sustainable practices will be critical for sustaining growth and competitiveness in this dynamic sector.

Gastronomy tourism in Türkiye seems to have received increasing attention from non-governmental organisations. Currently, there are at least 70 gastronomy and/or culinary associations in Türkiye (Kozak, 2023) aiming to promote Turkish cuisine at both domestic and international levels while also providing support to local cooks and chefs. Table 20 presents some of these associations.

Table 20: Indicative examples of gastronomy tourism associations/platforms in Türkiye

Name	Core Aims/Activities	Website
Tourism Restaurant Investors and Gastronomy Enterprises Association (TURYID)	Promoting Turkish cuisine on regional and international levels.	https://turyid.org/en/
Pearl Gastronomy Guide	Restaurant guide (similar to the popular Michelin Guide)	www.inciligastronomirehberi.hurriyet.com.tr
Turkish Culinary Federation	Contributing to the development of the culinary profession in Türkiye by gathering all regional associations in Türkiye under the same roof.	www.tafed.org.tr
Turkish Cooks Association	Developing culinary in Türkiye by supporting local cooks/chefs	www.ascilardernegi.org.tr
Association of all restaurants and tourism professionals	Promoting Turkish cuisine to the global landscape of gastronomy	www.tures.org.tr
National Culinary Federation	Promoting Turkish cuisine in national and international arenas, contributing to the sustaining of the culinary profession in Türkiye.	www.ulusalascilarfederasyonu.org

Source: Authors' own creation

At the destination level, Türkiye has been comparatively active in claiming credit for its gastronomic products through engaging in existing international branding initiatives. For instance, so far, three Turkish cities; namely, Hatay, Gaziantep, and Afyonkarahisar are included in the UNESCO Creative Cities List under the field of gastronomy. Table 21 presents a SWOT analysis of gastronomy tourism in Türkiye.

Table 21: SWOT analysis of Gastronomy tourism in the Türkiye

Strengths +	Weaknesses –
*Turkish cuisine: Türkiye has a vast culinary repertoire, which reflects the country's multicultural history and geographic diversity. *International recognition: Turkish cuisine has gained growing popularity and international recognition. For example, Istanbul is "popular not only for its attractions but its cuisine, The Michelin Guide recognizes it at the forefront of gastronomy tourism." *Popularity of Turkish chefs worldwide: Turkish cuisine is unique and popular across the world. Various Turkish chefs have created exceptional dishes and achieved global fame, such as Nusret Gökçe (known as "Salt Bae") and Mehmet Gürs. *Gastronomy associations: Currently, there are at least 70 gastronomy and/or culinary associations in Türkiye aiming to promote Turkish cuisine at both domestic and international levels while also providing support to local cooks and chefs. *Food events and festivals: There are over 50 food-related events/festival in Türkiye. *UNESCO Creative Cities of gastronomy: Three Turkish cities; namely, Hatay, Gaziantep, and Afyonkarahisar are included in the UNESCO Creative Cities List under the field of gastronomy. *Food shows and media: There are some cooking TV shows such as the popular MasterChef Türkiye.	*Lack of implementation of action plans: One key challenge arises from action plans that are yet to be fully realized. For instance, the Cultural Turkish Cuisine Working Group has not been implemented as originally planned. *Limited infrastructure and accessibility in certain regions: Unlike popular tourist destinations such as Istanbul and Antalya, certain regions, e.g., Southeast of Türkiye, lack adequate facilities for gastronomy tourists, including sufficient restaurants, accommodations, and transportation options. *Inadequate international reach and exposure: There are over 50 food-related events/festivals in Türkiye, however, the vast majority of these are celebrated domestically failing to attract significant international attention. *Turkish restaurants' underrepresentation in top restaurant guides: Despite the richness, diversity, and international recognition of Turkish food, the number of restaurants featured in popular restaurants guides is notably limited (Türkiye has only five).
Opportunities +	Threats –
*Strengthening Synergy: There is also a clear need to create synergy and consolidate efforts undertaken by the public and private sectors to better engage in effective planning and implementing marketing and promotion strategies.	*Natural disasters: Natural disasters especially earthquakes, can have several direct and indirect consequences on Turkish cuisine tourism. Earthquakes can generate a sense of risk, discouraging visitors from visiting impacted areas. In certain circumstances, earthquakes can harm or destroy ancient marketplaces, restaurants, or structures vital to Turkish culinary heritage. *Türkiye's tourism has strong competitors in the Mediterranean with strong gastronomy tourism potential and established image, e.g., Italy and Greece.

Understanding barriers and challenges hindering the creation, development, and marketing of gastronomy tourism as well as the role of governmental support is key to proposing knowledge-based policy recommendations. To this end, the following sections are based on quantitative data collected from a sample of 78 respondents (58 tourism businesses and 20 tourism experts). The general profile of the respondents is presented in Table 22.

Table 22: Descriptive profile of respondents (Türkiye sample)

Gender	N	%	Marital Status	N	%
Male	26	33.3	Single	51	65.4
Female	52	66.7	Married	26	33.3
Total	78	100.0	Other	1	1.3
			Total	78	100.0
Age	N	%			
18-24 years old	31	39.7			
25-34 years old	30	38.5	Education	N	%
35-44 years old	10	12.8	High school graduate or less	5	6.4
45-54 years old	6	7.7	College graduate/undergraduate	41	52.6
55-64 years old	1	1.3	Master's Degree	14	17.9
65 and above	0	0.0	Doctoral degree	14	17.9
Total	78	100.0	Professional qualification	4	5.1
			Total	78	100.0
Type of Business /Current role	N	%			
Restaurateur	30	38.5			
Hotelier	16	20.5			
Tourism expert	20	25.6			
Travel agent	12	15.4			
Total	78	100.0			

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.3.3. Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

Despite the clear potential of gastronomy as a significant factor that can further drive tourism growth in Türkiye, there are various challenges that should be addressed by different stakeholders including governmental bodies/institutions and private sector representatives. On the governmental/institutional level, one key challenge seems to stem from action plans that are yet to be fully realized. After the 3rd Tourism Council, many, if not all, of the items determined by the commission were implemented.

There is also a clear need to create synergy and consolidate efforts undertaken by the public and private sectors to better engage in effective planning and implementing marketing and promotion strategies. For instance, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency has ongoing collaborations, joint content and media works with Michelin Guide and World's 50 Best, and also has gastronomy promotional content broadcast on channels such as CNN, Euronews, BBC, Aljazeera. Hence, the idea of *GastroHunt project* (launched in 2014 by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye collaborating with a celebrity national and international chefs and food influencers) can be replicated by involving international celebrity chefs and in languages of major gastronomy tourist sending-regions. In recent years, destinations such as Gaziantep, Adana and Urla have made significant progress in this regard.

Türkiye experiences occasional large earthquakes with magnitudes greater than 7.0, which can cause damage across a radius of more than 100 kilometers. Although these earthquakes do not always result in catastrophic damage, they occur more frequently than expected for a country of its size. Since 1950, over 92,300 individuals have lost their lives due to earthquakes. Additionally, seven of these earthquakes triggered tsunamis, leading to further loss of life and destruction (Worlddata.info, n.d.). Earthquakes can have several direct and indirect consequences on Turkish cuisine tourism. Earthquakes can generate a sense of risk, discouraging visitors from visiting impacted areas. Even if the culinary options stay intact, the threat of aftershocks or more seismic activity may diminish the allure of gastronomy tourism in these places. In certain circumstances, earthquakes can harm or destroy ancient marketplaces, restaurants, or structures vital to Turkish culinary heritage. The devastation of transportation networks and agricultural areas might interrupt the supply of fresh ingredients, compromising the quality and availability of traditional cuisines. This may change the eating experience for travelers seeking traditional Turkish food.

From the quantitative data collected from tourism businesses and tourism experts in Türkiye, it appears that gastronomy tourism is challenged by marketing issues (i.e., inadequate marketing and promotion efforts), as well as economic factors (i.e., high costs of culinary offerings). Moreover, the lack of adequate support to local farmers and livestock breeders is highly rated by

respondents (See Table 23). Barriers including "limited options for tourists with specific dietary needs" and "climate change" were rated as the least important.

Table 23: Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Türkiye	Mean	Std. D
Inadequate marketing and promotion efforts	4.09	1.14
High costs of culinary offerings	3.95	1.13
Lack of adequate support to local farmers and livestock breeder	3.93	1.06
Enclave tourism (i.e., resorts, all-inclusive hotels)	3.91	1.44
Lack of support from local authorities	3.90	1.13
Lack of central governmental support	3.85	1.17
Concerns about food safety and hygiene	3.74	1.11
Lack of authenticity due to excessive commercialization of culinary experiences	3.73	1.12
Limited culinary offerings	3.70	1.21
Inadequate hospitality services standards	3.65	1.30
Lack of adequate infrastructure (e.g., quality hospitality facilities)	3.63	1.20
Negative stereotypes/ misconceptions about local cuisine	3.63	1.12
Inadequate language skills among culinary staff	3.59	1.16
Stringent regulations (e.g., licensing requirements, bureaucratic hurdles)	3.54	1.11
Limited options for tourists with specific dietary needs	3.51	1.18
Climate change	3.22	1.16

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.3.4. Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

Turkish cuisine has been growing in popularity worldwide leading to the emergence of gastronomy tourism as an important niche tourism market in recent years. This is unsurprising given the rich culinary heritage and diverse regional cuisines stemming from centuries of cultural influences and culinary traditions (Gündüz et al., 2024). The growing niche tourism market does not seem to be overlooked by tourism planners and policy maker in Türkiye. In fact, there are emerging branding and marketing efforts to put Türkiye on the map of gastronomy tourism. Gastronomy tourism is integrated, to some extent, into broader destination development and sustainability initiatives. Gastronomy experiences are incorporated into cultural tours as well as agrotourism activities hence fostering the overall tourism product and enhancing sustainable tourism practices. This approach not only preserves culinary traditions and cultural heritage but also generates economic opportunities for local communities. Furthermore, investments in

culinary infrastructure, such as culinary schools, food markets, and culinary tourism trails has further bolstered Türkiye's gastronomy tourism sector.

One key factor determining the success of destinations in harnessing the power of gastronomy tourism is gastronomy festivals and food events. Food-themed festivals are at the heart of gastronomy tourism and have been traditionally recognised as an important element contributing to destination competitiveness (Yang et al., 2020). Recent research also highlights the role of festival events in fostering regional gastronomic products' profile of Türkiye (Gündüz et al., 2024). Türkiye is home to several food-themed festivals such as the Taste of Adana Festival (*Adana Lezzet Festivali*) which has been being organized since 2017. The festival attracted over half a million visitors in its 6th year in 2022 and registered over 30 million social media access (Adana Lezzet Festivali, 2023). Table 24 presents ten of the most popular food festivals in Türkiye.

Turkish cuisine is unique and popular across the world, and this popularity is carried forward by many talented Turkish chefs. Several chefs have created exceptional dishes and achieved global fame, including Nusret Gökçe (known as "Salt Bae"), Mehmet Gürs, Ali Güngörmüş, Fatih Tutak, Maksut Aşkar, and Musa Dağdeviren. Moreover, several initiatives have been influential including the gastrodiplomacy activities carried out under the coordination of the Directorate of Communications of Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, the May 21-27 Turkish Cuisine Week declared in 2021 and still celebrated nationally and internationally, and the publication of the Turkish Cuisine Prestige Book with Centuries-old Recipes.

Table 24: Key gastronomy and food festivals in Türkiye

Name	City	Central theme/Highlight dish
Adana taste festival	Adana	Kebap
Alaçatı herb festival	Izmir	Local herbs and regional dishes
Antalya taste festival	Antalya	Orange and local traditional dishes
Bodrum taste festival	Bodrum	Mushroom, olive, and seafood
Bursa gastronomy festival	Bursa	Iskender Kebap and Meatball
Gaziantep gastronomy festival	Gaziantep	Lahmacun, Beyran Soup and Kebaps
International Istanbul gastronomy Festival	Istanbul	Traditional Palace cuisine
Istanbul fish festival	Istanbul	Seafood
Izmir food festival	Izmir	Izmir Dolma and Meatball
Mersin international citrus festival	Mersin	Citrus and tantuni

Adapted from Gündüz et al. (2024)

As presented in Table 25, tourism practitioners and tourism experts in Türkiye viewed destination safety, organizing gastronomy and food festivals, cross-sector collaboration (e.g.,

agriculture, food production, and hospitality), and identifying and promoting unique culinary experiences as the most important factors contributing to the success of gastronomy tourism. Interestingly, however, while still highly rated (over 4), strong online presence (e.g., social media) to engage with potential visitors and showcase culinary experiences, integration of culinary experiences with cultural activities, and emphasizing halal food in marketing communications were viewed as the least important.

Table 25: Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Türkiye	Mean	Std. D
Destination safety	4.77	0.50
Organizing gastronomy and food festivals	4.69	0.51
Cross-sector collaboration (e.g., agriculture, food production, and hospitality).	4.68	0.49
Identifying and promoting unique culinary experiences	4.68	0.49
Availability of fresh, locally sourced ingredients	4.65	0.50
Opportunities for visitor engagement (e.g., cooking classes, food tastings)	4.62	0.54
Collaboration with celebrity chefs and culinary experts to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets	4.58	0.57
Authenticity of culinary heritage.	4.47	0.61
Collaboration with tour operators and travel agencies to create gastronomy-focused travel packages	4.47	0.61
Locals' sense of pride in their food	4.46	0.76
Collaboration between government agencies, culinary businesses, local communities, and tourism stakeholders	4.46	0.73
Collaboration with food influencers to showcase the destination's gastronomic assets	4.45	0.67
Engagement of local communities in gastronomy tourism initiatives	4.44	0.59
Perceived destination image	4.42	0.74
Marketing gastronomy tourism offerings on government websites	4.41	0.72
Strong online presence (e.g., social media) to engage with potential visitors and showcase culinary experiences	4.40	0.77
Integration of culinary experiences with cultural activities (e.g., facilitating visits to local farm)	4.26	0.84
Emphasizing halal food in marketing communications	4.15	1.00

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.3.5. Governmental strategies and tools to foster gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

Türkiye is privileged with a rich, diverse, and internationally recognised cuisine that has the potential to foster tourism demand and length of stay. At the same time, Türkiye's tourism has strong

competitors in the Mediterranean with strong gastronomy tourism potential and established image including Italy and Greece. To remain competitive, it is important to develop knowledge-based strategies oriented towards effective management and marketing of gastronomy tourism.

