

Article

Motivations of the Culinary Tourist in the City of Trapani, Italy

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Abstract: Culinary tourism is a popular practice and the resulting economic activity has great potential to enhance the attractiveness of a tourist destination. When visitors search for unique and genuine gastronomic experiences in a visited area, gastronomy becomes a germane motivation for selecting a travel destination. This study addresses culinary tourism through segmentation of visitors to Trapani, Italy, concerning the importance of gastronomy in their choice of travel destinations. This study identifies three types of tourists with different degrees of interest in local gastronomy: survivors, enjoyers, and experiencers. According to the results of statistical analysis, experiencers (tourists with a great interest in local gastronomy) show the greatest appreciation for local food as well as being the group that makes the greatest economic impact in the area.

Keywords: gastronomy; tourism; segmentation; Trapani; Italy; assessment of attributes

1. Introduction

This article contributes to the current academic literature on the gastronomic experiences of tourists. Its main goal is the analysis of the tourists' interest and motivations towards the local cuisine of Trapani, in the region of Sicily, Italy. Studying tourists' motivations is essential to understanding gastronomic tourism because, when tourists travel, they visit restaurants—and similar places—to satisfy their basic physiological need of nourishment. Naturally, tourists consume food out of necessity, but their desires and motivations for eating can differ [1,2]. Tourists may desire to learn about the local food and have gastronomic experiences, and culinary expectations can therefore significantly influence the choice of destination [3–5]. According to Fields [6], four types of gastronomic motivations can be identified among tourists: physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status and prestige.

Analysis of gastronomic tourism involves the study of visitor behaviour patterns. A traveller who is not interested in the gastronomy of the place visited, or does not travel with the express motivation to taste local food, considers food a resource to satisfy a mere physiological need. There are, however, tourists who do show an interest in gastronomy, and the main reason to travel for this class of consumer is to get in touch with different gastronomic habits and cultures and learn about them, tasting local foods, and culturally enhancing their knowledge.

Studies conducted on this subject show two substantial findings [6,7]: first, tourists interested in destination gastronomy are usually more willing to spend money on food and, second, such tourists usually demand higher levels of quality and authenticity from the local cuisine.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gastronomy and Tourism

Gastronomy offers visitors a unique experience. It is essential to analyse the tourist behaviour and its link with the cuisine of the visited destination when studying gastronomic tourism. However, as mentioned, not all types of tourists are curious about local cuisine. Some tourists are not interested in the culinary heritage of the place visited and do not consider food as a distinctive attribute of the site, but simply a resource to satisfy the need to eat. Other tourists, however, consider gastronomy an integral cultural experience, crucial for knowing and understanding the region visited [8]. For this type of tourist, gastronomy represents an important motivation for the trip, and scientific studies on this type of tourist have increased considerably in recent years. Henderson [9] determined four research lines for gastronomic tourism: (1) the gastronomic behaviour of the tourist at the destination, (2) gastronomy as a resource creating a tourism practice, (3) the analysis of gastronomy as a component of marketing, and (4) the economic impact exerted by culinary tourism in a certain geographical area. This article contributes to the first line of research proposed by Henderson [9] through an analysis of the link between gastronomy and tourist behaviour in the city of Trapani, Italy. As mentioned above, the motivations of a tourist interested in local gastronomy fall into four groups: physical, cultural, interpersonal, and status and prestige [6]. Physical motivations refer to gastronomy as a basic human need for food. Cultural motivations concentrate on the tourists' desire to interpret the destination visited through its local gastronomic culture. Interpersonal motivations analyse the people's need for socialization: food has the power to bring people together and it facilitates interaction. The motivations of status and prestige derive from the social role of culinary experiences. The combination of some or all of these motivations encourages some tourists to show a marked interest in local cuisine, and the desire to chase new gastronomic experiences influences the decision concerning which destination to visit [4].

