

Gastronomy as a catalyst for destination branding and sustainable tourism: Insights from rural Serbia and Italy

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Abstract: Gastronomy plays a crucial role in shaping cultural identity and enhancing tourism, as travelers increasingly seek authentic culinary experiences that connect them to their destinations. The study conducted among 407 tourists in Radda in Chianti, Tuscany, Italy investigates how tourists' perceptions of a rural destination's food and wine culture influence their travel choices, satisfaction, and loyalty, emphasizing the importance of gastronomy in destination branding and sustainable tourism. Using Banoštor in Fruška Gora, Serbia, as a case study, the authors highlight that, despite its rich gastronomy, the destination struggles with international recognition compared to more established areas, such as Radda in Chianti. Through factor analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study identified key factors, including Local Influence, Gastronomic Identity, and Gastronomic Promotion, which significantly impact tourists' perceptions of the rural destination's gastronomy. These factors emphasize the importance of authentic, locally owned dining experiences and the strategic marketing of a destination's culinary heritage to enhance tourist satisfaction, support local economies, and drive regional growth. Overall, the findings affirm that a robust gastronomic identity is essential for successful promotion and economic benefits in food tourism, positioning gastronomy as a key driver of sustainable tourism.

Keywords: *gastronomy, destination branding, sustainable tourism, Serbia, Italy*

JEL Classification: L83, Q01, M31

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy, often regarded as the art of cooking and eating, transcends mere sustenance to become a vital component of cultural identity and tourism (Ozkan, Kocyigit & Kab0acik, 2025). As travelers seek authentic experiences that connect them to the places they visit, local cuisine plays a pivotal role in shaping a destination's identity and appeal (Quispe & Hernández-Rojas, 2025). The interplay between gastronomy and destination identity is pivotal in shaping visitor experiences (Alcívar-Vera, Hernández-Rojas & Huete-Alcocer, 2025), as food not only serves as a representation of a destination's identity and local culture but also functions as a compelling symbol that can draw in tourists (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2025). This relationship is evident in how iconic dishes become synonymous with specific locations, such as pizza in Naples (Varela, 2025) or paella in Valencia (Vidal-González, Medrano-Ábalos & Sáez-Álvarez, 2022), enhancing the unique appeal of these destinations and influencing visitors' travel intentions (Vujić, Cvijanović & Vujić, 2024). The influence of local gastronomy on destination identity is profound, as traditional dishes often serve as a mirror reflecting the cultural heritage of a community (Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024). According to Suttisansanee et al. (2023), the distinct flavors of Thai cuisine, characterized by their balance of sweet, sour, salty, and bitter, encapsulate the country's agricultural practices and historical trade routes. Local ingredients, such as lemongrass, galangal, and chili peppers, not only define the culinary landscape but also reveal regional variations and agricultural practices that have evolved over centuries (Baldwin, 2017).

This connection between food and identity fosters a sense of community pride, as locals often take great pride in their culinary traditions, which are passed down through generations (Simon-Roberts, 2025). According to Sgroi (2023), the unique gastronomy of a region can significantly enhance its tourism appeal; tourists are increasingly drawn to destinations that offer authentic food experiences, leading to a greater

appreciation of local culture and an influx of visitors eager to explore (do Nascimento Costa, da Rocha Viana, de Melo Junior, de Souza & de Sousa, 2025). According to Varela (2025), cities like Bologna in Italy have marketed themselves as gastronomic capitals, attracting food enthusiasts from around the world who seek to indulge in traditional dishes like tortellini and ragu. Such culinary icons contribute significantly to the destination's branding, akin to cultural and landscape offerings, thereby strengthening the destination's identity and attractiveness (Jerez, 2023; Bešić, Bogetić, Bakator & Petrevska, 2024). Gastronomic experiences, by their very nature, immerse tourists into the local community ecosystem, allowing them to participate in the production or consumption of local dishes, which fosters an authentic connection to the locale (Recuero-Virto & Arróspide, 2024). This not only enriches the visitor's overall satisfaction but also reinforces the perception of the destination's authenticity and identity, making gastronomy a crucial element in tourism development (Kim, Lee, Chua & Han, 2022). Consequently, understanding and leveraging the gastronomic identity of a region can lead to more effective tourism strategies, ultimately enhancing the destination's appeal and economic prosperity (Quispe & Hernández-Rojas, 2025).

Gastronomy serves as a powerful tool for enhancing visitor experience, with food festivals and culinary events playing a crucial role in attracting tourists (Pérez-Priego, García-Moreno García, Jara-Alba & Caro-Barrera, 2023). The integration of food and wine tourism into destination marketing is a complex process that focuses on creating immersive experiences rooted in local gastronomy and wine culture (Ratten & Strickland, 2024). Collaboration among local wineries, hospitality, and transportation sectors can lead to attractive tourist packages, while industry standards ensure consistent quality, fostering local economic development and cultural preservation (Vuković, Maiti, Vujko & Shams, 2020). Continued investment in infrastructure and marketing is essential for enhancing visitor experiences and ensuring the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of food and wine tourism destinations (Mora, Moral-Cuadra, López-Guzmán & Aguilar-Rivero, 2025).