Fostering gastronomy tourism in Türkiye cannot be achieved without clear governmental strategies and tools oriented towards leveraging the country's culinary heritage as a competitive advantage in the global tourism market. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive gastronomy tourism policies and action plans at both national and regional levels. Moreover, governmental bodies need to collaborate with industry stakeholders to create marketing campaigns that highlight Türkiye's diverse culinary offerings and attract gastronomy tourists. A good example is the Gastrohunt project in 2014. Such campaigns should be intensified and deigned to target gastro-tourist sending regions. It should be noted that there have been serious efforts in this regard, For instance, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) was established with the aim of making Türkiye a brand and attraction hub in the domestic and international tourism market, discovering, developing and promoting tangible and intangible natural, cultural, biological and human-made heritage, increasing Türkiye's tourism capacity and the share of tourism investments in the national economy and service quality through short, medium- and long-term communication/marketing activities. The TGA, which constitutes the best and umbrella example of public-private sector cooperation, is composed of representatives from the public and private sectors in terms of its board of directors. Accordingly, the strategies and decisions taken regarding tourism are realized through public-private sector cooperation. One of the most important of these strategies is to diversify tourism across the country and throughout the year. In this direction, gastronomy tourism is among the most prominent and important tourism types. With various projects (e.g. "Taste Map of Türkiye", "Turkish Cuisine Week", "Gastrocity", "Turkish Cuisine Book", "Taste in Istanbul is The New Cool" etc.) and promotional activities carried out in Türkiye and abroad, efforts are underway to make Türkiye one of the leading countries in gastronomy tourism. TGA has working on gastronomy routes such as Olive tree, Turkish Roof, Cheese. Route promotions are supported by international publication collaborations in addition to press and opinion leader hosting.

Development of gastronomy tourism is unlikely to be achieved without provision of financial incentives and grants for gastronomy-related businesses, including restaurants, food producers, and culinary tourism operators. These incentives may include tax breaks, subsidies for infrastructure development, and funding for training programs aimed at enhancing culinary skills and promoting sustainable practices.

Perhaps driven by celebrity chefs and relevant competitive cooking TV shows such as the popular MasterChef Türkiye, gastronomy tourism has become an attractive subject of study. This emerging demand has resulted in an increasing number of departments and degree programs being launched and introduced in various public and private universities across Türkiye focusing on gastronomy and

culinary arts. These programs are now complementing the traditional *elite* culinary arts academies supporting the Turkish hospitality industry with a talented workforce in gastronomy tourism.

Based on the qualitative inquiry in Stage 1 and an extensive review of the literature, a total of 17 items were identified to measure respondents' perceptions of strategies and tools that the government uses to support gastronomy tourism. As presented in Table 26, respondents view almost all items as highly important. Specifically, there is a need to protect culinary heritage, support food festivals, develop gastronomy infrastructure, and engage in marketing and promotion campaigns focusing on gastronomy tourism to support tourism businesses.

Table 26: Governmental strategies to support gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

	Mean	Std. D
Protecting and preserving culinary heritage (e.g., traditional recipes, cooking techniques/styles)	4.75	0.54
Supporting food festivals and events	4.68	0.52
Gastronomy infrastructure development (e.g., culinary centres, and food hubs)	4.68	0.54
Engaging in marketing and promotion campaigns focusing on gastronomy tourism	4.64	0.53
Developing culinary trails and routes	4.62	0.53
Supporting culinary education and training (e.g., gastronomy programmes at Universities)	4.62	0.65
Increasing visibility of gastronomy heritage through inscription on UNESCO Intangible Heritage lists.	4.60	0.54
Integrating gastronomy in tour programs (e.g., food tours)	4.57	0.67
Supporting and incentivising local farmers and livestock breeder	4.52	0.57
Funding from government authorities to invest in gastronomy tourism	4.51	0.62
Participating in travel fairs and tourism exhibitions	4.47	0.70
Encouraging culinary entrepreneurship and small-scale food businesses	4.44	0.57
Tax incentives (e.g., tax reduction, tax exemption) for culinary businesses	4.42	0.80
Promoting the historical and cultural significance of local foods (e.g., food and beverage museums)	4.40	0.67
Creating spaces for local communities to showcase and sell their authentic products (e.g., food markets)	4.35	0.75
Supporting and incentivising local small family hospitality businesses	4.34	0.69
Engaging in actions to mitigate climate change	4.09	1.00

Source: Authors' own creation

When asked about their perceptions of the potential elements used by destinations in the process of developing gastronomy tourism, respondents seem to agree that all elements are considered important or very important in the process of developing gastronomy tourism (see Table 27).

Table 27: Tools used by destinations in the process of developing gastronomy tourism in Türkiye

	Mean	Std. D
Gastronomy product development	4.68	0.49
Collaboration with local communities	4.60	0.56
Capacity building (e.g., training/education)	4.58	0.59
Product standardization	4.45	0.76
Identifying gastronomy recourses and inventory	4.35	0.73
Branding campaigns	4.32	0.90
Market segmentation	4.32	0.81
Environmental analysis	4.27	0.84
Gastronomy destination benchmarking	4.02	1.05

Source: Authors' own creation

Recommended practices for Türkiye

- Over the past decade, Türkiye has engaged in several successful gastrodiplomacy activities such as the GastroHunt Project. These activities need to be intensified targeting major gastro tourist-sending markets.

- Food-themed festivals are at the heart of gastronomy tourism and have been traditionally recognised as an important element contributing to destination competitiveness, currently, there are over 50 food-related events/festivals in Türkiye, however, the vast majority of these are celebrated domestically failing to attract significant international attention.

- Despite the richness, diversity, and international recognition of Turkish food, the number of restaurants featured in popular restaurants guides is notably limited. For instance, while France and Japan have 625 and 414 Michelin-starred restaurants respectively, Türkiye has 107 restaurants included in the Michelin Guide with only 12 Michelin star restaurants. While such forms of branding have been always subject to criticism, they have significant potential in fostering gastronomy tourism in destinations.

- There seems to be need for more efforts to better integrate food and culinary offerings in existing marketing communications. This is important to attract gastro-tourists but more importantly to emphasize the concept of Turkish hospitality.

- Currently, there are over 70 associations in Türkiye with "gastronomy" [Gastronomi] or "Culinary" as the core scope. Interestingly, many of these share the same objective of "promoting Turkish cuisine" and many are apparently inactive (as evidenced by the outdated

content available on their websites). While many of these might be engaging in small-scale activities related to gastronomy; it might be beneficial to encourage merging between associations that share similar scope and are based in the same region. This consolidation of efforts, if institutionally and financially supported, can result in better outcomes.

3.4.4. Case Country- Egypt

3.4.4.1. General Outlook

Egypt is one of the most popular travel destinations in the Middle East and Africa. Over the years, Egyptian tourism has been linked to sun, sea, and sand as well as cultural and heritage travel (Baalbaki & Zizka, 2024). Types of tourism in Egypt are diverse including, recreational, eco-tourism, cultural, medical, sports, festival, conference, and religious (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020), and recently gastronomy tourism has been promoted as well (Mohamed et al., 2020).

The tourism and hospitality industry in Egypt contributes roughly 11.4% of the country's GDP and creates 12.6% of the country's direct and indirect job possibilities. Of all sources of income, it accounts for 20% of the foreign exchange revenue, making it the most significant. According to the ministry of tourism and antiquities, with a total of 14.906 million travelers, 2023 saw record-breaking rates of incoming tourism to Egypt, surpassing the previous record of 14.731 million tourists set in 2010 (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2024). With a noteworthy 6% annual rise in tourist arrivals during the first 50 days of 2024, Egypt's tourism industry is off to a promising start in 2024 (Abi Farraj, 2024). Top nationalities for tourists' arrival in 2023 were German, Russian, Saudi Arabian. Ahmed Issa, the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, unveiled in a statement his bold plans to solidify the nation's status as a top travel destination. These goals include a substantial increase in the country's share of worldwide tourism and a goal of 30 million visitors by 2028 (Abi Farraj, 2024). According to the minister, Egypt plans to increase its percentage of international tourism from 1.6% to 1.7% by 2028 (Abi Farraj, 2024). Additionally, there are other major factors that can contribute to the growth of the Egyptian tourism. For example, Egypt has recently eased visa rules for visitors from China, Iran, India, Türkiye, Morocco and Algeria to stimulate the tourism industry. The government also introduced a multi-entry tourist visa valid for five years at a cost of $700 (Khatib, 2023).

3.4.4.2. Gastronomy Tourism in Egypt, its development and characteristics

The food culture of Egypt is a significant aspect of one of the world's oldest civilizations, Egyptian civilization (Mohamed et al., 2020a). Egypt's food culture is "colorful" (Mohamed et al., 2020b). It exemplifies the diversity of origins and elements of the Egyptian culinary experience due to its long history of diversity and its position as a hub for diverse cuisine between Africa, Asia, and Europe (Mehdawy & Hussein, 2010). While some ingredients and cooking techniques have not changed since the time of the pharaohs, Egyptian cuisine has absorbed elements from several historical periods, including foreign immigration, the Islamic and Ottoman periods, and multiple Greek and Roman eras (Saeed & Al Atres, 2024; Mohamed et al., 2020a). The result of these influences is modern Egyptian cuisine, which has favorably influenced culinary traditions, eating customs, and recipe variations

(Mohamed et al., 2020a). It is interesting to note that many of the traditional foods eaten in ancient Egypt are still enjoyed there today, albeit with modified ingredients and preparation techniques (Halawa, 2023).

Egyptian cuisine offers a variety of iconic dishes that are beloved both locally and internationally. These include koshari (a hearty dish made with rice, lentils, pasta, and a spicy tomato sauce), ful medames (a nutritious dish made from fava beans), and various types of grilled meats and kebabs. Owing to the diversity in the history of Egyptian cuisine, each of Egypt's sub-destination has the opportunity to showcase and promote its unique flavors while offering visitors a unique culinary experience (Mohamed, Hewedi, Lehto & Maayouf, 2020b). Mohamed et al.'s (2020a, p. 2594) argued that "Egyptian food has the potential to differentiate and distinguish the Egyptian destination along with other cultural and natural resources."

The culinary scene in Egypt is diverse, from five-star hotel restaurants to street food. Egypt's top hotel chains include, Marriott, Hilton, Steigenberger. The hotels sector has 220,000 rooms and approximately 1,400 tourist restaurants as of 2023. The number of restaurants/cafes in Egypt is estimated at 400,000 while 140,000 operation is in Cairo (Foreign Agricultural Service, 2024). Additionally, Egyptian street food is tasty and cheap, ranging from completely vegetarian items to hearty meat options and quick snacks and fruity drinks (Kraig & Sen, 2013). Zeidy (2021, p. 199) observed that the gastro scene has changed in Cairo over the last decades "Egyptian restaurant scene evolved from a predominantly Western-oriented style to a more locally inspired setting...recent events in Egypt have brought about a trend toward baladī (literally meaning "local") food culture––a form of gastronationalism that for the first time is seeing Egyptian food culture truly reflected in Cairo's restaurants." The scene also includes the different food markets displaying spices, fruits, vegetables and meats. This extends to farms, food festivals, and food tours.

Demand-wise, Egypt's gastronomy market is not easy to quantify. However, Egypt received almost 15 million visitors in 2023. In 2023, tourists spent an average of $93 per day and stayed for 9.5 nights on average in Egypt (Daba Finance, 2024). It is estimated that around 25% of all spending related to tourism occurs in the world on food and drink (World Food Travel Association, 2020). If we apply that food spending standard, that means an average tourist in Egypt would have spent $37 on food and beverages daily. However, this is obviously affected by many internal factors (e.g., demographics; cultural and social factors) and external variables (e.g., economics; destination-related factors) (Rady, Abou Elezz & Abdel-Aziz, 2021).

According to an interview conducted with a staff member of the tourism promotion authority, gastronomy tourism is relatively new in Egypt. However, it gained much interest a few years ago. Egyptian destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have historically marketed and projected an image of the destination primarily using monuments, historical sites, and the natural environment, with cuisine being considered an ancillary element. Nonetheless, Egyptian destination marketers have

been incorporating food and food-related activities into their promotional materials to encourage gastronomy tourism.

There are several stakeholders and entities engaged in managing, developing and marketing gastronomy tourism, be it affiliated with the state or from the private sector. Some of these are highlighted in the next section. Furthermore, Table 23 lists more examples of associations/platforms involved directly and indirectly with gastronomy tourism in Egypt.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities: This is the main entity concerned with the development and marketing of gastronomy tourism in Egypt. In particular, the Egyptian General Authority for Tourism Promotion is responsible for promoting gastronomy tourism among other tourism types. This authority aims to increase the influx of foreign tourism to Egypt, present an accurate image of Egypt's cultural history, modern renaissance, and diverse tourism offerings, remove barriers to tourism growth, promote domestic travel, raise awareness of tourism, and foster a sense of identity among the populace.

The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC): Focusing on the continuity and stability of Egyptian culture as evidenced by its tangible and intangible heritage, NMEC portrays the complete spectrum of the civilization's richness and diversity across the ages, from prehistoric periods to the present. NMEC aims to preserve and revive traditional culinary practices.

The Egyptian Hotel Association (EHA): EHA represents the hotel sector which is important for its food and beverage provisions. EHA aims to support hotel establishments in Egypt to improve their services. It designs and implements training programs for workers in the sector. It also participates in international tourism exhibitions and conferences.

However, there are some private sector organizations which directly and indirectly promote Egyptian gastronomy.

Tour operators: Some tour operators are specialized in gastronomy tours and naturally they are involved in promoting gastronomy tourism, for example, "Bellies En-Route" (https://belliesenroute.com/). They do offer different tours enjoying local food while exploring the city. Their slogan is "Meaningful Culinary Experiences That Bring People Together.**"**

Nawaya: "Nawaya" is a communal kitchen and non-governmental organization situated in Badrashin, Giza. Through community engagement, it seeks to maintain agricultural culinary history and build a network of small farmers interested in implementing sustainable agricultural methods and capable of raising awareness of the significance of soil health, nutrition, and overall well-being.

Egyptian Chefs Association (ECA): **ECA** is a professional association whose goal is to uphold and elevate Egypt's culinary standards by fostering professional growth and education. It organizes and delivers culinary training programs, cooking competitions, and it also publish the "Chef's Corner Magazine."

