

# **HIGH CUISINE RESTAURANTS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES FROM A RESEARCH IN ITALY**

**Angelo Presenza  
Simone Iocca**

**University “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara, Italy**

**ABSTRACT:** Food represents the identity and uniqueness of a destination, providing travellers with insight into the culture of the place they are visiting. Restaurants have been recognized as potentially important partners in efforts to promote local food systems. This study is focused on high cuisine restaurants. The main aim is to complete a first portrait of this specific typology, looking at the demographic characteristics and the management strategies. In particular, the paper analyses the use of local food inside these restaurants, their attitudes and the strategies that they utilise in the valorisation of the local identity. A sample of 59 Italian high cuisine restaurants was utilised and an online survey was conducted. Results show that entrepreneurs that work in high cuisine restaurants have specific individual characteristics as well as specific attitudes toward the use of local food and traditional cuisine. The central role of creativity emerges as a principal innovation tool for products and process development. The results also highlight the fundamental role played by the networking activities, so that restaurants perceive it as important to be involved in local activities related to destination promotion. **Keywords:** Food service, Local food, Gastronomy tourism, Entrepreneurial attitudes, High cuisine restaurant.

**RESUMEN:** La gastronomía representa la identidad y singularidad de un destino, ofreciendo a los viajeros conocimiento sobre la cultura del local que visitan. Los restaurantes han sido reconocidos como pares potencialmente importantes en los esfuerzos de promoción de los sistemas gastronómicos locales. El presente estudio se centra en los restaurantes de haute cuisine. El principal objetivo es efectuar un primer retrato de esta tipología específica, observando las características demográficas y estrategias de gestión. En particular, el artículo analiza la utilización de productos locales dentro de esos restaurantes, su actitud y las estrategias utilizadas para valorar la identidad local. La muestra incluye 59 restaurantes italianos de haute cuisine, ha sido también efectuada una pesquisa online. Los resultados muestran que los empresarios que trabajan en restaurantes de haute cuisine tienen características individuales específicas, así como actitudes específicas en relación a la utilización de la gastronomía local y de la cocina tradicional. Se destaca el rol central de la creatividad como principal herramienta de innovación para el desarrollo de productos y procesos. Los resultados destacan aún el rol fundamental de las actividades desarrolladas en red, para que los restaurantes perciban la importancia de que se involucren en actividades locales relacionadas con la promoción del destino. **Palabras-clave:** Servicio gastronómico, Gastronomía local, Turismo gastronómico, Actitudes empresariales, Restaurante de haute cuisine.

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**Angelo Presenza** is Assistant Professor in Organization Design. He holds a PhD in Business Organization with a specialization in Tourism. His research focuses on destination management and governance, and related organizational structures. He is also interested in event management as well as gastronomy tourism. Author's email: [presenza@unich.it](mailto:presenza@unich.it). **Simone Iocca** is PhD candidate in Management and Business Administration. Fields of interest are management and governance. His research focuses on governance in tourism, in particular on the analysis of organizational actors and mechanisms of relationship. He is also interested in event management. Author's email: [s.iocca@unich.it](mailto:s.iocca@unich.it)

**RESUMO:** A gastronomia representa a identidade e singularidade de um destino, oferecendo aos viajantes conhecimento sobre a cultura do local que visitam. Os restaurantes foram reconhecidos como parceiros potencialmente importantes nos esforços de promoção dos sistemas gastronômicos locais. O presente estudo centra-se nos restaurantes de *haute cuisine*. O principal objetivo é efetuar um primeiro retrato desta tipologia específica, observando as características demográficas e estratégias de gestão. Em particular, o artigo analisa a utilização de produtos locais dentro desses restaurantes, as suas atitudes e as estratégias utilizadas para valorizar a identidade local. A amostra consistiu em 59 restaurantes italianos de *haute cuisine*, tendo sido também efetuada uma pesquisa online. Os resultados mostram que os empresários que trabalham em restaurantes de *haute cuisine* têm características individuais específicas, bem como atitudes específicas em relação à utilização da gastronomia local e da cozinha tradicional. Destaca-se o papel central da criatividade enquanto principal ferramenta de inovação para o desenvolvimento de produtos e processos. Os resultados destacam ainda o papel fundamental das atividades desenvolvidas em rede, para que os restaurantes percebam a importância de se envolverem em atividades locais relacionadas com a promoção do destino. **Palavras-chave:** Serviço gastronômico, Gastronomia local, Turismo gastronômico, Atitudes empresariais, Restaurante de *haute cuisine*.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, trends in tourist demand evidence the growing importance of the eno-gastronomic resources in destination attractiveness and image (Trunfio, 2006). Apart from a physical necessity, food represents the identity and uniqueness of a destination, providing travellers with insight into the culture of the place they are visiting. The taste of local products, the food preparation and appearance, and the whole eating environment creates memories that influence the travel experience. Restaurants have been recognized as potentially important partners in efforts to promote local food systems. Fine describes the restaurant as “an organization in which groups labour to produce physical and cultural objects” (Fine, 1996: 231). So, the restaurant meal “like all food, has an aesthetic, sensory dimension and is evaluated as such by both producers and consumers” (Fine, 1996: 13).