According to Cheng, Wu, Chen and Zhou (2024), gastronomy tours have gained popularity as a way to provide immersive cultural experiences. These tours often include visits to local markets, cooking classes, and tastings at family-owned restaurants, offering travelers a holistic view of the local culinary scene. Local dining establishments further contribute to the

overall appeal of a destination, as they often embody the essence of local culture and hospitality. According to Brainville, Aubron and Philippon (2025), the rise of farm-to-table restaurants in regions like France has not only elevated the dining experience but also reinforced the narrative of sustainability and community support, enticing visitors who value authentic and responsible culinary experiences.

Culinary tourism significantly contributes to sustainable rural development by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions, thereby enhancing the overall viability and impact of rural tourism (Turčinović, Vujko & Stanišić, 2025). This integration is evident as local dishes not only attract tourists but also serve as a gateway to cultural revitalization and economic growth within these regions. According to Turčinović et al. (2025), culinary tourism offers new opportunities for rural communities, enabling them to capitalize on their unique gastronomic heritage while promoting environmental sustainability. To maximize these benefits, stakeholders must implement practices that reduce environmental impact and ensure the socio-economic development of these regions remains sustainable (Vujko, Bojović, Nedeljković, Jović & Todorović, 2024). Such efforts will require collaboration among local producers, policymakers, and tourism organizers to overcome existing barriers and create a thriving, sustainable culinary tourism sector (Arsić, Vujko & Nedeljković, 2025).

This paper aims to explore how tourists' perceptions of a rural destination's food and wine culture influence their travel decisions, satisfaction, and loyalty, highlighting gastronomy as a key driver of destination branding and sustainable tourism development. As a case study, the authors singled out village Banoštor, Fruška Gora (Serbia) as a destination of recognizable gastronomy shaped by traditional food and wine, and which has the potential to attract tourists and achieve competitiveness in the gastronomic tourism market. However, compared to certain destinations such as village Radda in Chianti, Tuscany (Italy), Banoštor, although similar in terms of tourist-geographic characteristics, lags far behind when it comes to attracting tourists. Although the primary research was conducted in Italy, specifically in the South Tyrol region, the paper also includes the village of Banoštor, located on Fruška Gora in Serbia, in order to provide a basis for comparative analysis and to identify the potential for applying best practices in the context of the Western Balkans. Banoštor was selected because it shares several key characteristics with the Italian case study: a strong winemaking tradition, notable landscape po-

tential, a rural setting, and a growing potential for wine tourism development. Using a benchmarking approach, the findings and practices from the Italian example are analyzed to extract actionable recommendations for Banoštor's sustainable development, particularly regarding the enhancement of rural hospitality and the strengthening of destination identity through food and wine. This approach ensures not only academic comparability but also practical relevance for local stakeholders in Serbia. It was concluded that Banoštor, located in Serbia's Fruška Gora region, has a rich viticultural history dating back to the Roman Empire (Turčinović et al., 2025), yet it remains largely a local wine producer with limited international recognition. The village is known for its high-quality wines made from both indigenous and international grape varieties, and while it hosts events like the Banoštor Wine Festival to promote its wines, most are consumed domestically (Vuković et al., 2020). In contrast, Radda in Chianti has a long-established reputation in global wine tourism, benefiting from historical significance, strong branding, and a well-developed tourism infrastructure that attracts international visitors and generates significant economic benefits for the region (Abraben, Grogan & Gao, 2017). The example of Radda in Chianti ought to serve as a benchmark for stakeholders in Serbian wine tourism, illustrating how to effectively utilize local wine heritage to establish a tourism destination that competes on a global scale.

Assuming that a tourist destination must have certain attractive factors that affect the size of the contractile zone, the authors set the goal of answering the question: What other factors, in addition to gastronomy, influence the decision-making process of travelers? This goal is founded on the premise that high-quality gastronomy, encompassing food and wine, is not an adequate determinant in the decision-making process of travelers. Additional factors significantly influence the reputation of a destination, enhance its sustainability, and promote economic development in rural regions. The research was conducted among 407 tourists of Radda in Chianti, Tuscany, Italy, and the results the authors reached show: A strong gastronomic identity is the foundation for successful promotion; Destinations must first cultivate authentic food experiences before launching large-scale marketing campaigns; Digital influence and local dining experiences play a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions; Destinations should leverage social media, influencer marketing, and online reviews to strengthen their appeal; Food festivals and culinary heritage are key to

differentiating a destination's food culture; Investing in cultural events can significantly boost a destination's reputation; Quality and visibility are essential for economic impact; Ensuring that tourists have a high-quality culinary experience, combined with effective promotion, leads to sustainable tourism growth. This analysis confirms that gastronomic tourism is a key driver of sustainable rural and urban destination development, with identity, influence, and promotion as its three main pillars.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The impact of food tourism on local economies is profound and multifaceted, contributing significantly to increased revenue generation for local businesses (Bojović, Vujko, Knežević & Bojović, 2024). By attracting food enthusiasts, local restaurants, markets, and farms experience heightened patronage, which, in turn, can lead to increased sales and profitability. According to Guerrero (2018), towns like Ashland, Oregon, have successfully leveraged their culinary scenes, with the annual Oregon Shakespeare Festival contributing not only to the arts but also to local gastronomy, resulting in a thriving restaurant industry. Furthermore, food tourism creates job opportunities within the hospitality and service sectors, as restaurants, hotels, and tour guides expand to meet the demands of food-focused travelers (Yıkımiş et al., 2024). According to Vujko et al. (2024), food tourism can create jobs across various levels—from chefs and waitstaff to farmers and food artisans—thus improving the overall employment landscape in the region. Additionally, the development of local food markets and artisanal products is fostered through food tourism, as consumers seek authentic and local offerings. Initiatives like farmers' markets and food festivals not only promote local produce but also create a sense of community and pride among residents, contributing to a sustainable economic ecosystem that benefits everyone involved.