Table 28: Indicative examples of gastronomy tourism associations/platforms in Egypt

Name	Core Aims/Activities	Website
Sofret Masr: Taste of Egypt	Under the patronage of Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, this online project which chronicles the culture, dishes and places of Egypt's culinary heritage from Ancient Egyptian to modern-day cuisine. The project contains more than 1,700 photographs, 60+ expertly curated stories, and more than 30 videos which provide a detailed and immersive digital experience of Egyptian cuisine. It also deep dives into Egypt's culinary history and the influence of different cultures, including Ptolemaic, Ottoman and Asian on modern day cuisine.	https://artsandculture.google.com/project/taste-of-egypt
National Museum of Egyptian Civilization NMEC	NMEC endeavours to foster deeper connection to Egypt's cultural identity and heritage, instilling a sense of loyalty and belonging. It hosts a special event for that purpose called "Tabliyat Misr" (Tablya in Egyptian heritage is a circular dining table). Tabliyat Misr initiative, focuses on safeguarding traditional cuisine and reviving culinary traditions. It stands as a testament to Egypt's dedication to protecting its intangible cultural heritage through educational programmes, lectures, and workshops.	https://nmec.gov.eg/nmec-events/tabliet-misr/
Egyptian General Authority for Tourism Promotion (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities)	It aims to raise growth rates in international tourism traffic to Egypt, highlight the true picture of Egypt's cultural history, its modern renaissance and its various tourism components, work to remove obstacles that prevent the growth of tourism traffic, encourage domestic tourism, increase tourism awareness, and connect citizens with their heritage.	https://www.experienceegypt.eg/
Chamber of tourism establishments and restaurants (CTR)	Contributing to Egyptian tourism promotion. Helping tourism facilities in Egypt to promote and develop their services. Creating an effective training environment for workers in the sector by designing programmes, developing and implementing training plans. Active participation in international tourism conferences and exhibitions.	https://ctr-egypt.org/ https://www.facebook.com/CTER.Egy/

Egyptian Hotel Association (EHA)	EHA aims to be the first and main supporter of hotel establishments in Egypt. It endeavours to improve the hotel sector by disseminating knowledge, exchanging experiences, and eliminating obstacles that prevent its prosperity, as well as delivering professional training to workers in Egyptian hotels.	http://www.egyptianhotels.org/#
-Tourist Establishment Licensing and Control (National Food Safety Authority, NFSA)	-Establish the food safety binding rules for tourist establishments in accordance with the applicable international standards and in a manner consistent with the national requirements, and such rules are to be determined by a decision issued by NFSA Board of Directors. -Perform official controls on food handling operations in accordance with the provisions of food safety-related laws and decisions. -Establish the rules and conditions based on which food handling licenses are granted to tourist establishments.	https://www.nfsa.gov.eg/en-gb
Egyptian Chefs Association (ECA)	ECA is a professional association whose goal is to uphold and elevate Egypt's culinary standards by fostering professional growth and education. It organizes and delivers culinary training programs, cooking competitions, it also publish the "Chef's Corner" Magazine	https://www.egyptchefs.com/
Ibis Restaurant & Cooking School	Markus Iten, a seasoned Swiss chef and the founder and honorary president Egyptian chefs association, opened Ibis, a restaurant and cookery school tucked away in the idyllic Tunis Village of Fayoum. Markus makes use of everything from the region's pottery legacy to its breathtaking natural setting to enrich the gastronomical experience and impart gastronomy knowledge and skills to the upcoming generation of chefs.	https://www.facebook.com/ibisrestaurantandcookingschool/
Slow Food Egypt	Slow Food Cairo Chapter organizes several events each year, ranging from simple dinners and tastings, where members come together to share the everyday joys of food, to visits to local producers and farms, conferences, and discussions.	slowfoodcairo@gmail.com
The International Hotel Supplies Exhibition (HACE-Hotel Expo)	The HACE -HOTEL Expo aims to create a global meeting hub where business owners and suppliers from the hospitality, catering, bakery, confectionery, food and beverage-related sectors can network together, enhance their businesses, and thrive in economic growth. HACE- Hotel Expo collaborates with the Egyptian Chef's Association to host the largest acclaimed culinary competitions	https://hace.com.eg/

	in one place, e.g., Egyptian cuisine competition, best restaurant, young chef of the year. It also organizes and hosts live cooking shows.	
Nawaya	"Nawaya" is a non-governmental organization and community kitchen, based in Badrashin. Its goal is to preserve agricultural culinary heritage through community outreach and create a network of small farmers who are interested in applying sustainable agricultural practices and are also able to spread awareness about the importance of soil health, nutrition, and well-being. Their seasonal tours and cooking classes aim to bridge the gap between rural and urban communities, helping consumers make better food and environmental decisions. They do organize different activities: cooking classes, heritage foods catering events in Cairo., gastro tours.	https://www.facebook.com/NawayaEgypt/?locale=ar_AR
Scene eats	Scene eats describes itself as "Egypt's tastiest food culture magazine." They provide content on food, cooking and dining in Egypt, offering a unique take on recipes, restaurants, food culture.	https://sceneeats.com/

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.4.3. Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Egypt

There are some major challenges facing gastronomy tourism in Egypt which include:

-**Negative publicity**: One of the key challenges that tourism faces, in general, and gastronomy tourism, in particular, is negative publicity. This may be ascribed to disturbing individual events. Yet, such individual incidents would yield damaging repercussions due to its widespread (Rayhan Uddin, 2022).

-**Economic challenges**: Travelers' expenditure on eating experiences can be impacted by economic instability, inflation, and swings in the travel and tourism sector, which can affect the demand for gastronomy tourism in Egypt. For example, the annual urban consumer price inflation in Egypt rose to 35.6 percent in February 2024, from 29.8 percent in January 2024 (Bower, 2024). According to Bower (2024), the 11.4 percent month-on-month increase is a record for the north African republic. The price of food rose by 47.9% in January 2024 compared to the same month in the previous year (Allam, 2024).

-**Regional competition**: Some countries in the region are considered major rivals to Egypt. For example, Türkiye—a destination that boasts a rich cultural heritage— is a major competitor in the region with tourist arrivals reaching 51.4 million in 2022. Istanbul is the hub for the expanding Middle Eastern, American, and French markets. Istanbul is "popular not only for its attractions but its cuisine,

The Michelin Guide recognizes it at the forefront of gastronomy tourism" (Rowland, 2023). Furthermore, it has been mentioned elsewhere that there are two cities from the Middle East, Zahlé (Lebanon); Buraidah (Saudi Arabia) listed in the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy. Adding Türkiye (Gaziantep, Hatay, Afyonkarahisar) and Iran (Rasht and Kermanshah) that would make it seven cities in the Middle East (UNESCO Creative Cities Network). Added to that, it seems that the budget allocated for tourism is modest according to the Egyptian Minister of tourism. In a TV interview, the Minister asserted that the budget allocated is much less than the budget allocated to competing countries, and therefore they work to maximize the benefit of every pound (Ramadan, 2024).

-**Limited number of food festivals and events**: Although there are some food festivals and gastronomic events, they remain limited and are mostly concentrated in Cairo. The private sector may be reluctant to participate, possibly due to a conflict of interest: the private sector focuses on profitability, while the government prioritizes promotion. Reaching an understanding between both parties is essential. Additionally, organizers are encouraged to rotate the location of these events each year, rather than consistently holding them in Cairo. Some of these events are intermittent, occurring only 'once upon a time.' Organizers are encouraged to establish these events as permanent fixtures in an annual calendar of gastronomic events.

-**Language barrier**: Gastronomy tourism revolves around travelers' engagement with and acquisition of knowledge from food-making and tasting experiences (Molina-Collado, et al., 2024). However, foreign visitors seeking gastronomy experiences may face communication challenges with local vendors and restaurant staff due to their limited command of English. Since gastronomy tourism emphasizes learning and interaction with locals, language barriers may relatively hinder this experience.

3.4.4.4. Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Egypt
There are several key factors contributing (or can contribute) to the success of gastronomy tourism:

-**Rich and diverse culinary heritage**: Egypt boasts a 5000-year-old culinary culture that is extensively documented, palpable, and iconographical. This is supported by a plethora of archaeological finds, including monuments, murals with vibrant engravings, and paintings that depict ancient Egyptian eating habits (Halwa, 2023). Egypt's food culture exemplifies the diversity of origins and elements of the Egyptian culinary experience due to its long history of diversity and its position as a hub for diverse cuisine between Africa, Asia, and Europe (Mehdawy & Hussein, 2010).

-**Diverse culinary landscape:** This includes street food, local specialties, chain food service operations, and luxury restaurants. There are different markets and food venues as well for spices, fruits, vegetables meats, bakeries, local tea and coffee shops, various food festivals and events. These constitute a vibrant culinary landscape of Egypt, highlighting its unique flavors, ingredients, and dining tradition.

-**Gastronomy initiatives**: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities launched "Sofrat Misr" (Taste of Egypt) project launched by the Google Arts and Culture platform in cooperation with "Rawi" magazine and the "Nawiyah" Foundation. This project aims to introduce people around the world to the distinctiveness and diversity of Egyptian cuisine and its history, as this digital project chronicles a mixture of cultural aspects, places, and cuisines associated with the Egyptian culinary heritage in the past decades to the present era (Rafik, 2024). The project contains more than 1,700 photographs, over 60 expertly curated stories, and more than 30 videos.

-**Street food culture**: Egyptian street food is tasty and cheap, ranging from completely vegetarian items to hearty meat options and quick snacks and fruity drinks (Kraig & Sen, 2013).

Table 29: gastronomy and food festivals in Egypt

Name	City	Central theme/Highlight dish
Cairo Bites	Cairo	Cairo Bites features line-up of favourite local, regional, and international eating and drinking establishments residing in Egypt. A festive environment that combines food with fun. It combines food, music, shows, competitions, and prizes.
Cairo International Dates Festival	Cairo	The festival aims to introduce dates and their role in a healthy, integrated diet. It also aims to enhance trade exchange opportunities, and exchange experiences between producers, experts, and decision-makers. Cairo Dates Festival includes conferences, workshops, lectures, performances, heritage events, and competitions.
Cairo Food Week (CFW)	Cairo	The food festival is loaded with culinary events, talks, exhibitions, screenings, and activities scattered across the city's vivid lifestyle districts, cultural locations, and overhauled downtown venues.
Egyptian festival for cheese	Cairo	Cheese
Egypt International Date Palm Festival	Siwa Oasis	Farmers and producers showcase their dates as part of a massive exhibition of 150 pavilions and participate in a series of competitions.

Source: Authors' own creation

-**Culinary infrastructure:** This includes restaurants, food markets, festivals, that can cater to the needs and interests of gastronomy tourists.

-**Worldwide exposure**: Several food bloggers and content creators have visited Egypt to explore its rich culinary heritage and share their experiences through articles, videos, and podcasts. Prominent names include: "Mark Wiens" (Migrationology), "Trevor James" (The Food Ranger), "Mike Chen" (Strictly Dumpling). These content creators offer diverse perspectives on Egyptian cuisine, from street food to traditional dishes, providing valuable insights for those interested in exploring Egyptian food culture.

-**Egyptian food digital material**: There are food bloggers/channels who have produced videos specifically focusing on Egyptian food, such as Mina Rome, Sally's Kitchen, The Kitchenista Diaries,

Chef Tarek Ibrahim, and Nile Waves. These food bloggers/channels offer a glimpse into Egyptian cuisine through their videos, sharing recipes, cooking techniques, and insights into the cultural significance of different dishes.

Table 30 shows the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of gastronomy tourism in Egypt.

Table 30: SWOT analysis of gastronomy tourism in Egypt

Strengths +	Weaknesses –
*Gastronomic diversity: Due to its history, location, and diversity of cultures, Egypt has a rich culinary legacy that includes a wide range of traditional meals. *Cultural and historical significance: Egyptian cuisine offers visitors not just a taste of delectable cuisine but also insights into the nation's history and culture. It is intricately linked to both. * Local ingredients: Egypt's cuisine is authentic and of high quality because of its lush soil and easy access to the Nile River, which yield a plentiful supply of fresh food and ingredients. * Iconic dishes: Egyptian cuisine features iconic dishes such as koshari, ful medames, and mahshi, which have the potential to attract food enthusiasts from around the world.	*Food safety and sanitary requirements: Promoting gastronomic tourism in Egypt may be difficult if certain restaurants have inconsistent standards for these two areas. *Limited number of food festivals, events and relevant associations: There is a limited number of food festival, events and relevant associations. Additionally, most of these are concentrated in Cairo. *Language Barrier: Foreign visitors looking for culinary experiences may find it difficult to communicate with local vendors and restaurant staff due to their limited command of English.
Opportunities +	Threats –
*Gastronomy tourism promotion: Through marketing campaigns, food festivals, and culinary tours, there is a chance to highlight Egyptian cuisine as a vital part of the nation's tourism attractions. *There are several private sector bodies that seem already aware of the importance of gastronomy for the Egyptian tourism. Collaborations with these are viable option that will benefit both parties.	*Negative publicity: This can harmfully impact Egypt's image as a tourist destination. *Health concerns: Foodborne infections, health crises, or public health emergencies can erode trust in the safety and calibre of Egyptian food, which can influence gastronomic tourism. *Competition: Egypt must contend with other culinary tourism destinations across the globe and regionally, some of which may have better developed culinary scenes, Michelin-starred restaurants, and well-known chefs. As noted earlier, there several destinations in the Middle East that uphold the status of UNESCO creative cities of gastronomy. *Economic challenges: Travelers' expenditure on eating experiences can be impacted by economic instability, inflation, and swings in the travel and tourism sector, which can affect the demand for gastronomy tourism in Egypt.

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.4.5. Governmental strategies and tools to foster gastronomy tourism in tourism in Egypt

Historically, Egyptian DMOs have advertised and projected the destination's image primarily through the usage of monuments, historical sites, and the natural environment, with gastronomy playing a supporting role. To promote food tourism, Egyptian destination marketers have begun including food and food-related activities in their marketing materials. Apparently, there is always room for improvement.

Remarkably, Mohamed et al. (2020b) conducted a content analysis study performed on the material on 20 websites run by DMOs in Egypt. The study observed some early attempts by Egyptian DMOs websites to promote culinary customs and food culture, yet the findings imply that the use of food culture on Egyptian DMO websites is still somewhat new. Mohamed et al. (2020b, p. 1064) concluded that "the current marketing practices by the national and various regional level DMOs are limited, lacking a coordinated national food tourism strategy."

Some of the approaches used for this purpose include:

-The use of digital media is evident and "Sofret Masr" (Taste of Egypt) is an example of this. Under the patronage of Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, this online project chronicles the culture, dishes and places of Egypt's culinary heritage from Ancient Egyptian to modern-day cuisine. The project contains more than 1,700 photographs, more than 60 expertly curated stories, and more than 30 videos which provide a detailed and immersive digital experience of Egyptian cuisine. It also deep dives into Egypt's culinary history and the influence of cultures, including Ptolemaic, Ottoman and Asian on modern day cuisine.