2.2. Segmentation of Tourists with Regard to Gastronomy

Segmentation of tourists represents a key element for the proper management of a destination and facilitates the development of specific tourism products to meet the diverse needs of each segment. Segmentation studies deal with variables such as motivation, lifestyle, or sociodemographic profile. In the subsector of gastronomic tourism, it is therefore essential to classify groups of tourists with similar characteristics. Diverse people come to a site interested in local cuisine [10], but within a group of tourists with a culinary motivation, different levels of interest in gastronomy can be detected [11]. Regarding the segmentation of culinary tourists, it is important to point out, among others, the research carried out by Kivela and Crotts [11], McKercher et al. [12], Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [13], and Robinson et al. [14]. These studies determined that the tourists most interested in the gastronomy of a destination usually belong to a class with high purchasing power and such tourists also demand high quality from the local cuisine.

Kivela and Crotts [11] classified tourists based on three key parameters: (1) gastronomic culture, (2) attachment to gastronomy as a decisive element for travel, and (3) examination of the tourists' gastronomic experience. Based on tourist responses to the questions asked, they proposed a model of gastronomic tourist segmentation into two classes: (1) those with little interest in local gastronomy and greater interest in other products offered at the destination, and (2) tourists who really have a relevant interest to know and taste the destination cuisine.

McKercher et al. [12] proposed a model for the segmentation of tourists according to three criteria: (1) studying the self-recognition of the traveller as a gastronomic tourist, (2) evaluating whether the tourist defines him- or herself as captivated by the gastronomy of the destination, and (3) investigating whether gastronomy is taken into account as a basic motivation in the decision concerning whether or not to carry out the trip. Based on the answers to the questions posed above, five segments of

culinary tourists were defined: definite culinary tourist, likely culinary tourist, possible culinary tourist, unlikely culinary tourist, and non-culinary tourist.

Three other patterns of categorization can be found in Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [13]. The first is how the chance to have new gastronomic experiences can be a motivational push to travel. The second concerns the centrality of gastronomy as an element for travel to a specific destination. The third considers the link between gastronomy and tourist satisfaction with the site. Based on these three guidelines, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [13] classified tourists into three groups: (1) “experiencers”—tourists who give fundamental weight to gastronomy on a trip, (2) “enjoyers”—tourists who only feel a certain inclination towards gastronomy and culinary aspect, and (3) “survivors”—those for whom gastronomy does not constitute a paramount element for travelling.

Robinson et al. [14] presented a segmentation based on the involvement of tourists in various gastronomic activities at the destination, distinguishing two large groups—highbrows and lowbrows—differentiated by the expense incurred related to gastronomy at the destination. Based on these previous studies, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Gastronomic motivation, as a fundamental factor for destination selection, is diverse among tourists visiting Trapani (Italy).*

2.3. Sociodemographic Traits of the Gastronomic Tourist

According to Park [15], the study of socio-demographic traits of culinary tourists is focused on the investigation of patterns of culinary consumption. Ignatov and Smith [16] pointed out that the segment of tourists who affirm that gastronomy represents a main element for the selection of a destination are approximately 45 years old, and such tourists also have a high level of education and a medium-to-high income level. Similarly, authors such as McKercher et al. [12] believe that the most distinct features of the sociodemographic profile of culinary tourists are university education, medium-to-high income level, and an age of 35–45. Correia et al. [17] highlighted a valuable trait: women with a university educational level appeared to be more interested in gastronomy than men. Similarly, Abdelhamied [18] also noted that the gastronomic tourist tends to have a university education and a high level of income. The foregoing conclusions are supported by other research conducted by Getz et al. [19], Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [13], Jiménez Beltrán et al. [20], and Levitt et al. [10]. From this it can be deduced that the gastronomic tourist usually has a university-level education, is aged between 35 and 45 years, and has an, on average, a medium-to-high income level.

Considering the preceding, there does appear to be a specific socio-demographic profile for the gastronomic tourist identified in the literature, which would be attractive working material for the management of different tourist destinations. This is because the tourist segment in question has the willingness to learn about the culture of the destination site through gastronomy and its notorious level of expenditure, which supposes increased economic benefits for the destination by developing its gastronomic heritages [21]. Based on these studies, the following hypotheses were presented:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Older tourists have a more favourable attitude towards local cuisine.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Tourists with a greater gastronomic motivation have a higher educational level.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Visitors with greater interest in local cuisine generate a higher economic impact.*