The integration of food and wine tourism into the marketability and competitiveness of destinations is a multifaceted endeavor that goes beyond the mere production of quality products (Vuković et al., 2020). A crucial aspect is the emphasis on creating and promoting immersive experiences that leverage the authenticity of local gastronomy and wine culture, thus enhancing the destination's appeal and brand image. According to Mekbel et al. (2025), destinations like Provence can capitalize on their unique wine culture

and picturesque landscapes to position themselves as attractive wine tourism hubs, offering a competitive advantage in the global tourism market. The collaboration between local wineries, hospitality sectors, and transportation services can further enhance marketability by creating comprehensive and enticing packages for tourists, thereby boosting the overall appeal of the region (Turčinović et al., 2025). To maximize the benefits of food and wine tourism, continued investment in infrastructure, marketing, and training is essential, ensuring that both the quality of offerings and the visitor experience are continuously enhanced (Rachão, de Jesus Breda, de Oliveira Fernandes & Joukes, 2021). These strategic actions collectively contribute to the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of food and wine tourism destinations, making them more attractive to both domestic and international tourists.

The role of wine tourism in enhancing regional identity cannot be overstated, as it serves as a powerful vehicle for promoting unique cultural heritage through wine production (Ratten & Strickland, 2024). Wine regions, such as Tuscany in Italy and Bordeaux in France (Vecchio, Annunziata & Bouzdine-Chameeva, 2024), showcase their distinct terroirs and winemaking traditions, which are often deeply intertwined with local history and culture. Wineries are increasingly being established as tourist attractions, where visitors can partake in tastings, vineyard tours, and educational workshops (Turčinović et al., 2025). This not only elevates the profile of the wine but also establishes a narrative that connects visitors to the land and its people. Moreover, effective branding and marketing strategies that leverage local wine characteristics are crucial in differentiating a region from its competitors (Gaetjens, Corsi & Plewa, 2023). According to Gali, Camprubí and Donaire (2017), the “I Love New York” campaign successfully promoted New York’s wine regions by emphasizing the diversity and quality of its wines, which has contributed to an increase in wine tourism and, subsequently, regional economic growth. By fostering a sense of pride in local wine production, regions can create a compelling identity that resonates with both domestic and international tourists, enhancing their competitiveness in the global tourism market (Turčinović et al., 2025).

The interplay between food and wine tourism significantly enhances the attractiveness of destinations, as evidenced by the synergistic effects of culinary events and wine festivals (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012).

These events often serve as platforms for showcasing local produce and wines, attracting visitors eager to indulge in authentic and memorable experiences. According to Jovanović, Almeida-García, Cortés-Macías and Parzych (2025), the development of travel itineraries that combine food and wine experiences allows tourists to immerse themselves in the culinary landscape of a region. Itineraries that include vineyard tours followed by cooking classes or food tastings create a holistic experience that highlights the relationship between food and wine. According to Fusté-Forné and Filimon (2025), the influence of social media and digital marketing in promoting food and wine tourism experiences cannot be overlooked. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook enable local businesses to showcase their offerings to a broader audience, leveraging visually appealing content that captures the essence of a destination’s culinary scene. This digital presence not only attracts visitors but also encourages them to share their experiences, further amplifying the reach and impact of food and wine tourism (Ingrassia, Bellia, Giurdanella, Columba & Chironi, 2022).

The relationship between gastronomy and sustainable tourism is increasingly recognized as essential for promoting local economies and environmental conservation (Chan, 2025). Farm-to-table practices, which emphasize the use of locally sourced ingredients, support local farmers and reduce the carbon footprint associated with food transportation. According to Domi and Belletti (2022), in regions like Tuscany, the promotion of local wines and olive oils has not only bolstered the economy but has also encouraged visitors to engage with agricultural practices that sustain the landscape. According to Vujko et al. (2024), gastronomy has the potential to foster environmental awareness and conservation efforts. Sustainable culinary practices, such as foraging and the use of seasonal ingredients, help preserve biodiversity and traditional knowledge, ensuring that culinary traditions are maintained within the context of contemporary tourism. Additionally, by spotlighting local food systems, gastronomy can inspire visitors to become advocates for sustainable practices, creating a ripple effect that extends beyond their visit. In this manner, gastronomy not only serves as a reflection of cultural identity but also as a catalyst for sustainable tourism that benefits both local communities and the environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data collection and analysis