-The Egyptian General Authority for Tourism Promotion exploits social media for the promotion of Egypt as a gastronomy destination. It has accounts on most of the available platforms, e.g., YouTube, Snapchat, X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, under one title "Experience Egypt." "Experience Egypt" YouTube channel created in 2006 has 156K subscribers, 493 videos and 367,301,235 views. However, the Ministry of tourism YouTube channel (Ministry_Tourism_Antiquities) created in 2016 has only 45.7 K subscribers, 275 videos, and 1,394,511 views. These are utilized to display content on Egyptian cuisine, famous dishes, and culinary heritage. This reflects the authority's realization of the importance of social media promotion as it can significantly influence tourists' decisions to visit certain countries and explore the gastronomy of such destinations.

- The Egyptian General Authority for Tourism Promotion invite food bloggers and vloggers and influencers to visit Egypt to report on their experience in the country showing its unique culinary culture. The output material is then used for marketing and promotion.

- Providing support and sponsorship to food events, for example, Cairo Food Week (CFW). Food festivals and events' organizers are encouraged to approach the Ministry to secure support for their intended events. In case events are not up to the standard, they are given directions and help on how to elevate it. Additionally, food event organizers are encouraged to hold these annually.

-Presence in international travel exhibitions, e.g., Arabian Travel Market; ITB, is employed to showcase the richness and diversity of Egypt's attractions and promote gastronomy tourism.

- Tourism service providers are urged to highlight the ancient Egyptian cuisine as part of an integrated tourism package or experience that includes hospitality services and ancient Egyptian tourism.

Recommended practices for Egypt

-Creating a shared, well-defined vision among various stakeholders is essential when it comes to marketing or managing gastronomy tourism.

-Egypt's destinations should aspire to join UNESCO's Creative Cities of Gastronomy. Egypt should present its creative and diverse food offerings. Working with local chefs and restaurants to create creative menus with fresh, locally sourced ingredients to satisfy tourists' quest for outstanding culinary experiences.

- High hygiene standards accentuation in dining operations is critical to raising the confidence and satisfaction of gastronomy enthusiasts. Consequently, introducing a certification system or an award program to distinguish extraordinary gastronomic experiences can further incentivize excellence and instill a culture of continuous improvement within the destination.

-Establish partnerships with local stakeholders: engaging and collaborating with the private sector is important. To overcome low budgets and red tape, the private sector should be empowered to take the initiative.

-Developing an observatory to detect negative publicity in general and those specifically related to gastronomy. While it is not easy to chase individual cases it is easy to spot widespread negative word of mouth and attentively respond to it.

In sum, Egypt has the potential to be a gastronomy destination leveraging on its unique cultural heritage and authentic cuisine. Nevertheless, this requires the official bodies to actively implement a sound strategy that exploits marketing and promotion campaigns, especially digital marketing, and establish collaborations with the different stakeholders e.g., food producers, food service operations, tour operators, relevant associations, events planners, and empower them to take the initiative. Creativity in creating gastronomic tours that are both informative and enjoyable would ensure the development of a memorable experience for tourists which would guarantee their satisfaction and spread favorable word of mouth. This would help to establish Egypt's status as a gastronomic destination among competitors in the region.

3.4.5. Case Country- Italy
3.4.5.1. General Outlook

Tourism is one of the main drivers of the Italian economy. Italy– according to the World Tourism Organization data – is the third most popular European country in terms of international tourist arrivals (Vergori & Arima, 2020). Moreover, Italy was confirmed as the second most popular overnight travel destination in Europe and the fifth most popular worldwide in 2023 (Mancini, 2024). The top source markets in 2021 were Germany (17.1%), France (14.5%) and Austria (9.3%) (OECD, 2022).

Italy's travel and tourism industry generated €215BN, or 10.5% of the country's overall economic output, last year, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) 2024 Economic Impact Research (EIR), highlighting the industry's prominence as the backbone of the Italian economy (WTTC, 2024). Additionally, the industry demonstrated its importance as a source of employment in 2023, shattering previous records and creating almost 185,000 new positions nationally, or one in every eight jobs. This increased the overall number of jobs to 2.97 million (WTTC, 2024). With foreign expenditure rising by 19% annually to reach €51.4BN, the rebound in foreign visits to Italy has been exceptionally robust and has broken previous records, underscoring Italy's appeal as a top travel destination worldwide (WTTC, 2024). WTTC predictions indicate that the next ten years have an especially promising future. It is anticipated that by 2034, the sector will have contributed an unprecedented €270BN to the Italian economy, greatly bolstering the country's GDP (WTTC, 2024).

Italy draws millions of tourists each year who crave to explore art cities, regional customs, cuisine, and increasingly, shopping tourism, luxury travel, and wedding tourism (Mancini, 2024). The primary factor influencing tourists' decisions to visit Italy is the country's rich cultural legacy (24%), which is followed by the country's scenic surroundings (20%). The motivation associated with local events (e.g., sports, religious, cultural) is constantly increasing and serves as a magnet for over 6.5 percent of tourists (55 million presences of both foreigners and Italians) (Mancini, 2024). In 2023, foreign tourism expenditures in Italy amounted to 51.6 billion euros, concentrated mainly in Lombardy, Lazio, Veneto and Tuscany (Mancini, 2024). By 2028, cultural interest in Italy will bring in $12 billion, an increase of +160% from 2021 and 14.4% annually. Gastronomy also has a significant impact: 1 in 4 tourists (i.e., 22.3% of Italian tourists and 29.9% of foreign tourists) are drawn to traditional products through food interests and "Made in Italy" agribusiness (Mancini, 2024). Notably, Italy will hold the Winter Olympics in Milano-Cortina in 2026 and the Jubilee Year in Rome in 2025. Additionally, Italy has submitted a bid to host Expo2030 in Rome (UNWTO, n.d). Certainly, this will have positive outcomes for Italian tourism.

Famous as "Bel paese" (beautiful country), "as Dante and Petrarch christened it, Italy is a land of sun and sea, noble mountains and productive plains, and inventive people who have created stunning

cities and lives full of delights" (Colebatch, 2017). The momentousness of food within the human geography of Italy—its role in the tiny and great events that mark the cycle of the day, year, and people's lives is a remarkable characteristic of Italy (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Italy is one of the "origin of food" countries, where local and traditional knowledge about how to produce, cultivate, and prepare food is part of the local culture (Pizzichini, Andersson & Gregori, 2022). Local culinary traditions were already instituted once "Maestro Martino" authored his prominent recipe book "Liber de arte coquinaria" (Book on the Art of Cooking) in the mid-1460s (Parasecoli, 2014).

Since the 1990s, travelers from both domestic and foreign countries have shown a growing interest in regional gastronomy in Italy. Italy has a significant position in the international tourism market thanks to the sophistication of its cuisine and the abundance of options for dining establishments and other culinary attractions. On a global scale, Italy is linked to the representation of cultural and gastronomic legacy (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Ab Karim and Chi (2010) implementing an online survey of members of online travel and food groups from Yahoo.com and MSN.com, examined the food image of three countries recognised for their popular cuisine, namely, France, Italy, and Thailand. Italy has the best culinary image overall and the highest likelihood of being visited in the future, according to the findings (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). Ab Karim and Chi (2010) mentioned that Italy was famed for its food/cuisine, which included characteristics such as taste, presentation, variety, and quality; it also provided travellers with distinctive food-related tourist activities, such as food tours, cooking courses, and street markets. They discovered that food/cuisine had a significant influence on travellers' interest in visiting Italy. Italy had the highest rating in food/cuisine compared with France and Thailand, which may explain travellers' highest interest in visiting Italy (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010).

Gastronomy can be thought of as part of Italy's soft power (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023). Nevertheless, power has many facets, and financial power is one. Internationally, Italian food exports totaled €37 billion in 2016 (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023). Other reports estimate that culinary tourists in Italy have exceeded 110 million in 2017 (of which 43% domestic tourists), with an economic impact of 12 billion euros (15.1% of the Italian tourism sector) (Testa, Galati, Schifani, Di Trapani & Migliore, 2019).

Moreover, 58% of Italian travellers reported in 2023 having travelled at least once primarily for the purpose of eating and drinking, which is a 37-percentage point increase from 2016. It is believed that there are around 9.6 million in absolute terms. However, the pursuit of experiences with food is not exclusive to these visitors; rather, it now piques the curiosity of all visitors to the Bel Paese. During their most recent travels, seven out of ten had taken at least five trips (+25% on 2021) (Garibaldi, n.d).

It is estimated that, in 2019, residents carried out over 80 million excursions, almost all cases spent in Italian locations (98.2 percent). Most same-day visits to the national territory are carried out for personal reasons of pleasure or leisure (63.0 percent), similarly to trips with at least one overnight

stay. Excursions of a strictly cultural nature represent 2.9 of the national totals, visits to the natural beauty of the place and those made to taste the food or attend folkloristic events, or shows, exhibitions, concerts are equal to 2.0 respectively percent and 2.2 percent (ISTAT, 2023). The average expense for cultural visits in Italy is equal to 57 euros, a value lower than that of all other types, except for visits to relatives and friends (55 euros). A more detailed analysis of the reasons highlights that visits of a strictly cultural nature and those to natural beauties record an average expense similar (53 and 54 euros respectively), however the component of excursions for gastronomy, folklore and shows is characterized by a higher average expense (approximately 64 euros). The latter is more similar to the average expenditure observed for all excursions (65 euros), which are significantly influenced by the costs incurred during shopping visits (134 euros), which raise the average expenditure of the visits carried out for other reasons at 81 euros (ISTAT, 2023). However, depending on the locations and aspects of the trip, there may be distinct trends in the amount of money spent by tourists. As a result, it is crucial to investigate and research the various traits or culinary preferences that travellers may exhibit on various journeys or locations (Kesgin, 2023).

3.4.5.2. Gastronomy Tourism in Italy, its development and characteristics

As early as 1548, the erudite Hortensio Lando suggested an imagined voyage around Italy, emphasizing the significance of learning about the country's gastronomy specialties. Italy is world-renowned for its diverse regional cuisine. Farms, restaurants, chefs, festivals, food associations, specialist travel companies, and tourist institutes are among the market's major players (COLDIRETTI, 2022). In fact, the gastroscape of Italian gastronomy tourism is rich and diverse, laying a robust foundation for this type of tourism. Figure 2 illustrates the Italian gastronomy tourism gastroscape.

Figure 17: The Italian Gastroscape

Source: Authors' own creation

Italian cuisine is a vital feature of the Mediterranean diet and a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023). UNESCO recognizes various Italian culinary traditions as intangible cultural heritage, including pizza and the Mediterranean diet. Pizza, or the Art of Neapolitan Pizzaiuolo, has been added to the UNESCO list, detailing the technical know-how required to make, roll, and cook the dough in a wood-fired oven (Italia.net, n.d.). Under the heading of traditional knowledge and practice, truffle hunting and extraction in Italy was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021. Truffle hunting, in fact, requires a broad variety of abilities and knowledge pertaining to climate, flora, and the environment, as well as the management of natural ecosystems and the interaction between the truffle hunter and the dog (UNESCO, n.d.). Additionally, Parma was the first Italian city nominated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2015. Parma is the heart of the Italian Food Valley, in the Emilia-Romagna region. It is also home to numerous traditional Italian products that are branded with distinction and protected by PDOs such as PDO Parmigiano Reggiano, PDO Culatello di Zibello, PGI Porcini Mushroom di Borgotaro, and PGI Coppa di Parma. Italy flaunts the highest number of EU-conferred PDO, PGI and TSG products (Antolini & Truglia, 2023). In Italy, 295 agri-food products have obtained certification, representing 21% of all EU products (Antolini & Truglia, 2023).

Several studies showed the increased interest of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) in integrating a destination with food events, which contributes to developing a culinary image and transforming a destination into a location of gastronomy (Pizzichini et al., 2022). Food festivals are incredibly popular in Italy (Santini, Cavicchi & Belletti, 2013). Food festivals have been acknowledged by UNESCO as an integral component of Italy's intangible cultural heritage (Pizzichini et al., 2022). Whereas "during festivals, product knowledge is spread among participants and local communities and local products become a powerful tool for disseminating the culture of a place" (Pizzichini et al., 2022, p. 616).

Sagre[1] are community-based cuisine festivals that are typically held in rural locations in smaller centers. Sagre are well-attended because they provide a rare opportunity to have a high-quality, inexpensive meal prepared by valued local women and men with extensive home cooking experience, in an atmosphere of festivity, laughing, and conviviality (Ascione & Fink, 2021). Gündüz, Rezaei, Quaglia and Pironti's (2024) research divulged the overwhelming interest in Italian gastronomy festivals, accentuated by their enormous international appeal. They revealed the ten most craved gastronomy festivals in Italy, commemorated by an abundance of online content. These include in

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[1] The term "sagra" derives from Latin "sacrum" meaning holy: in ancient times these events were dedicated religious pagan celebrations where sacrifices were made as an offering in honour of the successful harvest (Fratelli Beretta, 2017).

order of the number of related news and posts: "Festa della Pizza (Naples), Taste of Roma (Rome), Salone del Gusto (Turin), Pesto World Championship (Genoa), Fiera del Tartufo (Alba), Sagra della Prochetta (Ariccia), Sagre del Limone (Massa Lubrene), Fiera del Ciccolato Artigianale (Pistoia), Sagra del Caricofo Romanesco (Ladipoli)" (Gündüz et al., 2024, p. 2632).

Italian food events are part of the "historical identity of communities", hence, they ought to respect some provisions to be designated "food festivals (sagra)" (Pizzichini et al., 2022). Santini et al. (2013) developed the Authentic festival Manifesto "Manifesto della sagra autentica", which emphasizes that food festivals are an integral element of the historical character of towns and communities, and they represent the ideal fusion of regional specialties and customs. A festival is regarded as "traditional" if it at least has a connection to the area that is recorded in written and oral tradition, and if the programmed cultural events represent the customs and culture of the area (Santini et al., 2013). The proposed manifesto covers different aspects related to festivals, e.g., definition, the main role of typical food, not-for-profit nature, the role of the local community, stakeholders' involvement, time and place, management and human capital, environmental substantiality (Santini et al., 2013).