2.4. Perceived Value of Local Gastronomy

The proposal of gastronomic offerings that can make a specific destination attractive allow tourism development to have a positive impact on other sectors and activities of the local economy. Such development would also provide tourist activities capable of differentiating the local offering

and competing against destination seasonality. To achieve this development, it would be essential to strengthen public and private actions by encouraging new culinary art focused on promoting food-based tourism. According to Ignatov and Smith [16], this can be achieved either by means of suitable establishments—such as proper restaurants, routes, and infrastructure—or by decisively promoting the development of such activities. It could also be important to link gastronomic activities with complementary pursuits, such as wine tourism. This would facilitate the creation of a unique and differentiated experience from the destination visit [22]. To achieve an unforgettable gastronomic experience, it is essential that the destination's culinary offerings be both recognizable and special. The destination should, therefore, have a sufficient number of restaurants offering truly unique gastronomic experiences to tourists [5].

In their gastronomic analysis of the city of Córdoba, Spain, Jiménez Beltrán et al. [20] mentioned that traditional culinary arts represented a strategic component both for the development of attractive aspects of the destination and for the transmission of the cultural legacy of the site to the tourist. It is therefore germane to develop culinary methods based on tradition and originality that allow the preservation of the culinary heritage, as well as novel gastronomic proposals [19,23]. Based on these suggestions, the following hypothesis was presented:

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *The perception of local gastronomy is different among tourists, being more valued by visitors with greater gastronomic motivation.*

3. Description of the Research Area

The province of Trapani (2459.84 km²) extends to the extreme western tip of Sicily and is bordered by the waters of the Sicilian Channel and the Tyrrhenian Sea (the watershed is represented by the ancient tower of Ligny in the city of Trapani) (Figure 1). The territory is divided into 25 municipalities, and its economy is mainly based on the tourist sector, developed thanks to the presence of a rich historical, cultural, and naturalistic heritage, and the production of wine and salt. Places of special interest are: Scopello, the Egadi islands and San Vito lo Capo, for its crystal clear waters; the volcanic island of Pantelleria; the Zingaro Nature Reserve, with its 1600 ha of vegetation; the Saline Natural Reserve; Erice, an ancient Phoenician city; the archaeological areas of Mothia, which show evidence of Phoenician–Punic influence; Selinunte, the largest archaeological park in Europe; and the ancient city of Segesta. This territory is one of the most visited areas of Italy and boasts a millenary enological tradition: each wine label is unique, being an expression of the place where the wine is born, including Marsala wine, the first Italian product with the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) label.

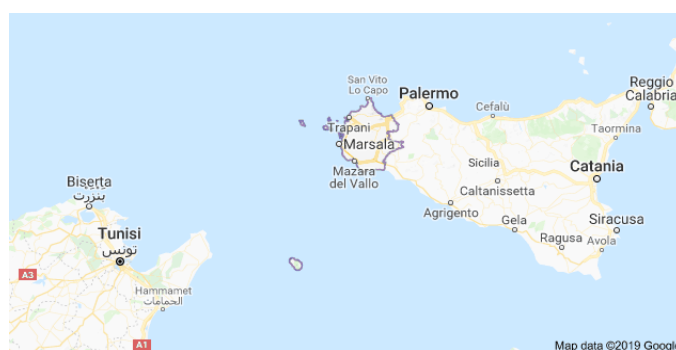


Figure 1. The province of Trapani. Source: Google Maps [24].

The local cuisine shows the influence of the various cultures that have dominated this area over the centuries, including Arab influence. The main dish is the *Trapanese couscous*, which unlike Maghreb couscous (based on legumes and mutton), has a fish-based dressing. This dish is celebrated with dedicated festivals, including the Cous Cous Fest, an international event held every year in the locality of San Vito lo Capo. Street food is also appreciated in this region, especially in the form of the typical

Sicilian dishes incorporating various fried foods. The synergy between landscape, flavor, and culture creates a perception of beauty and well-being particularly appreciated by visitors to this region.

Furthermore, Trapani is presented as an area strongly dedicated to the promotion and implementation of tourist activities due to the large quantity of resources available: archaeological parks, relevant cultural places, historical centers with valuable artistic and monumental resources, natural spaces, and a great variety of wine and food. This last is evidenced in great wine routes.