In Europe there are 1.5 million restaurants that represent 7.4% of all businesses, net of the agricultural and financial sector. Italy, France and Spain play a major role in the restaurant landscape of Europe, so that in Italy it accounts for 17.1% of all enterprises. At 40.9%, Italy boasts the highest number of people employed in the independent restaurant sector as proof of widespread entrepreneurship that has always been the hallmark of the Italian restaurant sector. Against an European average of 5.1 employees per firm, Italy is almost at the bottom of the ladder with a value of 3.9 (Italian Federation of Public Concerns, 2011).

While some aspects of the local food system movement have begun to receive scholarly attention, the role of restaurants in this movement is appreciated but not well understood.

The paper seeks to portray how restaurants are managed, what the weight of local eno-gastronomic resources on the menus is, and the weight of different strategies in restaurant performance. Furthermore, this study analyses the behaviour of restaurants when they are working

together and with the other stakeholders in order to increase innovation capacity, the transfer of knowledge, and the identification of synergies to increase the attractiveness of the eno-gastronomic tourist sector.

To achieve the objectives mentioned above, the paper starts with a deep literature review focused on some specific key concepts such as gastronomy tourism, entrepreneurship and destination promotion. Then a section is focused on empirical research: analysing quantitative and qualitative data collected from a web-based survey with 59 Italian restaurants extracted from “I ristoranti d’Italia - Guida dell’Espresso 2011” one of the most famous and influential Italian restaurants guides which compares and contrasts restaurants that are located in different areas of Italy.

Results reveal that entrepreneurs that work in high cuisine restaurants have individual characteristics (gender, age, social and family influence) as well as specific attitudes toward the use of creativity in the innovation of products and process development. Interesting results arise from the analysis of their approach toward gastronomy tourism. In this sense, it is important for entrepreneurs to be involved in local activities related to destination promotion.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Gastronomy tourism*

Sparks, Bowen, and Klag (2003) argue that food consumed with others forms a vital social link and gastronomy is the driving force behind the “cultural revival” of a tourism industry in a growth crisis that is struggling at a critical stage of the tourism product lifecycle.

In defining gastronomy tourism, there is a need to differentiate between tourists who consume food as a part of the travel experience and tourists whose activities, behaviours and - even - destination selection is influenced by an interest in food. For some tourists, food is mere fuel but for others, and arguably a growing minority, it is the prime motivation to travel. In between we have the interested and curious. Food tourism may be defined as visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor to travel (Hall & Mitchell, 2001: 308). Such a definition does not mean that any trip to a restaurant is food tourism, rather the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region or even to taste the dishes of a particular chef must be the major motivation for such travel. Indeed, such is the need for food to be a primary factor in influencing travel behaviour and decision making that as a form of special interest travel, food tourism may possibly be regarded as an exam-

ple of culinary, gastronomic gourmet or cuisine tourism. This reflects consumers for whom interest in food and wine is a form of “serious leisure” (Hall & Mitchell, 2001). From this perspective, food tourism may therefore be regarded as a form of speciality travel or special interest tourism (Hall & Mitchell, 2001).

Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009: 54) affirm that “the desire to travel and taste unique and authentic dishes is becoming one of the biggest paradigms in the tourism industry”. As a contemporary cultural resource, gastronomy satisfies all the conventional requirements of cultural tourism products. It adds value to the tourist's experience and – at many levels – is associated with quality tourism.

Gastronomy can also represent an important resource to support sustainable tourism and Sims (2009) presents several reasons to support this theory. Firstly, increasing tourist consumption of local foods can generate a multiplier effect that will benefit the local economy. Secondly, “buying local” helps the tourism industry reduce its carbon footprint. Thirdly, promoting high-quality cuisine or distinctive local food products helps a tourism destination distinguish itself from other destinations and attract a steady stream of visitors. Food has therefore developed from being a basic necessity for tourist consumption to being regarded as an essential element of regional culture. If culture and tradition are to prove sustainable in the face of tourism, then traditional and ethnic foods must be preserved along with other art forms. Sustainable gastronomy implies that communities can evolve socially and economically whilst keeping an eco-nutritional commitment to environmental sustainability and the optimal health of all members of the community (Scarpato, 2000: 186).

Gastronomy is also a fertile breeding ground for “creative tourism” (Richards & Raymond, 2000). Gastronomic holidays are therefore an important aspect of the emerging creative tourism sector, as tourists can learn to cook, learn about the ingredients used, the way they are grown and appreciate how culinary traditions have come into existence. Most of Western society is increasingly characterised by a demand for experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2000: 14) and this is noticeable through the increasing number of tourists eager to learn and increase their cultural capital by creating rather than just consuming.

### *The geographical imprinting on the entrepreneurial attitudes*

The activities of restaurants represent one of the key components of the relationship between gastronomy, tourism and regional development (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). As well as direct purchase by consumers, the use of local food by restaurants is significant in enhancing local food production and also in adding authenticity in the wider ex-

perience of the destination. At the same time, restaurants' use of local food could also represent a way to achieve market success and sustain a competitive advantage (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

In today's global and industrial food system, Inwood, Sharp, Moore, and Stinner (2009) suggest considering selective adoption of local food as an innovation tool to sustain the restaurant's competitiveness. Roger (2003) explains, with the term "innovation", a new idea, practice or object that generally offers a relative advantage to the adopter (in social prestige or economic terms).

Inwood et al. (2009) list some examples of local food attributes that can attract the attention of potential adopters. For example, among a growing number of the foods system stakeholders, local foods exhibit a relative advantage to food produced by the dominant commodity system in terms of taste, freshness, variety, and sometimes even price. The use of local foods can be a way to stimulate restaurants to innovate and differentiate their offer. Through the use of local foods, they can reengineer their organisation, process, products and markets. Restaurants can play a strategic role in transmitting new information to diners about food and possibly influencing their tastes and preferences. Local food is also an "instrument" that can be used to enrich firms of collaboration opportunities in local networks. The context of "distributed knowledge" offers an opportunity to use resources, knowledge, technology and experience outside the company to initiate innovation processes, impossible to achieve individually (Prats & Guia, 2005). The level of performance is conditioned by the exiting cooperative structure and the level of integration and participation presented in the territories. Examining the territory, it is possible to highlight different systems. There is a case where the consistency of these systems reveals rules and norms that prevail in local socio-economic culture and reduce the ambiguity of the actors' reciprocity of behaviour. Another case is when the institutionalisation of the territory relapses on the creation of formal institutions that demand the reorganisation of the *modus faciendi* (Domingos & Ramos, 2008).

Several studies (Paniccia & Valeri, 2010; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, & Zucchella, 2010; Pechlaner, Abfalter, & Lange, 2009) show that, especially for the tourist business, suitable innovations presuppose a cultural orientation to the co-evolution with the territory of reference. The management literature has generally accepted the concept that the relationship between the company and the environment is co-evolutionary in nature, affecting the evolution of one or the other and vice-versa (Cafferata, 2009). Focusing on tourism management studies, some authors emphasise the significant reciprocal influences among business, territories and tourists, highlighting opportunities and limits (Pencarelli & Splendiani, 2008). However, innovative co-evolutionary processes

appear under researched, especially empirically and interesting stimulus can come from studies on the behaviour of organisations that belong to environmental and spatial contexts culturally diverse (Calvelli, 2008).