The study was carried out among tourists in Radda in Chianti, Italy, involving a total of 407 participants. As noted by Ahmed (2024), an ideal sample size for a population of approximately 1,000,000 tourists, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, would necessitate 387 respondents. Therefore, the sample from Radda in Chianti that took part in the research is both valid and authoritative. The sample comprises 407 respondents, of which 58.2% are male, whereas females represent 41.8%. This indicates a minor gender disparity among the participants. Regarding the distribution of ages among respondents, there is a notable diversity, with the largest segment being individuals aged 25-34 years (22.1%), followed closely by those in the 55-64 years (18.9%) and 45-54 years (18.7%) categories. Conversely, the age groups that are least represented include individuals aged 18-24 years (12.0%) and those over 65 years (11.5%). This suggests that the destination may appeal more to middle-aged and older visitors than to younger demographics. Concerning the educational qualifications of the respondents, nearly half (46.2%) have attained higher education levels, specifically college or university degrees. In contrast, 26.5% possess a secondary school education, while 22.1% have completed only primary schooling. A minor percentage (5.2%) holds advanced degrees, such as a master's or doctoral degree. This indicates that the sample encompasses individuals from a diverse array of educational backgrounds, with a significant representation of those who have pursued higher education. A notable 61.7% of participants reported having previously visited the destination, whereas 38.3% are newcomers. This implies a considerable proportion of returning visitors, potentially reflecting a degree of satisfaction and loyalty among tourists. In summary, the data reveals a visitor demographic predominantly comprising middle-aged individuals, an audience with a considerable level of education, and a significant proportion of repeat visitors, all of which may influence destination management and marketing approaches.

In our research paper, we adopted a positivism epistemological approach. Given the nature of this study, which explores the relationship between gastronomy and destination recognition through a structured survey questionnaire, the most appropriate epistemological approach would be positivism. Positivism is based on the belief that knowledge is best obtained through objective observation, measurement, and statistical

analysis. This study follows a quantitative research design, gathering structured responses from 407 tourists in Radda in Chianti. The use of survey data, Likert-scale questions, and statistical validation of the sample size aligns with positivist principles, ensuring that findings are empirical, generalizable, and replicable. The survey focuses on identifying patterns, trends, and correlations related to how gastronomy influences destination recognition and sustainable rural development. By using quantifiable data (e.g., the frequency of visits, importance ratings, and agreement with statements), the study adheres to a structured and objective methodology characteristic of positivist research. The reliance on statistical tools to analyze responses further reinforces this epistemological stance. Additionally, the questionnaire includes items that measure causal relationships, such as whether gastronomy influences tourists' decisions or contributes to economic growth and employment. This approach is consistent with positivist research, which seeks to uncover universal laws and objective truths through measurable evidence.

This paper aims to examine how tourists' perceptions of a rural destination's food and wine culture influence their travel decisions, satisfaction, and loyalty, positioning gastronomy as a central element in destination branding and a catalyst for sustainable tourism development. However, bearing in mind that certain destinations have similar attractive features when it comes to food and wine, but different contractive zones and different number of visits by tourists, it was necessary to ask the question: What other factors, in addition to gastronomy, influence the decision-making process of travelers? To answer this question, three hypotheses of the work were set:

H1: Tourists who prefer locally owned restaurants and wineries are more likely to be influenced by social media and online reviews in shaping their perception of the destination's food and wine culture.

H2: Tourists who recognize the role of local gastronomy in preserving culinary heritage and enhancing the destination's image are more likely to recommend the destination based on its gastronomy.

H3: Tourists who perceive the quality of food and wine as meeting their expectations are more likely to acknowledge the role of gastronomy promotion in economic growth and recognize promotional materials highlighting the destination's gastronomy.

The subsequent task to be undertaken involved factor analysis, which identified three distinct factors. Specifically, during the summer of 2024, tourists visiting Radda in Chianti (Italy) were presented with a set

of 20 questions that required responses on a five-point Likert scale. From April to August 2024, the authors of this paper visited the village in Italy multiple times, thereby collecting the necessary data. After analyzing the data, the grouped responses singled out the following three factors as very characteristic: Local Influence, Gastronomic Identity, and Gastronomic Promotion. Factor analysis was utilized to decrease the number of observed variables and to discern latent factors that affect community participation. This approach is crucial in tourism research, as it aids in revealing the fundamental dimensions that shape perceptions of local empowerment, sustainability, and competitiveness.

$$x_i = \lambda_1 F_1 + \lambda_2 F_2 + \lambda_3 F_3 + \varepsilon_i$$

where x_i represents observed variables, λ are factor loadings, F are the extracted factors, and ε is the error term.

Following the extraction of factors, the study advanced to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This methodology serves as a multivariate technique designed to illustrate causal relationships among variables in alignment with a structural model. By utilizing path coefficients that reflect the strength of these relationships, this approach elucidates the links between variables. SEM stands out as a robust method capable of addressing multicollinearity, which occurs when two or more variables exhibit a high degree of correlation. One significant benefit of SEM compared to multiple regression and factor analysis is that every element of SEM modeling is required to be informed by theoretical frameworks. Theoretical considerations play a crucial role in the development and refinement of models. A substantial misapplication of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) can arise when data is merely adjusted to fit an appropriate SEM, potentially resulting in the expansion of theory based solely on the findings of the analysis. In the field of tourism research, SEM is extensively employed to evaluate theoretical models by assessing both direct and indirect effects among variables. This methodology is especially pertinent for comprehending intricate socio-economic interactions within the context of rural tourism frameworks.