4. Methodology

4.1. Survey Design

For this study, a survey was carried out with a representative sample of visitors to the city of Trapani, Italy, to understand their motivations, opinions, and assessments of the local gastronomy. The questionnaire used sought maximum clarity in the questions, with the aim of reducing the interview time with the tourists. The questionnaire was based on those from studies [4,5,13,25].

The questionnaire was divided into two blocks. The first contained questions related to gastronomy, including the respondents' interest in gastronomy and its importance when traveling, motivations that contributed to the traveller's experience in relation to local gastronomy, and an evaluation of the general attributes related to the dishes tasted and the service received in the gastronomic market. The second block collected socio-demographic characteristics from the sampled tourists (age, gender, economic level, place of origin, and degree of academic education). The questionnaire used questions with yes/no answers, questions with open and closed answers, and questions where a 5-point Likert-type scale was used (1 = of very little importance, 5 = very important). The survey was distributed in two languages (Italian and English).

4.2. Data Collection

A total of 415 questionnaires were collected from tourists, of which 396 were valid. Data collection was conducted between July and December 2018 in different culinary establishments in the historic centre of Trapani. Surveys were performed on different days and times, with the aim of collecting the greatest possible diversity of people and situations. The sample was achieved with a non-probabilistic technique, widely used in this kind of research, where tourists are intercepted in a specific space and time [26]. The rejection rate was low and not significant.

The target of this study included national and foreign tourists visiting the city of Trapani, regardless of whether they made an overnight stay in the city or if the visit was completed with stays at other destinations on the island of Sicily. For the consideration of the size of the target population, the number of visitors to the city in 2017 was used. According to the data of the Italian National Statistical Institute, a total of 714,411 tourists stayed in different establishments in the city of Trapani. Based on this number, and assuming an approximate character, if this investigation had used random sampling, the sampling error for a confidence level of 95% would have been $\pm 4.9\%$.

4.3. Data Analysis

Statistical analysis of data was performed with the program SPSS v23 (IBM, New York, NY, USA), making use of the different tests for reliability and validity of the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha). The multivariate technique of grouping cases (K-means clusters) was applied to detect groups of tourists with a similar interest in local gastronomy, as well as discriminant analysis to validate this grouping. Based on the segments obtained in the cluster analysis, statistical and association measures were applied from two-dimensional contingency tables (contingency coefficient and gamma test). Non-parametric statistical procedures were also used (including the Kruskal–Wallis H [27] and the Mann–Whitney [28] U test) to study the possible differences between the detected groups.

5. Results

5.1. Gastronomic Clusters

To study the motivation and interest in local cuisine among visitors to Trapani, the participants in the study were asked to indicate the degree of importance of gastronomy for their trip based on three items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the final scale indicated a value of 0.919, representing a significant internal consistency between the elements of the scale. The critical level (p) associated with Friedman's statistical χ^2 (17,520) of the analysis—used to test the null hypothesis that all the elements of the scale have the same mean—was less than 0.05. We could therefore reject the hypothesis of equality of the means of the elements.

One of the techniques most commonly applied for sample segmentation in tourism research is factor-cluster analysis [29,30]. This technique has received some criticism, however, due to problems, such as the loss of original information, and the abstract interpretation and presentation of erroneous assumptions [31–33]. This study employed the segmentation approach recommended by Dolnicar [31] based on direct grouping of the original scores. According to this approach, the use of original scores provides more accurate segmentation, given their ability to retain a greater degree of the original data [33–35].

The latest tourism research recommends the use of hierarchical clustering followed by a non-hierarchical method [36]. We therefore used two hierarchical algorithms: the complete link and the Ward method. These techniques play an important role in research focused on the segmentation of tourism demand [35]. Here, we used these techniques to identify groups of visitors with similar interests in local gastronomy who gave similar weight to gastronomy as a decisive factor when selecting the destination of their trip. The analysis of the resulting agglomerations and dendrograms suggested two or three cluster solutions. The more detailed study of the cluster and its size, as well as its subsequent analysis using a non-hierarchical K-means clustering algorithm, confirmed that the most appropriate solution included three groups, or segments, of tourists.