*The role of local gastronomy in the destination promotion*

Gastronomy may be considered as a principal resource or a supporting resource. Even in the second case, gastronomy can still play an important role, particularly in destinations with undifferentiated primary resources (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000).

Kim et al. (2009) voice a widely held belief when they claim that “food is one of the most important elements in tourists’ destination choice and travellers’ decision-making”.

There are several reasons for the potential that local food can have in contributing to promote a tourist destination. Indeed, the fact that food is expressive of a region and its culture means it can be used to differentiate a destination in an increasingly competitive global marketplace (du Rand & Heath, 2002).

Because it is an integral part of the tourist’s experience, food has become an important element in determining visitor satisfaction. Another reason of interest to study food tourism is that food is an attraction in its own right for travel. This can be both for the purposes of visiting a specific event or a built attraction, such as a brewery, a cheese maker or a restaurant. Tourists may also travel to a particular destination which has established a reputation of providing quality food products. Given the strong relationship between food and identity, it is not surprising that food becomes an integral part of tourism promotion. One of the basic reasons for this is the strong relationship between certain destinations and certain types of food. As Hughes (1995: 114) points out, there is a “notion of a natural relationship between a region’s land, its climatic conditions and the character of the food it produces. It is this geographical diversity which provides for the regional distinctiveness in culinary traditions and the evolution of a characteristic heritage”. The link between location and gastronomy has been used in a number of ways in tourism, including promotional efforts based on distinctive or “typical” regional or national foods (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Gastronomy is seen as an important source of marketable images and experiences for tourists. If gastronomy can be linked to specific regions, it becomes a powerful tourism marketing tool. Authenticity has always been viewed as an important aspect of tourism consumption, and seeking out “authentic” local and regional foods can become a motive for visiting a particular destination. In this sense, a local product is a supply system proposed by one or more firms ingrained in an area geographically, culturally and historically, defined and perceived by the

market as a tangible (food products, handicrafts, artefacts) and intangible (information, culture, history, knowledge, traditions, etc.) package characterised by an uniform image or brand identity (Minguzzi & Presenza, 2010; Pencarelli & Forlani, 2006).

## METHODOLOGY

The restaurants' database was created by the "Ristoranti d'Italia 2011 - La guida dell'Espresso", one of the best-known and most respected ranking systems for high-quality cuisine restaurants in Italy. Each year over one hundred gastronomy experts visit thousands of restaurants in Italy. Each restaurant is given a vote out of twenty, which deals exclusively with the kitchen, while the text describes the characteristics of the restaurant (Preface of the "Ristoranti d'Italia 2011"). Quantitative research was carried out through a questionnaire composed of four main sections. The first referred to the profile of restaurants. The second section analysed strategies adopted by restaurants and it contained 2 sub-sections (the first is about management strategies in general, the second is focused on inputs for innovation). The third analysed the relationship between local food attributes and restaurant attitudes and includes questions about menu structure, customer attitudes and barriers to adoption of local food. The fourth was used to measure restaurant attitudes towards gastronomy tourism with a set of thirteen statements.

Questions were selected through a review of available literature. They were measured asking restaurateurs to answer on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree).

The questionnaire was sent by e-mail. On the website of "Ristoranti d'Italia 2011 - La guida dell'Espresso" (<http://temi.repubblica.it/espresso-ristoranti-italia-2011>) there is a list of the best restaurants for 2011, grouped by region. From the list of 200 restaurants it was possible to extract 175 e-mail addresses, to which an e-mail was sent, containing a brief description of the research objectives, the website link of where to find the questionnaire and the instructions to complete it. The online survey was carried out during the winter 2011 with a response rate of 33.71%.

The study intentionally focused on top restaurants. Because so little research has been conducted in this area (Colin et al., 2005), we believe that such a measurement of this specific typology of restaurants would form the basis for a useful and interesting research project.

## RESULTS

### *Demographic characteristics*

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the restaurants interviewed, organised by the geographic provenience. According to that, 40.7% restaurants are from Northern Italy, 28.8% from Central Italy and 30.5% from the South.