3.2. Case studies of Banoštor (Serbia) and Radda in Chianti (Italy)

Banoštor, situated in the Fruška Gora region of Serbia, boasts a rich viticultural history that traces back to the

era of the Roman Empire. The name of the village is derived from the Latin phrase *Bonis-Torre*, which denotes a Roman settlement that previously existed in the area. Despite this historical background, the wine production in Banoštor has largely remained local until recent times, receiving minimal international acknowledgment (Turčinović et al., 2025). In this paper, Banoštor is included as a case for benchmarking, to learn from best practices, particularly from successful examples in Italy. Conversely, Radda in Chianti has served as a viticultural hub for centuries and ranks among the principal sites within the Chianti Classico wine region. The earliest recorded reference to Chianti wine can be traced to the 13th century, with Radda significantly influencing the 1716 decree issued by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, which formally established the Chianti wine zone (Nesto & Di Savino, 2016). This enduring historical presence has bolstered Radda's robust wine identity and its attractiveness as a tourist destination.

Banoštor is recognized for its production of high-quality wines derived from both indigenous and international grape varieties, including Grašac (Welshriesling) and Cabernet Sauvignon. Nevertheless, wines from Fruška Gora, including those originating from Banoštor, are in the process of establishing a robust brand identity in the global market. Although regional wine festivals, such as the Banoštor Wine Festival, serve to promote the area, the majority of these wines are consumed within the domestic market or in neighboring nations (Turčinović et al., 2025). Conversely, Radda in Chianti enjoys the global recognition associated with Chianti Classico wines. The Chianti Classico designation, identifiable by the unique Gallo Nero (Black Rooster) emblem, is acknowledged and safeguarded by stringent production standards. Wines originating from Radda are often distributed internationally, enhancing the region's reputation as a leading destination for wine tourism (Nesto & Di Savino, 2016).

The tourism infrastructure in Banoštor is in a state of development, featuring small, family-operated wineries that provide tastings and rural lodging options. The village mainly draws visitors from within Serbia, as well as from Hungary and Croatia. Initiatives aimed at enhancing wine tourism involve partnerships between wineries and rural guesthouses; however, substantial investments on a larger scale continue to be scarce (Torović, Lakatoš, Majkić & Beara, 2020). In contrast, Chianti's Radda boasts a well-established tourism infrastructure. This village features luxury agriturismos, boutique hotels, and up-

scale restaurants designed to serve international visitors. Common activities include guided wine tours, vineyard experiences, and truffle-hunting excursions, all supported by considerable investments in hospitality and tourism promotion (Festa, Shams, Metallo & Cuomo, 2020). Additionally, the presence of esteemed wineries like Castello di Radda and Volpaia enhances its attractiveness to discerning wine aficionados.

In Banoštor, the burgeoning sector of wine tourism offers economic prospects for local winemakers and small enterprises, although its influence continues to develop. The small influx of tourists results in economic advantages being predominantly held by a select group of stakeholders. Nevertheless, the local wine festivals and the rise in wine exports are contributing to a broader economic impact of Banoštor's wine industry (Bojović et al., 2024). In Radda in Chianti, the economic landscape is significantly influenced by wine tourism. The tourism associated with Chianti Classico yields millions of euros each year, benefiting not only wineries but also restaurants, lodging establishments, and local craftsmen. This region draws visitors from North America, Asia, and Europe, contributing to a more diversified and robust economy.

Banoštor upholds a robust link to the rural traditions of Serbia, emphasizing tourism that is driven by the community. The yearly Banoštor Wine Festival highlights local winemaking practices, features traditional Serbian music, and presents culinary specialties like kulen and artisanal cheeses (Turčinović et al., 2025). Radda in Chianti has successfully embraced international tourism trends while maintaining its medieval architecture and long-standing wine-making traditions. The Chianti Classico Expo, for instance, integrates authenticity with commercial attractiveness, ensuring that the cultural heritage remains at the

forefront of the visitor experience while appealing to a worldwide audience (Randelli & Martellozzo, 2019).

The comparison between Banoštor and Radda in Chianti highlights key differences in wine tourism development. Banoštor represents an emerging wine destination focused on regional tourism, with a strong emphasis on community and traditional Serbian wine-making. In contrast, Radda in Chianti has a well-established reputation in global wine tourism, benefiting from historical prestige, strong branding, and high-end tourism infrastructure. These differences influence the economic impact of wine tourism, the scale of tourism infrastructure, and the overall positioning of each destination in the wine tourism market.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The factor analysis (see Table 1) yielded a model that categorizes the variables into three factors, collectively accounting for 81,626% of the variance. Looking at Table 1, it can be seen that the Eigenvalue > 1 for three factors, which is proof that the extracted factors are adequate.

Table 2 shows the extracted factors. The singled-out factors are: **Local Influence**, **Gastronomic Identity**, and **Gastronomic Promotion**. Together, these three factors underscore the pivotal role that gastronomy plays in destination branding and sustainable tourism: **Local Influence** creates an authentic experience that draws tourists interested in supporting local businesses and experiencing the true essence of the destination; **Gastronomic Identity** shapes a destination's brand by tying it to its culinary heritage, attracting those who seek cultural authenticity and tradition; **Gastronomic Promotion** enhances the destination's

Table 1: Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3,107	38,833	38,833	1,744	21,804	21,804	2,620	32,751	32,751
2	2,207	27,594	66,427	2,440	30,503	52,307	2,241	28,013	60,764
3	1,720	21,495	87,922	2,346	29,319	81,626	1,669	20,862	81,626
4	,401	5,013	92,935						
5	,194	2,422	95,357						
6	,159	1,984	97,342						
7	,124	1,549	98,891						
8	,089	1,109	100,000						