Another type of tourism that intersects with gastronomy tourism in Italy is Coastal tourism. Coastal tourism covers "beach-based activities and tourism (e.g. swimming, surfing, sunbathing) and land-based tourism in the coastal area as well as the supplier and manufacturing industries associated with these activities" (Pizzichini et al., 2022, p. 616). The Marche area has about 50 seafood festivals annually, organized by state institutions, private businesses, fishermen's unions, and local associations (Pizzichini et al., 2022). Seafood festivals, as part of coastal tourism, in the Marche area was researched by Pizzichini et al. (2022) emphasized enjoying the cuisine as the primary draw for guests. According to data gathered from discussions with organizers, roughly 20 quintals of bluefish (a characteristic local species from the Adriatic Sea) were consumed during the Anghio event, as well as 50,000 meals. The festival's strong emphasis on cuisine allowed the organizers to transform it into an emotional journey to discover bluefish via tradition and creativity. The events are distinguished by the diversity of meals and the participation of local and foreign chefs who create gourmet recipes using traditional items (Pizzichini et al., 2022).

A significant milestone for Italian gastronomy is joining the network of UNESCOs Creative Cities of Gastronomy (CCG). CCG are elected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to recognize a destination's food culture (Guo & Hsu, 2023). There are three Italian cities which hold this precious status: Alba, Bergamo, Parma. Parma was the first Italian city nominated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2015. Parma is the heart of the Italian Food Valley, in the Emilia-Romagna region. UNESCO's acknowledgment of a city as a hub of gastronomy creativity has been shown to increase gastronomy tourism and increase visitor interest in the locality (Soonsan et al., 2024).

The gastronomy landscape in Italy is vast encompassing a variety of businesses and actors. As of the end of 2012, there were 354 olive oil cities, 221 almond cities, and 206 organic farming cities, to name a few. Additionally, there are almost 6,000 local associations that operate "pro loco," or volunteer-run. Many of them frequently work with religious organizations or other non-profit associations that aim to improve local communities by promoting food festivals (Santini et al., 2013). Such rich and vibrant gastroscape of Italy needs to be professionally showcased and promoted. Hence, a variety of platforms and projects exist to promote gastronomy tourism, connect visitors with authentic culinary experiences, and highlight the country's rich food culture. These platforms are often utilized by travellers seeking information, itineraries, and reservations for food tours. There are numerous important gastronomical tourism platforms in Italy, e.g., Italia.it., that are entrusted with this important mission. Italia.it is the official website for tourism in Italy. It is managed by the Italian National Tourist Board and delivers thorough information about travel destinations, cultural events, gastronomic experiences, and practical advice for visitors planning their journey to Italy. Table 31 lists examples of gastronomy tourism associations/platforms in Italy.

Table 31: Indicative examples of gastronomy tourism associations/platforms in Italy

Name	Core Aims/Activities	Website
ENIT SpA Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo (The Italian National Tourist Board)	ENIT SpA is responsible for promoting Italy's tourist offer and increasing its attractiveness. Its activities include deseasonalisation, diversification of supply and optimisation of tourist facilities and sites. It also fosters specialised training for operators and is developing a digital ecosystem to optimise the use of tourism goods and services. It also promotes and markets Italian tourist, cultural and food services, supporting the Italian brand in the tourism sector and promoting the sale of food and artisan products in Italy and abroad.	https://www.enit.it/en
Italia.it	The official website for tourism in Italy is Italia.it. This website is managed by the Italian National Tourist Board and provides comprehensive information about travel destinations, cultural events, culinary experiences, and practical tips for visitors planning their trip to Italy.	https://www.italia.it/en
FIBE "Federazione Italiana Pubblici Esercizi" (Italian Federation of Bars and Catering)	The Italian Federation of Public Establishments. FIP represents the interests of public establishments in Italy, including restaurants, cafes, and other types of hospitality businesses. FIPE offers professional training services, promotes tourism, and maintains a certification program for quality labelling and hygienic standards.	https://www.fipe.it/
CONFCOMMERCIO-Imprese per l'Italia,	The Italian General Confederation of Enterprises, Professional Activities and Self-Employment, is the largest business representation in Italy, associating over 700,000 companies. It represents and promotes businesses, entrepreneurs, and professionals in	https://www.confcommercio.it/

	the trade, tourism, services, and transportation industries.	
Confturismo	Confturismo is a sectoral association within Confcommercio dedicated to representing and supporting Italy's tourism industry. It includes a variety of tourist industry players, such as travel agencies, tour operators, hotels, and other tourism-related enterprises. Confturismo's key goals are to advocate for the tourist industry's interests, promote sustainable tourism development, and increase Italian tourism's competitiveness on a national and worldwide scale.	http://www.confturismo.it/
ICIF (Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners)	ICIF is a non-profit organization that was established in 1991 with the goal of safeguarding the reputation of Italian products and cuisine among professionals who operate restaurants overseas. ICIF deliver courses on Italian cuisine, Italian bakery, pizza, pastry, gelato and chocolateries. They provide training for young Italians and foreign cooks to acquire a professional specialization on Regional Italian Cuisine. ICIF organizes food tours to discover the essence of Italian Regional Cuisine and Culture, the top-quality products and the rich culture of the Italian Regions. ICIF Promotes Italian cuisine and top-quality Italian products abroad, through the organization of training courses and the diffusion of information regarding "Made in Italy."	https://icif.com/en/
I Racconti delle Radici	I Racconti delle Radici is a large project, where La Cucina Italiana collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation , on the history of the cuisine of Italians who emigrated between the end of the nineteenth century and the seventies of the twentieth century to America, Northern Europe and Australia.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHpErgxiuUU
Slow Food Italy	Founded in 1986 in Italy , Slow Food is committed to promoting the right to pleasure and to good, clean and fair food for all, as part of the pursuit of prosperity and happiness for current and future humanity and for the entire web of living things. They organize international events e.g., Terra Madre Salone del Gusto. Together with the Piedmont and Emilia Romagna regions, a free and independent university; the University of Gastronomic Sciences , was founded to establish a worldwide research and education centre in food and gastronomy.	https://www.slowfood.it/
The University of Gastronomic Sciences (UNISG)	The University of Gastronomic Sciences, founded in 2004 by the international non-profit association Slow Food in cooperation with the Italian regions of Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna, is a government-recognized, private non-profit institution. UNISG aims to create an international research and education centre	https://www.unisg.it/en/

	for those working on renewing farming methods, protecting biodiversity, and building an organic relationship between gastronomy and agricultural science.	
Accademia Italiana della Cucina	The Italian Academy of Cuisine endeavours to promote and make the most of Italian cultural heritage; organises and oversees cultural, artistic or recreational activities of social interest, including activities, such as publishing, aimed at promoting and raising awareness about cultural issues. It also studies the difficulties facing Italian cuisine and gastronomy, generating proposals, providing information in response to requests.	https://www.accademiaitalianadellacucina.it/en
UNPLI for "Unione Nazionale Pro Loco Italiane"	UNPLI indicates the National Association for the promotion of local areas. In Italy the Pro Loco number almost 6,000; there are 650,000 members; 20,000 events and performances organised. Importantly, they promote Sagra di Qualità (Quality Food Festival); a certification initiative aimed at promoting and recognizing the excellence of local food festivals.	
Italia Del Gusto	Italia del Gusto is the first private consortium of Italian food enterprises, with members chosen based on product quality and brand prominence. Italia del Gusto engages in global marketing, promotion, and communication activities, attends international trade fairs, encourages the formation of partnerships and synergies among members, and assists its member companies in marketing their products to both the retail and restaurant channels.	(https://www.italiadelgusto.biz/en/)
Italia a Tavola	It is an Italian magazine dedicated to the culinary and hospitality industry. It covers a wide range of subjects, including culinary trends, restaurant reviews, and hospitality-related news. The magazine is a resource for culinary experts, offering insights, updates, and articles on many elements of Italian cuisine and hospitality.	https://www.italiaatavola.net/
Qualivita	Qualivita Foundation, a non-profit organization, was founded in Siena in 2000 with the aim of promoting and protecting quality European agri-food.	https://www.qualivita.it/

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.5.3. Barriers and challenges to gastronomy tourism in Italy.

Despite being an internationally recognized gastronomy destination with a strong brand image, gastronomy tourism in Italy may face some challenges including seasonality, regional disparities, competition, concerns about authenticity, and conflict of interests. These are briefly explored below:

Seasonality: Being non-seasonal, cultural tourism is seen as one of the primary tools for mitigating the effects of tourism destinations' seasonality. This is mostly because "culture" is available year-

round and is not limited by the weather (Vergori & Arima, 2020). However, Vergori and Arima (2020) found that foreign tourists tend to travel primarily throughout the summer season, while the winter season is less favoured. Rimini's tourist demand is very seasonal, with over 90% of overnight stays concentrated between April and September, with a peak during the summer season (July-August) (Fasone & Pedrini, 2023).

Moreover, foods and gastronomy are certainly associated with certain periods of time (Fuste-Forne, 2019). In Italy, a lot of the country's culinary tourism events are particularly seasonal, coinciding with certain food festivals or agricultural harvests, for example, the Roscetta Chestnut Festival typically takes place during the autumn season when chestnuts are harvested, while the White Truffle Festival is held from October to December. Seasonality can cause swings in visitor numbers and the financial sustainability of enterprises that rely on tourism.

Regional disparities, tourism inefficacy, and accessibility: There is a noticeable North–South division throughout Italy (Algieri & Álvarez, 2023; Jansen, 2017). While there are obvious internal economic differences in practically every EU nation (Algieri & Álvarez, 2023), Italy exhibits especially strong regional differences when it comes to GDP per capita, unemployment rate, export values, and tourist performance (Algieri & Álvarez, 2023; Jansen, 2017). Algieri and Álvarez (2023) concluded that most Southern regions—aside from Campania and Sicily—show notable levels of inefficiency in the tourist industry, according to the results, whilst Northern regions—aside from Valle d'Aosta— show higher levels of efficiency. As a result, given its resources, the South does not fully realize its potential, and governmental interventions to increase the appeal of Southern tourism locations are needed. There exist several plausible rationales for the South's overall inefficiency. Probably the most important is connectivity. Compared to the northern areas, the southern regions are more difficult to access by automobile, or high-speed train, and have smaller airports (Algieri & Álvarez, 2023).

Competition: Despite accounting for around 10% of the EU total, Italy's tourist gross value added is lower than that of Spain (27%), Germany (12%), and it is less competitive than Greece, Spain, and Portugal (Algieri & Álvarez, 2023). Some countries in the region are considered major rivals to Italy. For example, neighboring France— a forerunner in the tourism industry— is an exemplary competitor in Europe with international tourists expected to reach more than 100 million in 2024 (Van Puymbroeck, 2024). As part of the "Destination France" initiative, the French government has set allocated 1.9 billion euros over the course of three years (2022–2024) to secure its position as a leader in the tourist sector (Van Puymbroeck, 2024). Gastronomy-wise, "French cuisine remains a reference" (Csergo, 2020, p. 472); the country is largely associated with fine cuisine (Cardoso, Araújo Vila, de Araújo & Dias, 2020) and it strives to maintain this. Presently, in response to other countries establishing claims to their gastronomy, France is intensely keen to restore and preserve the luster of its food, etiquette, and goods (Csergo, 2020).

Authenticity: Food festivals are popular in Italy (Santini et al., 2013). Owing to their steady expansion and the large number of independent promoters involved in event organization, they constitute a phenomenon that is challenging to quantify (Santini, et al., 2013). However, it has been estimated that there are more than 7,000 official municipal food events held each year (Santini et al., 2013). Recent numbers are staggering even; 32,000 food festivals celebrated in 2019 (most of these events have just a few years of history) (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Over time, the trustworthiness of many events has been affected and visitors' uncertainty also swelled considering media campaigns against the "fake food festivals" (Santini et al., 2013).

The propagation of sagre is affecting Italy's contemporary tourism industry and igniting a national debate over the role that festivals play in local communities. The Italian National Union of the Pro Loco Associations (UNPLI) supports initiatives like the 2018 launch of the Sagra di Qualità national award, which is supported by the Manifesto della Sagra Autentica (also known as the Manifesto of the Authentic Food Festival) and other initiatives that voice antagonism to the explosion of festivals, particularly those that fail to promote regional culinary customs and goods (Fontefrancesco, 2020).

Conflict of interests: Food festivals could benefit the local economy, but they might also be dangerous for local businesses in the vicinity. The festival producers' aggressive pricing might be a major blow to the local food industry. Restaurants and cafés have occasionally tried to establish successful and long-lasting relationships and work with local groups, even though this is not always simple to do (Santini et al., 2013). A similar conclusion was reached by Pizzichini et al. (2022). In Italy, there were arguments among Anghiò festival (Bluefish Festival) organizers over restaurant participation. During the initial editions of the festival, restaurateurs were more involved and tended to provide a special menu on festival days. However, after the first two editions, local restaurateurs claimed that the event drove people away from their establishments. As a result, the organizers attempted to actively integrate restaurateurs into the festival as special guests or by featuring some of the dishes from local restaurants on the festival menu. Restaurants are one of the several stakeholder groups that festival organizers must manage and engage with positively for the event to thrive (Pizzichini et al., 2022).

3.4.5.4. Success factors of gastronomy tourism in Italy

The foodscape, e.g., restaurants, food markets, and festivals, that can cater to the needs and interests of gastronomy tourists is largely grounded in Italy. There are numerous crucial elements contributing to the success of gastronomy tourism in Italy:

Globally reputed Italian cuisine: "What is the glory of Dante compared to spaghetti?" Prezzolini[2] wondered in 1954, noting that pasta had "entered many American homes where the name of Dante is never pronounced" (Capatti & Montanari, 2003, p. xx). Certainly, gastronomy is an essential ingredient of the soft power of Italy (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023). Italy topped the list of the 100 finest cuisines

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[2] Giuseppe Prezzolini was an Italian literary critic, journalist, editor, and writer.

in the world according to TasteAtlas, an online food guide and portal that has been authoring the list for a number of years by incorporating restaurant ratings with its reviews (La Voce di New York, 2023). Parmigiano Reggiano was named the world's greatest cheese after receiving 36,551 votes among 1,378 cheeses. Mozzarella di Bufala Campana and Stracchino di Crescenza came next, while Burrata came sixth. It is no surprise that the cities with the best food were selected as Italy's own Rome, Bologna, and Naples (La Voce di New York, 2023). Additionally, A study by pickyeaterblog.com where Instagram hashtags were examined revealed that Italian cuisine is the most popular worldwide, followed by Japanese. Italian and Japanese cuisines are the most popular globally; as of 2023, each had been tagged more than 20 million times on Instagram (Shah, 2024).