Looking at gender, entrepreneurs tend to be male, while females represent a smaller portion. Most of the restaurateurs have a higher education certificate but in other sectors. This is the same for all groups, while differences are present if we compare the three groups in relation to the ones that have a classical culinary-training background. In this case, in the South there are only a few restaurateurs that have a specific school certificate, while the percentage increases if we examine the Centre and the North. Contrariwise, the analysis of the possession of university degrees reveals that the South has the highest percentage, while the North has the lowest.

In regards to age, the classes are different among the three groups. In fact, the restaurateurs from the Centre are concentrated in the class of 31-40 years old while the South in the class of 41-50 and the North in the class of 51-60.

**Table 1. Restaurant demographic**

Characteristics	North (40.7%) (%)	Centre (28.8%) (%)	South (30.5%) (%)	Total (n = 59) (%)
Legal form				
individual firm	13.0	12.5	33.3	19.3
partnership	52.2	56.3	44.5	50.9
corporation	34.8	31.3	22.2	29.8
Number of employees (annual average)				
less than 5	12.5	11.8	27.7	16.9
from 5 to 8	12.5	41.1	55.6	33.9
from 9 to 12	33.3	11.8	11.1	20.3
from 13 to 16	16.7	23.5	0.0	13.6
more than 16	25.0	11.8	5.6	15.3
Number of seats				
less than 16	0.0	5.9	0.0	1.8
from 16 to 30	25.0	47.1	23.5	31.0
from 31 to 50	41.6	11.8	35.3	31.0
from 51 to 70	16.7	17.6	35.3	22.4
more than 70	16.7	17.6	5.9	13.8
Average price of a full meal per person (€)				
less than € 40	0.0	6.2	27.8	10.3
from € 40 to € 60	20.8	18.8	44.4	27.6
from € 61 to € 80	45.9	37.5	16.7	34.5



more than € 80	33.3	37.5	11.1	27.6
Gender				
Female	8.3	6.7	5.9	7.1
Male	91.7	93.3	94.1	92.9
Age				
from 31 to 40	16.7	46.2	27.8	27.3
from 41 to 50	37.5	38.5	50.0	41.8
from 51 to 60	41.7	15.3	5.5	23.6
more than 60	4.1	0.0	16.7	7.3
Education				
middle school certificate	8.7	6.7	0.0	5.5
higher school certificate in tourism and restaurant	39.1	33.3	11.8	29.1
higher school certificate in other sector	47.9	40.0	64.6	50.8
degree in tourism	4.3	13.3	11.8	9.1
degree in other sector	0.0	6.7	11.8	5.5
Years in the restaurant business				
less than 11	0.0	0.0	17.6	5.6
from 11 to 15	0.0	14.3	17.6	9.2
from 16 to 20	13.0	14.3	23.5	16.7
more than 20	87.0	71.4	41.3	68.5
Family tradition in the restaurant business				
Yes	69.6	46.7	44.4	55.4
no, I started	30.4	53.3	55.6	44.6
Tasks				
Cuisine	100.0	85.7	77.0	89.4
Room service	94.8	84.7	88.2	89.8
Administration	91.3	84.6	100.0	92.6

Analysing the number of years in running restaurant business, there was a different longevity among the three groups. In fact, the North is the group with the highest longevity (more than 20 years), followed by Centre and South. For 55.4% of the total, there is a fundamental role of family tradition. The average goes up to 69.6% in the case of operators of the North and goes down in the case of operators of Centre (53.3%) and of South (55.6%).

Moving to the analysis of the firm's characteristics, partnership is the most common legal form for all the three groups although the percentage is a bit lower for the South. Concerning the enterprise size, the sample confirms that restaurants are small firms. In general, they have less than 12 employees, with the percentage decreasing in the Centre and South.

There are some elements that make it possible to distinguish restaurants by geographical provenience, while for others there are none. Maybe this is related to the specific category chosen (high-quality cui-

sine). More investigation can help to deepen this result, for example expanding the sample to several sub-categories.

*Management strategies*

In relation to specific strategies used by restaurants (Table 2), we have investigated the main management strategies adopted and also the role of innovation in running these specific enterprises. In regard to quality, unimportant differences were reported, so that all three groups presented similar data for importance of “Quality of menu”, “Quality of service”, and “Quality of restaurant space”. At the same time, quality is an essential variable in the strategies of top restaurants.