Source: Authors

Table 2: Factor Matrix

	Factor		
	Local Influence	Gastronomic Identity	Gastronomic Promotion
Quality Fulfillment	,170	,322	,873
Gastronomic Recommendation	,100	,738	-,202
Culinary Economy	,147	,295	,902
Local Dining	,812	-,036	-,010
Culinary Heritage	-,003	,819	-,084
Culinary Visibility	,156	,251	,842
Digital Influence	,999	-,002	-,004
Festival Impact	,018	,985	-,115

Source: Authors

visibility and economic growth, ensuring that local food and wine become key attractions for sustainable tourism. In rural areas of Radda in Chianti, these factors help position gastronomy as a central element of destination branding. They not only attract tourists but also support sustainable development by preserving local culture, fostering community development, and promoting responsible tourism. This integration of gastronomy into the tourism strategy ensures long-term benefits for both the destination and its local population.

Factor 1. Local Influence: This factor highlights the importance of locally owned restaurants and wineries and the influence of social media and online reviews on tourists' perceptions. Tourists are increasingly interested in authentic, locally sourced food and wine experiences. The preference for eating at local establishments supports the development of local economies and promotes cultural preservation. When tourists engage with local gastronomy, they create a connection with the destination, contributing to the branding of the area as an authentic and sustainable travel choice. In today's digital age, platforms like Instagram, TripAdvisor, and food blogs play a significant role in shaping a destination's image. Positive reviews and posts about local food and wine help enhance the reputation of a destination, boosting its appeal to potential tourists. Local influence helps position gastronomy as a key feature of the destination's brand. It promotes authenticity and sustainability by encouraging visitors to support local businesses, while the power of social media amplifies the destination's visibility, fostering wider recognition and attracting more sustainable tourists. This confirms Hypothesis H1 - *Tourists who prefer locally owned restaurants and wineries are more likely to be influenced by social media and online reviews in shaping their perception of the destination's food and wine culture.*

Factor 2. Gastronomic Identity: This factor emphasizes the role of gastronomy in shaping the identity of a destination and its potential to preserve traditional culinary heritage. It also highlights the role of food and wine festivals in strengthening the destination's image. Gastronomy is often integral to a destination's identity. A strong food culture can make a place stand out and attract visitors seeking unique culinary experiences. By supporting local gastronomy, rural destinations contribute to the preservation of traditional culinary practices. This aligns with the goals of sustainable tourism, which advocates for maintaining local culture and traditions while promoting economic development. Food and wine festivals help reinforce a destination's gastronomic identity, acting as significant draws for tourists and media attention. Festivals centered around food and wine allow visitors to experience local traditions, further promoting the destination's culinary reputation. A destination's gastronomic identity can distinguish it from others while also promoting sustainability by supporting heritage preservation and local communities. As part of destination branding, gastronomy becomes a symbol of authenticity, helping to attract tourists who value culture, tradition, and sustainable practices. This confirms Hypothesis H2 - *Tourists who recognize the role of local gastronomy in preserving culinary heritage and enhancing the destination's image are more likely to recommend the destination based on its gastronomy.*

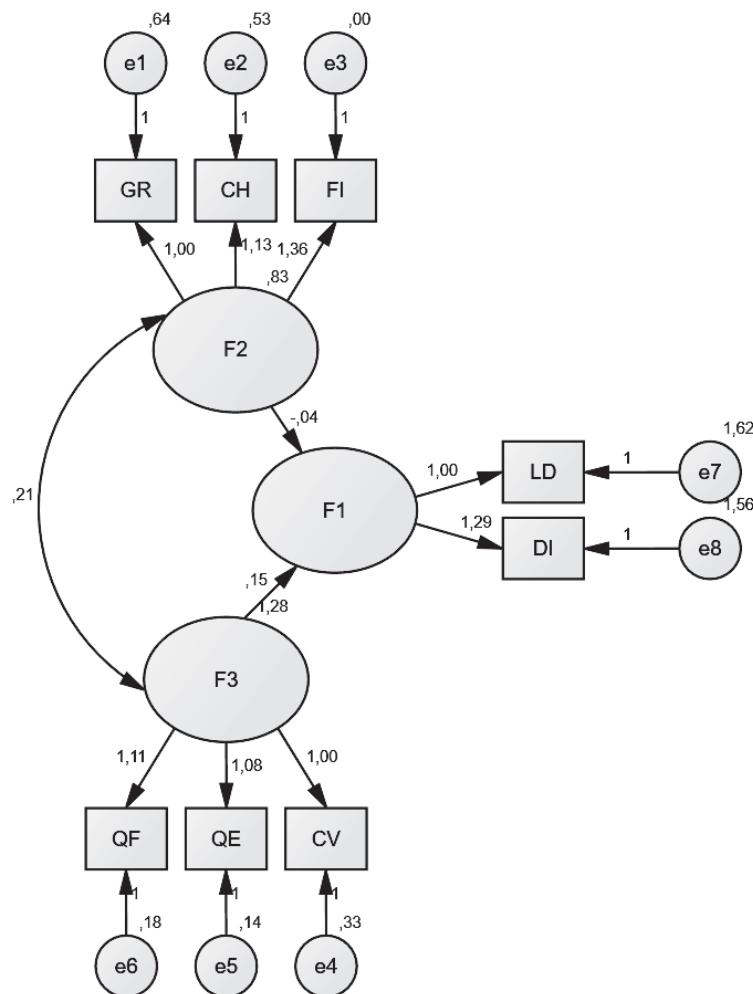
Factor 3. Gastronomic Promotion: This factor relates to the visibility of the destination's food and wine offerings and their promotion through various channels, as well as the perceived economic benefits of promoting local gastronomy. Tourists' satisfaction with the quality of food and wine directly influences their overall perception of the destination. Meeting or exceeding expectations contributes to positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits, which are crucial for sus-