Rich and diverse regional culinary heritage: Italian cuisine is typically preserved and honored by making references to urban identities. This can be seen in the titles of complex recipes and food preparations that were created in metropolitan areas, in the kitchens of skilled chefs, or, more recently, in industrial settings. It can also be seen in the names of items that have their origins in rural, mountain, or coastal regions, e.g., Bitonto oil, Treviso chicory, Messina swordfish, Ravenna turbot, Sorrento walnuts (Capatti & Montanari, 2003). Evidently, each region enjoys its gastronomy tradition, from the diverse pasta of Emilia-Romagna to the seafood of the Amalfi Coast and the delectable pizzas of Naples. Foreign influences are also evident, for example, the local cuisine in the province of Trapani, Sicily, displays the impact of the diverse cultures that have dominated this region over the centuries, including Arab influence (Nicoletti, Medina-Viruel, Di-Clemente & Fruet-Cardozo, 2019). Remarkably, the territorial and regional nature of Italian food gives tour operators a competitive advantage by distinguishing themselves from other operators, who often include the most popular foods in the country (Pesaresi & Abbasian, 2023).

Sustainable gastronomy tourism: Sustainable gastronomy means "cuisine that takes into account where the ingredients are from, how the food is grown, and how it gets to our markets and eventually to our plates." Sustainable gastronomy is becoming an increasingly important issue internationally, particularly since it began being promoted by the UNESCO (United Nations, n.d.).

Many sustainable gastronomy projects are implemented in Italy to maintain the country's natural and cultural assets and encourage sustainable tourism, e.g., the Slow Food movement. The Slow Food movement, founded in Italy, advocates for the preservation of traditional culinary methods, local foods, and small-scale producers. Travelers may contribute to this movement by eating at Slow Food-approved restaurants and visiting food festivals (Birney, 2024).

Agri-tourism: In Italy, agri-tourism is one of the chief spots where gastronomic tourists can experience local food and beverages. Agri-tourism is a farm that mixes agricultural production with an element of rural tourism. According to Del Bravo (2023), "Italian agritourism can be considered the true ambassador of taste and know-how connected to Italian culinary traditions." In Italy, agri-tourisms amounted to 23,406 in 2017, showing an increase of about 27% over the last 10 years (Testa,

Galati, Schifani, Di Trapani & Migliore, 2019). Even during the pandemic, the number of agritourism enterprises in Italy grew steadily, reaching a record 25,390 establishments that provided 532,000 dining seats, almost 14,000 camping pitches, and 294,000 beds—roughly 6% of all officially registered lodging establishments in the country (Del Bravo, 2023).

Creative gastronomy cities: Creative Cities of Gastronomy (CCG) are elected by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to recognize a destination's food culture (Guo & Hsu, 2023). Three Italian cities hold this precious status: Alba, Bergamo, Parma.

Gastrotomy tours: There are several tour operators and travel agencies in Italy and abroad that provide food tours in Italy. These trips offer the opportunity to experience the delectable Italian food in various Italian regions and eat at both traditional and sophisticated food service operations. Some would even provide a range of cooking classes, including making pasta, pizza, and ice cream. For example, Streaty organizes street food tours, whereas Bike Food Stories offers special tours throughout Parma and its environs blending cycling holidays and local food, while Le Baccanti is specialized in luxury travel and incentive trips built around food and art.

Italian celebrity chefs: Rich flavors, seasonal ingredients, and a variety of regional specialties characterize Italian cuisine, but the passion and inventiveness of the skilled chefs who create these delectable dishes are what really make it shine (Luca, 2023). There are many well-known Italian chefs who have polished their culinary skills and shared their knowledge through award-winning restaurants, television shows, and cookbooks, for instance, Gino D'Acampo is among the most famous Italian chefs in the world, renowned for his appearances on shows like 'This Morning' and 'Hell's Kitchen'. His successful career has made him one of the top Italian celebrity chefs (Luca, 2023). Another great chef is Massimo Bottura. Massimo is a 3-Michelin-star chef known for his creative take on classic Italian recipes. Massimo and his wife founded "FOOD FOR SOUL", a cultural project to empower communities, rescue food otherwise discarded, and fight social isolation.

Michelin restaurants: The selection of restaurants in the MICHELIN Guide Italy 2024 "celebrates the complexity, vitality and extent of Italian gastronomy; its many young, talented chefs; and the peninsula's eco-responsible, sustainable restaurant ecosystem." (MICHELIN Guide, 2023). Italy boasts 395 Michelin restaurants in 2024, classified as three stars (13 restaurants) two stars (40 restaurants) one star (342) (MICHELIN Guide, 2023). Furthermore, there are 58 restaurants in Italy that bear green stars (MICHELIN Guide, 2023), a sign that identifies restaurateurs at the vanguard of sustainability. Among the most well-known Italian restaurants with Michelin stars, Atelier Moessmer Norbert Niederkofler, Quattro Passi, Enoteca Pinchiorri, Osteria Francescana, Da Vittorio, Piazza Duomo.

Food festivals and events: Events are "animators of destination attractiveness", signifying a fundamental marketing proposition to promote a destination (Pizzichini et al., 2022, p. 614). Gastronomy festivals boost Italy's glamour as a tourist destination (Gündüz et al., 2024). Sagre are one

of the extremely popular types of food festivals in Italy (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Numbers may help to put out "sagre" in the correct perspective; with 8000 municipalities, over 32,000 food festivals celebrated in 2019 (most of these events have just a few years of history) and an esteemed turnover of 900 million euros. These figures pinpoint the significance of this festive phenomenon that personifies modern Italy (Fontefrancesco, 2020). Table 32 illustrates the key gastronomy and food festivals in Italy.

Table 32: Key gastronomy and food festivals in Italy

Name	City	Central theme/Highlight dish
Terra Madre Salone del Gusto	Turin	Food and culture multi-event gastronomy exhibition
Genova Pesto World Championship	Genoa	Pesto sauce
Sagra del Carciofo Romanesco di Ladispoli	Ladispoli	Artichoke
Sagra della Porchetta	Ariccia	Porchetta sandwiches
Fiera del Cioccolato Artigianale	Pistoia	Handcrafted chocolate
Taste of Roma	Rome	Traditional Italian dishes
Sagra del Limone	Monterosso	Lemon-based dishes and beverages
Festa della Pizza	Naples	Pizza
The Maccaruni Festival (Sagra dei Maccaruni)	Gavignano, Rome	Maccaruni
White Truffle Festival (Fiera Internazionale del Tartufo Bianco d'Alba	Alba, Piedmont.	White truffle
Anghiò Festival del Pesce Azzurro https://www.facebook.com/Anghio/		Blue fish
Eurochocolate https://www.eurochocolate.com/	Perugia	Chocolate
Roscetta Chestnut Festival	Canistro, l'Aquila	Chestnut
Canestrato di Moliterno Igp Festiva	Moliterno, Potenza	Cheese
Orsomarsese Fusillo Festival	Orsomarso, Cosenza	Fusillo pasta
Rice Festival in Jolanda di Savoia	Jolanda di Savoia	Rice
Pangiallo and Polenta Festival	Riano	Pangiallo is a sweet bread-like dessert made with dried fruits, nuts, honey, and spices, typically enjoyed during the Christmas season. Polenta, on the other hand, is a staple food made from cornmeal that is cooked to a creamy consistency.
Hazelnut Festival in Caprarola	Caprarola, Viterbo	Hazelnut
Morlupo Sausage Festival, (Sagra della Salsiccia)	Morlupo, Lazio	Sausage
Pro Loco in Festa	Porto San Giorgio, Fermo	"Pro Loco in Festa" is an event typically organized by local Pro Loco associations in Italy. The event features a variety of local dishes and specialties, often prepared using traditional recipes.
The Mussel Festival (Sagra delle Cozze)	Pedaso, Fermo	Mussels.

Quality certification: "Sagra di qualità" is a certification program, developed and administered by Unpli (Unione nazionale Pro Loco d'Italia), is intended to recognize and elevate the efforts and dedication of volunteers who, through their invaluable contribution, enable the most poignant and emblematic events in small communities. The quality mark attests to the worth and significance of these gatherings, which can strengthen relationships to the community, celebrate regional customs, award outstanding foods, foster collaborations with nearby businesses, and encourage thoughtful, high-quality travel (Italia a tavola, 2024).

Food museums: Experiences blending Italian food and culture attracts both travelers (mainly domestic tourists) and natives (Garibaldi, & Pozzi, 2018). Food museums were created for this purpose, including Parma Food Museums which accentuates that quality is a way of life, since they were created to share the history, customs, and flavors of the traditional goods from an authentic region. The stunning region of Parma is home to four museums, each one honoring a different commodity that is a sign of excellence and authenticity in addition to being created in Italy: Parmigiano Reggiano, ham, tomatoes, and Felino salami. Another example is the Alba Truffle Museum (https://visitalba.eu/mudet/), located in the heart of Alba's MUDET Museum. The museum's displays depict the complete process of producing and harvesting truffles, as well as the various types and culinary uses. Another example is Carlo Carli Olive Tree Museum. The owners of the Fratelli Carli firm assembled artifacts over decades, which eventually became an exhibition that became the Olive Tree Museum. Situated in one of the most significant olive-growing regions of the Mediterranean, Liguria, the museum comprises eighteen rooms that employ contemporary exhibition techniques to showcase the history of the olive tree and its oil, narrating the significance it held for all the great civilizations that flourished along the coast, from everyday life to religious and artistic aspects (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2018).

Food markets: Small shops and markets can play an important role in spreading knowledge about local products and promoting activities. Buying local food products helps visitors form a stronger bond with the place and its producers, as well as keep memories of various countries and cultures (Pizzichini et al., 2022). There are several famous food markets in Italy to visit. Mercato di Rialto in Venice is a historic market that offers a wide variety of fresh seafood, fruits, vegetables, and local delicacies (Di Iorio, 2023). Mercato di San Lorenzo in Florence is another lively market renowned for its quality meats, cheeses, fresh produce, and regional specialties, furthermore, it has a cooking school The Lorenzo de' Medici" cooking school regularly organizes courses in Italian and English. Mercato di Porta Palazzo in Turin is the largest open-air market in Europe (51,300 m2) and has over a thousand street vendors. The whole market area is visited by over 100.000 people weekly. "Porta Palazzo has been referred as "the Harrod's of Torino" where one can find the fairies' needle's silk remnants, the

tome, cheese from the Valli di Lanzo and caciocavalli cheeses from the Sila, tapioca and cherry tomatoes from Pachino, Timisoara style smoked meat, Pantelleria capers and Sambucan lambs from Stura di Demonte…" (Città di Torino, n.d.). These are only a handful of the fantastic food markets that await exploration throughout Italy!

Worldwide visibility: Several food bloggers and content creators have visited Italy to explore its intense culinary heritage and disseminate their experiences through articles, videos, and podcasts. Renowned names include: "Trevor James" (The Food Ranger), "Mike Chen" (Strictly Dumpling), "Mark Wiens" (Migrationology), Sonny (Best Ever Food Review Show), Max Ginestra (Abroad and Hungry), Thomas & Sheena (Chasing a plate). These famous content providers provide a variety of perspectives on Italian cuisine which are useful for individuals interested in learning more about Italian culinary culture.

Italian food media: The media has been crucial in promoting culture and increasing awareness. There are many media platforms that are exploited to propagate cultural rules and cuisine, in this instance. For example, there are over 25,400 books on Italian gastronomy labels in print media. There are various specialized food press outlets as well, e.g., La Cucina Italiana, Gambero Rosso, Appetito. People today consume a variety of media, including podcasts. One podcast channel that promotes Italian culture, particularly Italian cuisine, is Italy Made Easy (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023). Additionally, certain major streaming services, like Netflix's Chef's Table Show and CNN's Stanley Tucci Searching for Italy, also support Italian cultural hegemony with their documentaries (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023).

Based on this discussion, Table 33 shows Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of Gastronomy tourism in Italy.

Table 33: SWOT analysis of gastronomy tourism in Italy

Strengths +	Weaknesses –
-Globally reputed Italian cuisine -Diverse regional culinary heritage -UNESCO Creative Gastronomy Cities -Italian celebrity chefs -Michelin restaurants -Festivals and events -Festivals quality certification -Food museums -Food markets -Italian food media -Worldwide exposure -Agri-tourism -Sustainable gastronomy tourism -Gastronomy tour operators	-Seasonality -Regional disparities, tourism inefficiency and accessibility
Opportunities +	Threats –
Halal gastronomy tourism: Halal tourism is a subsector of tourism that follows the tenets of Islam which has substantial growth potential. Economically speaking, this potential is exemplified by the estimated US$225 billion worth of travel by Muslims in 2028 (Hendrik, Kusumawardani & Permanasari, 2024). Offering a halal	*Competition: Italy must contend with other culinary tourism destinations across the globe and regionally.

gastronomy experience may be a creative tool to cater to this evolving and promising business.	

Source: Authors' own creation

3.4.5.5. Governmental strategies and tools to foster gastronomy tourism in Italy

The Italian Council of Ministries released the "Tourism Code" in 2011 to govern the tourist sector at the state level, to adjust existing requirements under international and EU law. Nonetheless, at the regional level, the Constitution (art. 117) grants Regions and autonomous Provinces[3] (Trento and Bolzano) exclusive legislative authority. Italian regions have their own tourist regulations, although all adhere to EU and national Italian legislation according to the basic principle of subsidiarity (Belotti, 2019).

Italian cuisine is highly territorial and regional, meaning that any town, city, or area might be highlighted for its unique cuisine. Setting themselves apart from other tour operators, who mostly showcase the nation's most well-known cuisine, might provide tour operators a competitive edge (Pesaresi & Abbasian, 2023). Hence, regions and provinces endeavor to develop and market their gastronomy tourism profile. For example, the Emilia-Romagna Region Tourist Board is putting a lot of effort into using digital media to spread the word about its rich culinary heritage, ancient history, and welcoming culture. It accommodates as many bloggers and digital journalists as it can, holds contests, and allows locals to manage its Instagram account (Shankman, 2015). Regions and provinces also organize food festivals, fairs, and events that celebrate local cuisine and products. These events draw tourists and provide them with chances to experience and taste regional specialties. Examples include the Gelato Festival in Florence and the Alba White Truffle Fair in Piedmont.

There are several tools and strategies used to develop and promote gastronomy tourism in Italy including:

Tourism promotion: Promoting and enhancing Italy's tourism offerings is the responsibility of ENIT SpA. Deseasonalization, supplier diversification, and site and facility optimization for tourists are some of its initiatives. To maximize the use of tourism-related goods and services, it also promotes specialized training for operators and is creating a digital ecosystem. It markets and promotes Italian travel, cultural, and culinary services, bolstering the Italian brand in the travel industry and encouraging the sale of distinctive, artisanal foodstuffs both domestically and internationally. The portal 'Italia.it' is managed through the utilization of digital media and technology platforms.