Following Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [13], we labelled segments obtained as survivors, enjoyers, and experiencers. This model was used because it has a greater acceptance by the scientific community that specialises in gastronomic tourism studies. The first segment, survivors, consisted of 37.4% of the visitors surveyed. This group was characterized by having low values in the three items shown in Table 1 and by presenting an interest in local cuisine. The second segment, called enjoyers because of an average interest in gastronomy, consisted of 30.1% of tourists surveyed and was characterized by having intermediate values in the three survey items. The final segment, called experiencers, showed the highest gastronomic interest and consisted of 32.6% of the sample. As can be seen in Table 1, the results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test made it possible to maintain that the averages compared were not equal between the different clusters. Given the impossibility of detecting where these differences were, we used the Mann–Whitney U test.

Table 1. Characterization of the clusters based on gastronomy attitude.

| Gastronomy Attitude | Food Clusters | | | Kruskal Wallis H | |
|--|---------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|--------|
| | Survivors | Enjoyers | Experiencers | χ^2 | Sig. |
| How important is gastronomy as a motivation for travel? | 1.87 | 3.17 | 4.30 | 291.815 | <0.000 |
| How important are gastronomic experiences when you choose a destination for your trip? | 1.85 | 3.00 | 4.03 | 309.916 | <0.000 |
| How important is gastronomy for your satisfaction with your trip? | 1.79 | 3.02 | 4.18 | 337.933 | <0.000 |

The values in bold type present significant differences in two of three of the means clusters. To test for significant differences between the different means, the Mann–Whitney U test was applied. Source: Own elaboration.

These results are in line with previous research in the same field [4,5,13,37] and allowed us to accept Hypothesis 1 that stated that gastronomic motivation, as a fundamental aspect for destination selection, is diverse among the tourists visiting Trapani, Italy.

The three segments identified coincided with the ones highlighted by the recent literature on this topic, showing the existence of a group very interested in gastronomy and another with a lower interest. The “experiencers” segment can be equated with what Hjalager [1] called “experimental gastronomy tourists” and what McKercher et al. [12] called “definite culinary tourist”. The “survivors” segment were equivalent to the “recreational tourist” in Hjalager [1], the “non-culinary tourist” in McKercher et al. [12], and the “not interested tourist” in Thompson and Prideaux [37].

5.2. Sociodemographic Profile of the Foreign Tourists

Concerning the sociodemographic profile of the sample, 60.4% were men and the remaining 39.6% were women, with no significant differences in data collection over the different months. The surveyed tourists were, in general, young travellers. As can be seen in Table 2, 52.5% of the tourists were 40 years old or younger. There were, however, age differences depending on the tourist segments identified (Kruskal–Wallis $H = 130,169$, $p = 0.000$). In line with other studies on the subject [5,38], the presence of older tourists was higher in the segments with a greater declared interest in local gastronomy. Using the gamma coefficient, it can be stated that there was a direct and significant relationship between age and high interest or positive attitude towards local gastronomy (gamma coefficient = 0.647, $p = 0.000$). This allowed us to confirm Hypothesis 2: tourists with a higher age present a more favourable attitude towards local gastronomy.

Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of the tourists of Trapani.

| Variables | Categories | Food Clusters | | | Total |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|----------|--------------|-------|
| | | Survivors | Enjoyers | Experiencers | |
| Gender (N = 396) | Man | 79.7% | 52.1% | 45.7% | 60.4% |
| | Woman | 20.3% | 47.9% | 54.3% | 39.6% |
| Age (N = 396) | <30 years of age | 68.2% | 36.1% | 7.8% | 38.9% |
| | 30–40 years old | 18.9% | 14.3% | 7.0% | 13.6% |
| | 41–45 years old | 5.4% | 15.1% | 19.4% | 12.9% |
| | 51–60 years old | 1.4% | 18.5% | 41.1% | 19.4% |
| | >60 years of age | 6.1% | 16.0% | 24.8% | 15.2% |
| Educational level (N = 392) | Primary education | 5.5% | 7.6% | 7.0% | 6.6% |
| | Secondary education | 84.8% | 68.9% | 46.9% | 67.6% |
| | University education | 8.3% | 20.2% | 43.8% | 23.5% |
| | Master's/PhD | 1.4% | 3.4% | 2.3% | 2.3% |
| Occupational category (N = 391) | Manager | 1.4% | 6.8% | 17.1% | 8.2% |
| | Civil servant | 6.3% | 10.2% | 20.2% | 12.0% |
| | Salaried Employee | 36.1% | 28.0% | 25.6% | 30.2% |
| | Self-employed worker | 3.5% | 12.7% | 19.4% | 11.5% |
| | Student | 38.2% | 28.0% | 1.6% | 23.0% |
| | Unemployed | 4.9% | 1.7% | / | 2.3% |
| | Retired | 4.9% | 11.0% | 14.7% | 10.0% |
| Country of origin (N = 396) | Domestic | 59.5% | 58.8% | 65.1% | 61.1% |
| | Non-domestic | 40.5% | 41.2% | 34.9% | 38.9% |
| Income (N = 372) | Under €700 | 34.1% | 26.1% | 0.8% | 20.2% |
| | From €700 to €1000 | 9.1% | 2.7% | 1.6% | 4.6% |
| | From €1001 to €1500 | 25.8% | 11.7% | 17.8% | 18.8% |
| | From €1501 to €2500 | 29.5% | 40.5% | 37.2% | 35.5% |
| | From €2501 to €3500 | 1.5% | 15.3% | 24.0% | 13.4% |
| | Over €3500 | / | 3.6% | 18.6% | 7.5% |