tainable tourism growth. Destinations that actively promote their local food and wine not only attract tourists but also stimulate the local economy by supporting small-scale producers and businesses. This contributes to the overall sustainability of the region by generating income and ensuring the survival of traditional food production methods. Brochures, websites, and other marketing tools can highlight the gastronomy of a destination, helping to raise awareness and attract visitors. Effective promotion strengthens the destination's brand and ensures that its food culture is recognized and celebrated worldwide. Gastronomic promotion drives economic growth by attracting tourists who value culinary experiences. Through effective promotion, rural destinations can market themselves as sustainable and authentic food tourism hubs, which benefits both the local community and the environment by encouraging responsible travel

and consumption. This confirms Hypothesis H3 - *Tourists who perceive the quality of food and wine as meeting their expectations are more likely to acknowledge the role of gastronomy promotion in economic growth and recognize promotional materials highlighting the destination's gastronomy.*

Figure 1 represents a Structural Equation Model (SEM) that illustrates the relationships among the latent factors. The SEM model provides valuable insights into how different aspects of gastronomic tourism interact to shape tourists' perceptions, influence their choices, and drive economic benefits. The relationships between the three main factors—Local Influence (F1), Gastronomic Identity (F2), and Gastronomic Promotion (F3)—highlight the critical pathways through which food tourism contributes to destination branding and sustainability.

Figure 1: Structural Equation Model



Source: Authors

The structural equation model (SEM) was constructed to explore the interrelationships among three latent dimensions: Local Influence (F1), Gastronomic Identity (F2), and Gastronomic Promotion (F3). While Gastronomic Promotion (F3) exhibits a modest positive effect on Local Influence (F1) ($\beta = 0.15$), suggesting that well-designed promotional activities may enhance the visibility and perceived value of local food experiences, the relationship between Gastronomic Identity (F2) and F1 appears weak and likely non-significant ($\beta = -0.04$). This may indicate that identity, though theoretically central, does not directly shape perceptions of locality unless strategically communicated through promotional channels. In this context, the SEM serves to highlight emerging priorities: that promotional strategies (F3) potentially exert more tangible influence on local gastronomic perception (F1) than identity constructs in isolation. This underscores the importance of not only cultivating authentic food identities but actively translating them into compelling narratives within the tourism promotion ecosystem.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study confirms that gastronomic tourism plays a crucial role in the sustainable development of rural destinations. By focusing on three key pillars—identity, influence, and promotion—destinations can enhance their attractiveness, strengthen their cultural heritage, and generate economic benefits. A well-defined gastronomic identity rooted in local traditions, authentic culinary experiences, and food heritage serves as the foundation for a strong food tourism strategy. Local dining experiences, digital influence, and culinary events significantly shape tourists' perceptions, reinforcing the importance of influence in guiding visitor choices and behaviors. Furthermore, effective promotional efforts—including food festivals, digital marketing, and quality assurance—are essential for maximizing the economic impact of gastronomic tourism. To achieve long-term sustainability, destinations must adopt integrated strategies that balance cultural preservation, economic growth, and environmental responsibility. Encouraging community participation, supporting local producers, and leveraging digital platforms can further enhance the competitiveness of food tourism destinations. Ultimately, this analysis highlights that gastronomic tourism is not only a tool for tourism development but also a means of strengthening local identity, fostering sustainable economic

opportunities, and enhancing the overall destination experience. By strategically investing in gastronomy, destinations can create lasting value for both visitors and local communities. It can be concluded that gastronomic tourism transcends being merely a niche sector; rather, it functions as a significant catalyst for the competitiveness and sustainability of destinations. By harnessing local culinary traditions, enhancing digital interaction, and committing to promotional efforts, destinations can cultivate enriching experiences for visitors while promoting both economic and cultural sustainability. Further strengthening the role of gastronomic tourism in the long-term development of destinations can be achieved through encouraging participation from local communities, supporting small-scale producers, and implementing sustainable food policies. Ultimately, gastronomic tourism acts as a conduit between tradition and innovation, bolstering local identity, promoting responsible tourism practices, and ensuring that destinations remain appealing and sustainable within an increasingly competitive global tourism environment.