Social media marketing: The official social media accounts of the Italian tourism bodies (italia.it) are managed by the Italian National Tourist Board (ENIT). The main social media accounts: Facebook

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[3] The province is a territorial local authority that belongs to a region and consists of several municipalities (Borowiecki & Castiglione, 2014, p. 243).

(facebook.com/italia.it Instagram (instagram.com/italiait), Twitter (twitter.com/Italia), YouTube (www.youtube.com/@italyit), Pinterest (https://www.pinterest.com/ItaliaIT/). These accounts are designed to advertise Italy's many travel attractions, such as its exquisite cuisine, stunning scenery, and rich cultural legacy.

ENIT marketing and development initiatives (CLUB ITALIA): All private tourist industry operators have the chance to expand and market their businesses internationally through CLUB ITALIA. Private operators are kept up to date and informed on the changes in the global demand market through CLUB ITALIA. Furthermore, they may attend workshops/roadshows, fairs, webinars, and any other event where a significant number of international visitors are interested in the Italian tourist business by using CLUB ITALIA.

Gastrodiplomacy: The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation established the Week of Italian Cuisine in the World (SCIM - Settimana Della Cucina Italiana Nel Mondo) to highlight the finest of the "Made in Italy" brand internationally (Italian foundation, n.d.). This is a promotional initiative that aims to highlight the unique and high-quality features of the Italian food sector while also encouraging export, internationalization, and inbound tourism through dedicated and targeted events in Italian embassies, consulates, cultural institutes (Tibollo, 2023). It is now in its eighth edition, with over 9,200 events organized by the network of Italian embassies, consulates, and cultural institutes in 100 countries since 2016 (La Cucina Italiana, 2023). The eighth edition of the Week of Italian Cuisine in the World, entitled "At the table with Italian cuisine: well-being with taste" was honorably opened by "The Vice President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Antonio Tajani, and the Minister of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests, Francesco Lollobrigida."

Apparently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is largely active in promoting Italian food and culinary heritage. It organizes several events in foreign countries to proudly showcase Italian cuisine. Under the direction of the Italian Embassy in Zagreb, the offices of the Italian economic system planned a comprehensive and diverse schedule of events that were arranged nationwide in Croatia. The Italian Trade Agency (ICE) Office in Varadzin, where Italy was a Partner Country in the International Pasta Congress "CONPASTA," hosted the inaugural ceremony. The Italian Cultural Institute organized two more events in Zagreb and Karlovac on the link between theater and food, respectively, while the Consulate General of Italy in Rijeka was preparing for an exhibition in Pula on the history of Italian home cooking (Tibollo, 2023).

Familiarization Trip (Fam Trip): FAM trips are an important aspect of marketers' business strategies since they promote and brand a destination. Since travel agencies and the media are regarded as the main opinion leaders who affect tourists' decisions when selecting a place, these trips are arranged for them (Kaurav, & Sharma, 2017). For example, Italy is a remarkable destination for Mexican travelers, offering an exceptional blend of natural beauty, culture, history, and gastronomy.

To capitalize on such a positive image, ENIT (Italian National Tourist Board) planned an exclusive Fam Trip for 12 prominent Mexican travel operators, intended to highlight the relevance and need for boosting tourism to Italy as a destination. Fam trips seek not only to highlight Italy's beauty to a prominent group of Mexican operators but also to improve bilateral connections and encourage two-way tourism (Karantzavelou, 2023).

Storytelling: I Racconti delle Radici is a large project, where La Cucina Italiana collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, on the history of the cuisine of Italians who emigrated between the end of the nineteenth century and the seventies of the twentieth century to America. "The storytelling of I Racconti delle Radici will explode into a 10-part web series, a photo exhibition, a cookbook and two webinars that will be spread to the 300 embassies, consulates and ICE [The Italian Trade Agency] offices across the planet. Through these channels, this special project expresses how the memories of the Italian abroad are always inextricably linked to cooking and sharing the table" (Tibollo, 2023).

International industrial fairs: International industrial fairs overseas are among the most potent instruments of cultural diplomacy. With a political undertone, politicians typically open exhibitions with solemnity, use the occasion to sign various bilateral agreements, bring together many actual business representatives to promote the nation's brand, showcase scientific and technological accomplishments, and plan several cultural events to introduce and advance national culture. Organizing an annual food expo, as was the case at Expo 2015, which had the subject of the World Expo and was hosted by Milan, Italy, is one of the ways Italy uses gastronomy as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life" was the expo's enduring theme. Italy offered a platform for cooperation, creativity, expertise, and cultural exchange at the exhibition (Elindawati & Nugrahani, 2023).

The status of UNESCO Creative Gastronomy Cities: UNESCO selects Creative Cities of Gastronomy (CCG) to highlight a destination's food culture (Guo & Hsu, 2023). Alba, Bergamo, and Parma are three Italian cities that have achieved this prestigious designation. This prestigious status is propagated and used for the marketing of these cities, with specially tailored food tours that cover the three; TOUR TIPICAMENTE UNICHE.

Gastronomic events and festivals: These are locally organized culinary festivals that are held throughout the Italian peninsula. Their goals are to draw tourists, mostly from Italy, from the nearby region or regions, to strengthen community ties and draw boundaries between them, and to showcase locally made or historically connected goods. Sagre are transformed into festivals used for territorial marketing purposes (Ascione & Fink, 2021).

Quality certification: Quality certification attests to the value and importance of food festivals, which can promote thoughtful, high-quality travel, celebrate local customs, build relationships with

surrounding businesses, and award exceptional foods (Italia a tavola, 2024). Unpli (Unione nazionale Pro Loco d'Italia) created and oversees the "Sagra di qualità" certification program, which aims to honor and elevate the commitment and hard work of volunteers who, by their indispensable assistance, make possible the most moving and iconic events in small towns (Italia a tavola, 2024).

That being said, it is germane to highlight a recent piece of research on the use of food for tourism marketing in Italy. Bigi, Cassia and Ugolini (2022) conducted content analysis to examine queries and responses submitted on TripAdvisor forums by potential and past tourists to four Italian destinations (Naples, Florence, Parma, and Ferrara) and their results were intriguing; "Regarding food, we conclude that we are facing the phenomenon of tourism destination image incongruence. The local DMOs overestimate the overall importance of Italian food in visiting decisions; neither the English-speaking and Italian-speaking potential travelers nor the destination experts consider food a central element in travel decisions" (Bigi et al., 2022, pp. 582-583). They explained that the Italian destination decision makers believe that the significance of food, which is prevalent in Italian culture, inherently has the same relevance for tourism or individuals from other backgrounds, nevertheless findings refuted this assumption. They elaborated that "therefore we assume that a standard message based on ethnocentric values (in our case food) can be ineffective and waste both energy and economic resources (Bigi et al., 2022, p. 583).

In sum, Italy is an established gastronomy tourism destination. Gastronomy tourism seems largely grounded, planned, and promoted. The Italian gastroscape is largely robust, and this claim is evidently confirmed through the globally famed Italian cuisine, restaurants, and food markets, that can cater to the various needs and interests of gastronomy tourists. This is also sustained by the diversity of regional cuisine, creative gastronomy cities, exorbitant number of festivals, and food museums. The list spans Italian food media, specialized food press, worldwide exposure by famous food vloggers, celebrity chefs, UNECO recognized gastronomy heritage, and quality awards, as well. This all gives an impression of an already saturated and competitive market. Hence, creativity in creating novel niches within gastronomy tourism in Italy is recommended, e.g., halal gastronomy tourism.

Recommended practices for Italy

No doubt that Italy is a successful destination with a strong brand of gastronomy tourism. One drawback might be attributed to the lack of ability (or perhaps lack of interest) in promoting halal gastronomy tourism. Currently, there are 2 billion Muslims worldwide, making about 25% of the global population. Muslim travellers are becoming a specialized market and one of the major export destinations for the global travel industry. Halal tourism has a substantial growth potential (Hendrik et al., 2024; Xiong & Chia, 2024). Economically speaking, this potential is exemplified by the estimated US$225 billion worth of travel by Muslims in 2028 (Hendrik et al., 2024). Halal food refers to "the type of food that is considered lawful to consume, whereas haram refers to food that is prohibited (e.g. pork, alcohol, blood, carnivorous animals)" (Xiong & Chia, 2024). In line with this pattern, the global

halal food business is expanding rapidly. Consequently, halal cuisine is being offered at various secular destinations in addition to the religious enclave (Xiong & Chia, 2024). Hence, promoting halal gastronomy tourism In Italy may be a viable option to attract a new and overlooked market segment.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The OIC member countries have increasingly recognized the significance of the tourism industry due to its direct and indirect contributions to development and economic growth. As a result, tourism has been identified as one of the six priority economic areas in the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC (COMCEC) Strategy, emphasizing its sustainable and competitive aspects within the OIC region (The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries [SESRIC], 2022). Despite already receiving a substantial share of the international tourism market, OIC countries have significant potential to offer diverse tourism experiences, particularly through niche tourism such as cultural and gastronomy tourism (SESRIC, 2023a). Among these, gastronomy tourism has gained prominence due to the diversity of local cuisines.

At the Qatar Travel Mart, the growing importance of gastronomy tourism for OIC countries was highlighted, particularly the richness and variety of food culture within these nations. It was noted that gastronomy tourism offers an opportunity to revitalize endangered ingredients and culinary traditions (Aguilar, 2023). Reflecting the significance of gastronomy tourism in OIC countries, a Training Webinar on "Gastronomy Tourism in OIC Countries" was organized, focusing on four key topics: (i) Key Concepts and Prospects of Gastronomy Tourism, (ii) Challenges Facing Gastronomy Tourism in OIC Countries, (iii) Policies and Digital Tools, and (iv) The Role of Gastronomy Tourism in Empowering Local Communities and Promoting Sustainable Tourism (SESRIC, 2023b). Additionally, the OIC Trade Centre (ICDT) has funded a project titled "Unleashing Tourism Potential in OIC Countries through Health and Gastronomy Tourism," which began in 2023.

To attract foreign direct investments, OIC member countries have undertaken various initiatives and measures. For example, some countries have developed comprehensive marketing strategies to showcase their authentic, traditional cooking methods and gastronomic diversity to targeted tourist groups globally. Bahrain, for instance, will host the UNWTO's World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in 2024, a result of the country's efforts such as the Bahrain Food Festival by the Bahrain Tourism and Exhibition Authority (World Tourism Organization, 2023). Several Arab countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, have also made considerable investments in gastronomy tourism to strengthen the sector and attract international visitors (SESRIC, 2023b). For example, the Dubai Tourism Authority launched the initiative "Taste of Dubai," promoting the destination as a gastronomy tourism hub through food festivals, tasting events, and culinary tours (Taste of Dubai, 2024). Similarly, Qatar celebrates its culinary culture through the Qatar International Food Festival, focusing on its rich culinary heritage and vibrant dining scene. The United Arab Emirates promotes its distinctive gastronomic products through initiatives like the Dubai Food Festival, Abu Dhabi Culinary Season, and Emirati Cuisine Competition (Visit Dubai, 2023; Emirates Culinary Guild, 2024).

According to SESRIC (2023b), gastronomy tourism in OIC countries (Asia, Africa, and Arab regions) has the potential to be worth $260 billion and is expected to reach $500 billion by 2030. Notably, some OIC member countries such as Türkiye, Malaysia, and Indonesia have made significant advancements in promoting their gastronomy tourism offerings. Current practices and initiatives in OIC countries include: Promoting diverse regional cuisines and the use of locally sourced ingredients in destination marketing; Organizing food trails, cooking classes, food tours, and festivals that showcase local dishes and food culture; Offering educational programs on traditional techniques, food history, and etiquette; Forming partnerships that support the local food system and expand economic opportunities.

Despite their varied cultures, landscapes, and rich foods suitable for gastronomy tourism, OIC countries face several challenges that must be addressed to develop this sector. These include insufficient infrastructure, a shortage of skilled and qualified employees, and a lack of formal partnerships between organizations, which can hinder the growth of gastronomy tourism (SESRIC, 2023b). Overcoming these issues could lead to new gastronomy-related investments in businesses such as restaurants, cafes, food markets, food halls, cooking schools, culinary institutes, and production facilities (SESRIC, 2023b). Additionally, perceptions of certain OIC countries as unsafe or unstable, influenced by media coverage, can deter potential visitors (Alfandi, 2020; Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022). Despite these challenges, OIC countries have a significant opportunity to benefit from the gastronomy tourism market, particularly with the increasing awareness of Muslim-friendly and halal tourism. The market size for halal tourism is projected to reach US$417.6 billion by 2034, growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.6% from 2024 to 2034 (Future Market Size, 2024). While some countries, such as Malaysia, Morocco, and Türkiye, already receive a significant share of this market, more destinations in Asia, Africa, and Arab OIC countries should aim to attract visitors to their regions. Promoting halal foods and providing halal-based activities can help OIC countries gain a share of this market (Battour et al., 2022). Moreover, international tourists increasingly value responsible and sustainable tourism (Schönherr & Pikkemaat, 2023). OIC countries have the potential to offer traditional farming practices related to gastronomy tourism (SESRIC, 2023b). By promoting and marketing their unique culinary heritage through travel companies, culinary activities (such as festivals and cooking classes), and social media, OIC countries can raise awareness of their food culture (SESRIC, 2023b). Gastronomy tourism in OIC countries is still evolving, but there is growing interest in showcasing member countries' authentic foods and food experiences to global tourists. If OIC members can reinforce their current strengths through strategic plans and initiatives, many of these countries could become central hubs of gastronomy tourism in the future.