Source: Own elaboration.

The educational level of tourists surveyed was medium or medium-low. Only 25.8% of the respondents had a university or post-graduate degree, compared to 67.6% with a secondary education. Analysing the level of education according to age, significant differences were detected, as older visitors had a higher level of education (gamma coefficient = 0.139, $p = 0.044$). Differences could also be seen when comparing the gastronomic segments (Kruskal–Wallis $H = 31.785$, $p = 0.000$), where there was greater gastronomic interest among tourists with a higher academic education (gamma coefficient = 0.425, $p = 0.000$). These results allowed us to accept Hypothesis 3, maintaining that greater interest in gastronomy is detectable in travellers with a higher academic education [10–12,16,20]. Concerning tourists' professions, salaried employees and students were the most prominent groups, followed by civil servants.

Regarding place of origin, 61.1% of visitors to Trapani were Italian nationals compared to 38.9% foreigners. Among the foreign visitors, French (37.7%) and Germans (23.4%) were the most prominent, followed by Spaniards (8.4%). Segment analysis did not show differences between tourist origin and their interest in gastronomy when travelling (Kruskal–Wallis $H = 1.299$, $p = 0.522$).

In terms of family monthly income level—expressed in euros—it is worth noting that 24.8% of respondents declared an income not exceeding €1000 per month, while 20.9% claimed they earned more than €2500 per month. In general terms, tourists visiting Trapani had moderate purchasing power: 35.5% of respondents declared an income between €1500 and €2500 per month. There were significant differences in terms of income level and interest in gastronomy (Kruskal–Wallis $H = 97.486$, $p = 0.000$), so it was possible to conclude that there was a direct relationship between greater purchasing power and interest in local gastronomy (gamma coefficient = 0.587, $p = 0.000$).

Among the surveyed tourists, 61.1% were repeating their experience in Trapani. Only 11.9% did not overnight in the city and 82.5% stayed more than three nights. The average overnight rate was 4.94 nights, with differences between the three clusters (Kruskal–Wallis $H = 20.380$, $p = 0.000$). Tourists with a greater interest in local gastronomy tended to stay longer at the destination (gamma coefficient = 0.240, $p = 0.000$).

The most common types of accommodation used were tourist apartments, 4- or 5-star hotels, and 2- or 3-star hotels, with significant differences between the different study segments (Kruskal–Wallis $H = 45.765$; $p = 0.000$). More “experiencers” tended to stay in 4- or 5-star hotels; this segment also tended to stay longer (greater number of nights stayed) and had greater purchasing power (higher monthly income), which served as a basis for accepting Hypothesis 4, stating that tourists more interested in the gastronomy of the destination tend to show greater spending capacity [6,7,21].

5.3. Assessment of Local Gastronomy

To analyse the main attributes of the gastronomy of Trapani, tourists were asked to assess those attributes to identify possible strong and weak aspects. Table 3 shows that the attributes that the tourists valued most were the “quality of the dishes”, “variety of dishes”, and “prices”. The following aspects received lower values: “facilities”, “environment of the establishments”, and the “innovation and new flavours in the dishes”. These aspects perhaps need more attention from the sector so they can be improved to increase tourist satisfaction.