Future research on gastronomic tourism should prioritize several key areas to deepen comprehension and enhance strategies for sustainable development. First, evaluating the long-term impacts of gastronomic tourism on local communities could provide important insights into its effects on employment generation, entrepreneurship, and the revitalization of rural areas. Furthermore, investigating how culinary tourism supports local food supply chains and benefits small-scale producers would contribute to greater economic and social sustainability. A vital domain for forthcoming research is the impact of digital platforms on consumer behavior. With social media, online reviews, and influencer marketing increasingly influencing tourism trends, studies could examine how various demographic segments interact with digital content pertaining to gastronomy. Furthermore, exploring the contributions of artificial intelligence and big data in the development of tailored gastronomic experiences may present novel strategies for destination marketing. The discourse surrounding food tourism continues to prioritize sustainability and ethical considerations. Future research endeavors ought to evaluate the environmental repercussions of gastronomic tourism, encompassing aspects such as its carbon footprint, management of food waste, and consumption of resources. Investigating the influence of slow food movements and farm-to-table initiatives on mitigating environmental harm may further underscore sustainable practices. Additionally, ethical

issues, including the commercialization of indigenous food traditions and the phenomenon of overtourism in culinary destinations, merit more thorough examination. The significance of gastronomic festivals in the context of destination branding offers a further area for exploration. Gaining insights into how these events influence visitor loyalty, regional tourism dynamics, and economic growth could guide approaches to the sustainable management of festivals. Additionally, examining methods to enhance inclusivity and promote environmental responsibility within these events would be beneficial. Addressing these gaps in research would improve the comprehensive understanding of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of gastronomic tourism. These insights would be vital in developing sustainable policies and strategies designed to promote food tourism as an essential element in boosting destination competitiveness and safeguarding cultural heritage.

The implications of the Italian case study provide a valuable blueprint for Banoštor's gastronomic development. As demonstrated in the Italian context, where the interplay between a strong culinary identity, strategic promotion, and community-driven engagement has fostered resilient and sustainable gastronomic tourism, Banoštor can adopt a similar trajectory. The SEM analysis from the Italian model suggests that gastronomic promotion (F3) exerts a more direct influence on the perception of local food culture (F1) than identity alone, highlighting the importance of translating cultural assets into visible and engaging promotional formats. Banoštor, with its deeply rooted wine heritage and traditional cuisine, is well-positioned to capitalize on this finding. By prioritizing structured promotional efforts—digital storytelling, strategic collaborations, and festival-driven visibility—while simultaneously nurturing its gastronomic identity through authentic experiences and producer-community synergy, Banoštor can align with the dynamics observed in the Italian model. In doing so, it not

only strengthens its positioning as a distinctive rural food destination but also enhances the economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability of its tourism offer. Banoštor has significant potential to establish itself as a leading gastronomic destination by leveraging its rich wine heritage and culinary traditions. To strengthen its identity, the region should actively promote local food and wine culture through storytelling, collaborations between producers and restaurants, and the introduction of a certification label for authentic local products. Digital marketing plays a crucial role in attracting visitors, making it essential for Banoštor to enhance its online presence. Engaging food bloggers, encouraging user-generated content, and developing interactive digital guides can amplify promotion efforts. Furthermore, creating unique gastronomic experiences, such as wine and food pairing tours, cooking workshops, and seasonal festivals, can enhance visitor engagement and satisfaction. Economic and community-driven initiatives are also vital for sustainable tourism development. Supporting small businesses, promoting agritourism, and offering training programs in hospitality and gastronomy can create new economic opportunities for locals. Sustainability should remain a priority, with initiatives such as farm-to-table dining, food waste reduction, and eco-friendly packaging ensuring environmentally responsible tourism growth. By adopting these strategies, Banoštor can attract a diverse audience, enhance its economic resilience, and position itself as a model for sustainable gastronomic tourism.

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Apstrakt

Gastronomija kao pokretač brendiranja destinacije i održivog turizma: uvidi iz ruralne Srbije i Italije

Drago Cvijanović, Aleksandra Vujko, Dejan Sekulić

Gastronomija igra ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju kulturnog identiteta i unapređenju turizma jer putnici sve više traže autentična kulinarska iskustva koja ih povezuju sa destinacijama. Studija sprovedena među 407 turista u Radi u Kijantiju, Toskana, Italija, istražuje kako percepcije turista o kulturi hrane i vina ruralne destinacije utiču na njihov izbor putovanja, zadovoljstvo i lojalnost, naglašavajući važnost gastronomije u brendiranju destinacije i održivom turizmu. Koristeći Banoštor na Fruškoj gori u Srbiji, kao studiju slučaja, autori ističu da uprkos bogatoj gastronomiji, destinacija se bori sa međunarodnim priznanjem u poređenju sa razvijenim destinacijama kao što je Rada u Kijantiju. Kroz faktorsku analizu i modeliranje strukturnih jednačina (SEM), studija je identifikovala ključne faktore kao što su

lokalni uticaj, gastronomski identitet i gastronomska promocija, koji značajno utiču na percepciju turista o gastronomiji ruralne destinacije. Ovi faktori naglašavaju važnost autentičnih iskustava u restoranima u lokalnom vlasništvu i strateškog marketinga kulinarskog nasleđa destinacije kako bi se povećalo zadovoljstvo turista, podržala lokalna ekonomija i podstakao regionalni razvoj. Rezultati potvrđuju da je snažan gastronomski identitet neophodan za uspešnu promociju i ekonomsku korist u gastronomskom turizmu, pozicionirajući gastronomiju kao ključni pokretač održivog turizma.

Ključne reči: *gastronomija, brendiranje destinacije, održivi turizam, Srbija, Italija*

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