In summary, fostering gastronomy tourism demands a holistic approach that integrates innovation, strategic partnerships, targeted marketing, infrastructure development, and supportive policies. By embracing these strategies, OIC member countries can enhance their global competitiveness. Based on data collected thorough field case studies as well as desk-based research involving OIC and non-

OIC case studies, the following policy recommendations are proposed underpinned by existing theoretical assessments and empirical findings presented throughout this report.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION #1: Boosting agriculture and supporting local farmers/livestock breeders

Qualitative and quantitative data collected during the field studies reveal that lack of support for agricultural activities and local farmers/ livestock breeders a potential barrier to the development of gastronomy tourism. The data also reveal that investing in agriculture and supporting farmers is a key strategy to foster gastronomy tourism. Given that local products and ingredients are key assets for gastronomy tourism, OIC countries need to ensure a sustainable agricultural sector that provides a consistent supply of fresh, high-quality ingredients which are essential for authentic gastronomic experiences. Investment in sustainable farming practices not only ensures the quality and authenticity of the cuisine but also attracts tourists seeking unique, eco-friendly food adventures. The call for boosting agriculture and supporting farmers and livestock breeders, however, should not be interpreted as an indication of weakness in the OIC agriculture sector. Contrarily, recent reports (e.g., SESRIC, 2023) show that over the last decade, the agricultural production in OIC witnessed a growth of just over 13%, surpassing that of non-OIC developing countries (around 11%) and the global average (around 10%). This indicates that the potential is there, however, there might be a missed opportunity in terms of linking agriculture and farming to gastronomy product development. In other words, if gastronomy tourism is to be developed in OIC countries, agriculture and farming/livestock practices should be supported through subsidies, training programs, and infrastructure development. For instance, access to financial resources (e.g., loans) could be relaxed and financial incentives could be provided to encourage agricultural and farming activities. Training opportunities covering innovative methods and practices in agriculture could be provided. More importantly, improving infrastructure is essential to the development of agriculture and farming activities. This is important given that 21 out of 46 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are members of the OIC.

To establish a community-based gastronomy tourism, it is essential that farmers and agricultural practitioners benefit from gastronomy tourism. This can be ensured through establishing farmers' markets and farm-to-table restaurants. This will not only ensure community-based gastronomy tourism, but will also create direct connections between tourists and local producers, enriching the culinary experience. OIC countries can also promote agri-tourism activities such as farm visits, cooking classes, and harvest festivals. These agri-tourism activities are common in leading non-OIC gastronomy destinations including Italy and France and have proved to be useful in fostering gastronomy tourism and boosting destination reputation/image. In sum, building on the already growing agriculture sector, OIC countries need to establish collaborative efforts between tourism boards, agricultural departments, and local communities to contribute the development and marketing of gastronomy tourism. By integrating agriculture with gastronomy tourism, OIC

destinations can create a sustainable tourism model that benefits both the environment and the local economy, offering tourists a richer and more meaningful travel experience. The synergy between local agriculture and tourism will not only enhance the culinary offerings but will also promote regional identity and cultural heritage, making it a compelling strategy for tourism development.

Closely related to agriculture and farming, combating climate change should be viewed as a priority (despite the lack of support in the collected data presumably due to the lack of knowledge on the potential linkage between climate change and gastronomy). The challenge posed by climate change is even greater for OIC countries given that the majority of these countries are Low- and Middle-income Countries (LMICs) where resources and expertise might be limited and inherently preservation of food heritage might not be a policy priority. While this is a global challenge that is not restricted to OIC countries, it is imperative to monitor the impact of climate change and engage in mitigating strategies to reduce potential harmful impacts on food and livestock producers and inherently gastronomy tourism.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION #2: Infrastructure and superstructure development

As highlighted earlier, a significant number of OIC countries are listed as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) which indicates a lack of resources necessary to develop the infrastructure for tourism in general let alone gastronomy tourism. Hence, it is difficult to talk about gastronomy tourism if accessibility to gastronomy destinations is not facilitated. Therefore, high-quality transportation infrastructure, such as airports, roads, and public transit, is essential access to culinary destinations so tourists can explore diverse gastronomic offerings. This infrastructure is also necessary to support the distribution of fresh local produce to restaurants and markets, maintaining the quality and culinary traditions authenticity of the food. When financial resources to develop and improve infrastructure are insufficient, alternative resources should be sought including the build, operate, and transfer ("BOT") approach.

On a higher level, superstructure development in OIC countries is also pivotal to the development of gastronomy tourism. This includes the establishment of culinary schools, food markets, and hospitality establishments. One way to boost superstructure development can be through supporting local hospitality entrepreneurs. This can be achieved through providing financial incentives, such as grants or low-interest loans, to local entrepreneurs, small-scale farmers, and culinary start-ups, encouraging them to develop innovative food products and services that cater to tourists, while preserving and promoting traditional culinary practices. The data collected for the current report indicated a lack of skilled labour in the area of gastronomy tourism. Hence, establishment of culinary schools can contribute massively by training skilled chefs to preserve local culinary traditions. These schools should also engage local communities as the natural reservoir of culinary heritage and cooking transitions. There is also a scope to for these culinary schools to initiate culinary exchange programs that allow chefs, food professionals, and hospitality, tourism, event and gastronomy students from OIC

member countries to learn from each other and share culinary techniques. These exchanges can help enhance the culinary skills and knowledge of participants, contributing directly and indirectly to enriching the gastronomic offerings of OIC destinations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION #3 Moving beyond mass tourism

Understandably, tourism in many of the OIC member countries is still maturing attracting comparatively considerable numbers of international tourist arrivals. Hence, strategic development plans as well as branding and marketing strategies are generally geared towards attracting/obtaining greater share from mainstream mass tourism market with little efforts being made to capitalize on existing potential (including gastronomic assets) to diversify tourism offerings. For instance, the Maldives (one of the case studies investigated in the present report) is often associated with *sun, sea, and sand* tourism. In other words, efforts to attract diverse tourist segments through tourism product diversification are notably limited. Successful examples of OIC member countries that have been able to target niche markets include Türkiye (e.g., health tourism), Malaysia (e.g., Halal tourism), and United Arab Emirate (e.g., luxury tourism). Given the strong food heritage and established cooking traditions of many OIC countries, there is a scope to integrate gastronomy in tourism development plans. This should be viewed as a strategic decision to move beyond mass tourism to achieve competitive advantage through unique gastronomic experiences.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION #4: Creating and implementing well-defined marketing strategies

OIC Cases studies involved in this report (i.e., Uganda, the Maldives, Türkiye, and Egypt) all have considerably strong food heritage and established cooking traditions. However, these do not seem to be integrated into well-defined marketing strategies. Integrating gastronomy tourism into marketing strategies requires a multifaceted approach that highlights the unique culinary assets of a destination. Effective marketing campaigns should emphasize the authenticity and diversity of local cuisine, promoting it as a key component of the cultural experience. Branding and marketing efforts might not lead to immediate positive outcomes (i.e., increased demand on gastronomy tourism) and therefore, they should be viewed as strategic and long-term actions. Utilizing storytelling techniques can enhance the appeal, where narratives about local chefs, traditional recipes, and food production methods captivate potential tourists while also contribute to constructing a destination image where food forms an integral part.

Collaborations with local and international chefs, celebrity gourmet and chiefs, and food influencers can amplify reach and credibility, creating compelling content for social media and digital platforms. These collaborations can be framed as gastrodiplomacy activities targeting major gastro tourist-sending markets.

Marketing campaigns in OIC countries should also leverage food festivals as unique selling propositions, positioning the destination as a prime spot for food enthusiasts. Notably, while food-

themed festivals are at the heart of gastronomy tourism and have been traditionally recognised as an important element contributing to destination competitiveness, the vast majority of gastronomy and food festivals in OIC countries are celebrated domestically with limited international reach. Hence, there is a need to organize international food festivals, culinary exhibitions, and cooking competitions that highlight the diverse cuisines of OIC member countries. These events should be marketed globally to attract culinary tourists, and should include participation from renowned chefs and food critics to enhance visibility. Likewise, marketing campaigns in OIC countries should highlight culinary tours and cooking classes as key attractions. Integrating gastronomy tourism with other cultural and natural attractions can create comprehensive travel packages that appeal to diverse tourist interests. Additionally, utilizing targeted advertising and personalized marketing techniques can attract niche markets, such as gourmet travelers and eco-conscious foodies, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the campaign.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION #5: Facilitating public-private partnerships

Tourism in general and inherently gastronomy tourism is unlikely to thrive in the absence of strong collaboration between government bodies, tourism boards, and private sector stakeholders (e.g., culinary academies, hotels, restaurants). Hence, it is vital to encourage a strong and sustainable collaboration to develop and promote gastronomy tourism. Combining the strengths of both sectors, these public-private partnerships can help fund infrastructure projects, marketing campaigns, and gastronomy events. Governments can provide the necessary infrastructure, regulatory support, and funding, while private enterprises bring innovation, expertise, and market reach. These collaborations can lead to the development of culinary districts, food festivals, and marketing campaigns that effectively promote local cuisine. By working together, public and private entities can elevate the global profile of OIC member countries as prime gastronomic destinations. One example can be consolidating joint efforts of public and private sectors to increase visibility of gastronomy assets by aiming to meet the criteria off the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION #6: Fostering capacity building

Human resources are vital for the success of tourism products and gastronomy tourism is no exception. Hence, there is a scope to focus on capacity-building as a strategic tool to foster gastronomy tourism. To do so, OIC member countries need to put more efforts into the development of specialized culinary training programs especially within higher education institutions. These training programs would help increase awareness about food heritage and cooking traditions while also identifying ways to integrate these into available tourism products (e.g., cultural tourism). The capacity building efforts can also involve cross-border exchanges and workshops among higher education institutions within and beyond OIC member states to promote knowledge sharing and cultural exchange in gastronomy.

Annexes

Annex A: International tourist arrivals to OIC member states (millions
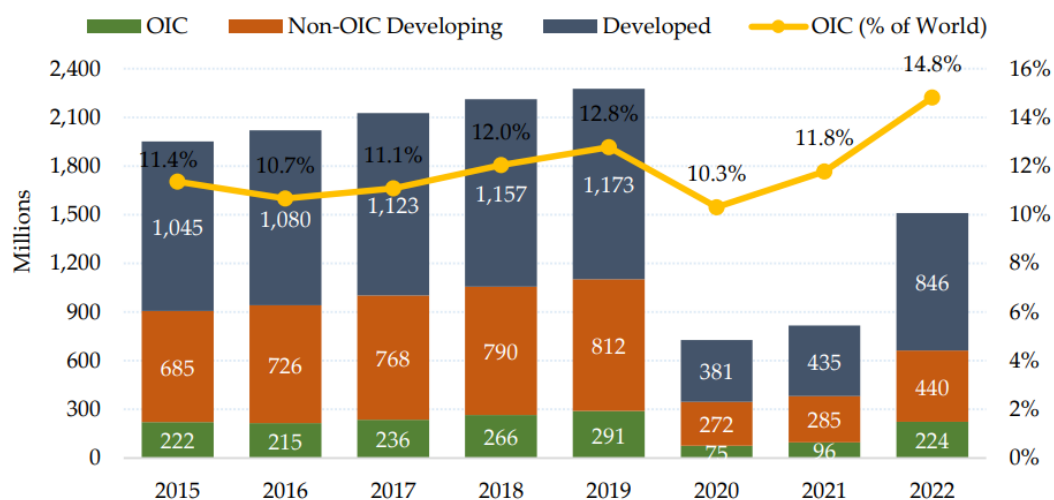
Source: (SESRIC, 2024)

Annex B: The status of the case OIC countries in terms of their gastronomy tourism potential

Case country	Foodservice Market Estimation (USD)	Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) - 2024-2029
Egypt	9.04 billion	15%
Türkiye	13.88 billion	12%
Uganda	15.48 billion	10 %
Maldives	190 million	7%

Sources: *(Euromonitor, 2024; Market Research, 2024; Market Research Future, 2024; Statista, 2024).*

Annex C: Governmental and non-governmental international organizations with their existing roles in gastronomy tourism

Organization/Association	Role/ Objective
International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT)	Empowering local communities by raising awareness of the importance to safeguard and promote distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism assets.
Citta slow	Encouraging high quality local food and drink, general conviviality and the opposition to cultural standardisation.
Culinary Tourism Alliance	Bring people together from across the culinary tourism industry to support the creation of shared food and drink experiences that celebrate the history, heritage, and culture of a destination.
World Food Travel Association	World Food Travel Association is the world's oldest and largest organization focused on the development and promotion of food and beverage tourism (a.k.a. culinary tourism and gastronomy tourism).
Chaine des Rotisseurs	An International Association of Gastronomy now established in over 75 countries bringing together enthusiasts who share the same values of quality, fine dining, the encouragement of the culinary arts and the pleasures of the table.
WORLDCHEFS	A non-political professional organization, dedicated to maintaining and improving the culinary standards of global cuisines.
Social Gastronomy Movement	A growing global impact network of people and organizations using the power of food to transform individual lives, foster more inclusive communities, and create positive social change. Social Gastronomy works to address social inequality, improve nutrition, and engage people to leverage their skills for social good.
Slow Food	A global movement acting together to ensure good, clean and fair food for all.
The Asian Food and Agriculture Cooperation Initiative (AFACI)	An inter-governmental and multilateral cooperation body that aims to improve food production and promote sustainable agriculture in Asian countries through knowledge and technology transfer and sharing.
European Regions of Gastronomy	Contributing to a better quality of life for their citizens by raising awareness about the importance of cultural and food uniqueness by improving sustainable tourism standards, stimulating creativity and gastronomic innovation.

Annex D: Key academic journals publishing in the area of gastronomy, culinary, and food

Title	Publisher	Country	Website
International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science	Elsevier	Netherlands	https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/international-journal-of-gastronomy-and-food-science
International Journal of Gastronomy Research	IPEAK ACADEMY LTD	UK	https://www.gastronomyresearch.com/index.php/ijgr"
Toros University Journal of Food, Nutrition and Gastronomy	Toros University	Türkiye	https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jfng
Gastronomica – The Journal for Food Studies	University of California Press	USA	https://online.ucpress.edu/gastronomica
Journal of Culinary Science & Technology	Taylor & Francis Group	UK	https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wcsc20/current
Gastronomy and Tourism (Previously published as Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism)	Cognizant Communication Corporation	USA	https://cognizantcommunication.com/publication/gastronomy-and-tourism/
International Journal of Food Science & Technology	Wiley	USA	https://ifst.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/13652621
Journal of Food Science and Technology	Springer	Germany	https://link.springer.com/journal/13197
Food Science and Technology International	Sage	USA	https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/food-science-and-technology-international
British Food Journal	Emerald Group Publishing	UK	https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/0007-070X
Food Quality and Preference	Elsevier	Netherlands	https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/food-quality-and-preference
Nutrition & Food Science	Emerald Group Publishing	UK	https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/issn/0034-6659
Journal of Tourism & Gastronomy Studies	Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University	Türkiye	https://jotags.net/index.php/jotags
Journal of Food Processing and Preservation	Wiley	USA	https://ifst.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/jfpp
Journal of Gastronomy, Hospitality and Travel	Rahman Temizkan	Türkiye	https://www.joghat.org/

Source: Authors' own creation

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