Table 3. Tourist assessment of the attributes of Trapani's gastronomy.

| Attributes | Mean | Ranking |
|---|------|---------|
| Quality of dishes | 4.21 | 1 |
| Variety of dishes | 4.12 | 2 |
| Prices | 3.99 | 3 |
| Service and hospitality | 3.95 | 4 |
| Facilities | 3.29 | 5 |
| Environment of the establishments | 3.11 | 6 |
| Innovation and new flavours in the dishes | 2.58 | 7 |
| Cronbach's Alpha | | 0.776 |

Source: Own elaboration.

Analysis by tourist segment (Table 4) showed significantly different perceptions of the gastronomy of Trapani [4,5,25,39,40]. All of the gastronomic attributes, except for service and hospitality, were much more valued by “experiencers”, the cluster of travellers with the greatest interest in gastronomy (H₅).

Table 4. Cluster characterization based on aspects of the Trapani’s gastronomy.

| Attributes of Trapani’s Gastronomy | Food Clusters | | | Kruskal–Wallis H | |
|---|---------------|-------------|--------------|------------------|--------|
| | Survivors | Enjoyers | Experiencers | χ^2 | Sig. |
| Quality of dishes | 3.72 | 4.39 | 4.62 | 112.381 | <0.000 |
| Variety of dishes | 3.61 | 4.29 | 4.54 | 106.381 | <0.000 |
| Prices | 3.63 | 4.04 | 4.36 | 67.766 | <0.000 |
| Facilities | 3.03 | 3.34 | 3.55 | 36.912 | <0.000 |
| Environment of the establishments | 2.86 | 3.21 | 3.29 | 26.755 | <0.000 |
| Innovation and new flavours in the dishes | 2.17 | 2.72 | 2.75 | 19.875 | <0.000 |
| Service and hospitality | 3.66 | 4.14 | 4.11 | 38.603 | <0.000 |
| Level of medium gastronomy aspects | 3.24 | 3.76 | 3.89 | 67.038 | <0.000 |

The values in bold type present significant differences in two of three of the means clusters. To test for significant differences between the different means, the Mann–Whitney U test was applied. Source: Own elaboration.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

Within the different types of tourism, gastronomy is one of the greatest potential avenues for improving the image and attractiveness of tourist destinations. This is due to the increase in the search for authentic sensations related to the culinary culture of the visited destination, which has given rise to the appearance of tourists who consider local gastronomy as the main motivation to travel to a certain place. This study analysed the relationship between tourism and gastronomy in the city of Trapani, Italy. This way the results of this research allowed for the comparison of the results to similar studies. Also, the results allowed the tourist authorities in Trapani to know the characteristics of its visitants and their best valued gastronomic assets.

The gastronomy of a place currently has a fundamental role as an engine of local development and tourist attraction. The present work highlighted how visitors show different attitudes and motivations towards local gastronomy, and, based on these variables, interest towards local gastronomy when travelling gave rise to three different groups of tourists, which, following the model proposed by Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [13], have been named “survivors”, “enjoyers” and “experiencers”. Of these three tourism segments detected, gastronomy plays an important role for tourists with a high gastronomic interest—that is, the “experiencers”. This research reinforces the findings of previous studies investigating the relationship between tourism and gastronomy in Europe and increases the scientific knowledge of this subject. This study also helps to analyse the tourists’ perceptions of gastronomy and the potential of those perceptions to improve a destination’s competitive market position.

This study also provides valuable information for the sector to be applied in practice. The main contribution to the sector has to be seen in the achievement of a better understanding of the characteristics of the different tourist segments identified and how they view local gastronomy, as this allows the sector to design tourism products according to the current demands and needs of modern tourists. To improve the tourism competitiveness of a city, this study pointed out the need to improve and modernize gastronomic establishments, as well as focusing on innovation in dishes and products.

The main limitation of this study is the time period, which was limited to six months, so it would be advisable to carry out further research throughout the whole year. It would also be useful to carry out an extension of this research focusing on the study of the offer side, to identify possible gaps between what tourists look for in the city of Trapani and what the tourism sector is currently offering.

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