Even though the respondents gave high scores to all the items related to management strategies, some highlights emerge. Marketing strategies were rated as the less important consideration for the group in the North, while financial management was rated as less important by the Southern group. The highest score has been assigned to human management by the Centre group.

An analysis of a list of different inputs that can influence the introduction of innovations in top restaurants through their capability to innovate was conducted (total average = 4.2, with no evident differences among North, Centre and South). Among all inputs, “creativity” is the most important input for innovation, and it is a characteristic seen in all three groups. This result emphasises how creativity represents a fundamental pillar for innovation in high-quality cuisine restaurants.

Other inputs are “customer survey” for the South, as well as “meeting with employees” for the North, followed by “workshop, meeting, cooking demonstration” for Centre, South and North. Less important inputs are “competitors analysis” and above all “blog and social network”. This contrasts with the fast progress of the Internet and this can result in a further point of investigation in the restaurant sector.

**Table 2. Management strategies**

	North	Centre	South
Management (average)			
Quality of menu	4.9 (0.3)	5.0 (0.0)	4.9 (0.2)
Quality of service	5.0 (0.2)	5.0 (0.0)	4.9 (0.3)
Quality of restaurant space	4.6 (0.7)	5.0 (0.0)	4.8 (0.6)
Financial management	4.4 (1.1)	4.8 (0.6)	4.2 (1.2)
Human management	4.8 (0.4)	5.0 (0.0)	4.9 (0.3)
Marketing management	4.2 (0.9)	4.7 (0.6)	4.4 (1.0)
Collaboration with local stakeholders	4.1 (0.9)	4.2 (1.1)	4.1 (1.0)
Inputs for innovation (average)			

Competitor analysis	2.6 (1.6)	2.4 (1.5)	1.9 (1.0)
Specialized media (press, TV, Internet, etc.)	2.8 (1.4)	<b>3.9 (1.1)</b>	3.1 (1.2)
Workshop, meeting, cooking demonstration	3.2 (1.4)	3.8 (1.4)	3.5 (1.3)
Blog and social network	1.9 (1.0)	2.1 (1.1)	2.6 (0.9)
Meeting with local restaurants	2.8 (1.4)	2.5 (1.4)	<b>3.1 (1.4)</b>
Customer survey	3.3 (1.5)	3.2 (1.4)	4.0 (1.2)
Gastronomy school	1.8 (1.0)	1.9 (1.3)	1.8 (1.1)
Meeting with employees	3.1 (1.4)	3.9 (1.3)	3.3 (1.1)
Creativity	4.7 (0.5)	4.9 (0.4)	4.6 (0.6)

*Note:* Standard deviation in parentheses. For “Management” and “Inputs for innovation” respondents rated the attributes on a scale of “1” to “5,” where “1” was least important and “5” was most important.

### *The weight of local food in the restaurant's strategies*

We examined the local food attributes valued by high-quality cuisine restaurants (Table 3). Data show that the use of local products is quite common in this category of restaurants, particularly in regions of southern Italy, with a predominance of typical products, followed by local products and organic products. In relation to typical names used to indicate the dishes in the menu, the research showed that this is an important activity. This is noticeable in all three groups, but is slightly lower in the South. Displaying the use of local food in the menu is an important activity for restaurants from the North and the Centre. Generally, restaurants change the menu following the seasons and this is even more important for the central regions.

We also asked restaurants their opinion on the customer's attitude in relation to several items including their perception of the importance of local products.

Considering the customers' behaviour, differences among the perceptions of the three groups are not so pronounced. Some differences arise comparing the importance of the price and the importance of the information about products. According to the restaurants' perception, the variable price still has a central role in the customer choices despite the increasing interest around local gastronomy.

**Table 3. Local food attributes and restaurant attitudes**

	North	Centre	South
Cuisine (average)			
Typical products	4.4 (0.8)	4.6 (0.8)	4.8 (0.6)
Organic products	3.1 (0.9)	3.9 (0.8)	3.7 (0.9)
Local products	3.4 (1.1)	3.8 (1.1)	4.4 (0.7)
Menu			

Use of typical names (%)			
Never	0.0	7.7	5.9
almost never	9.5	15.4	17.6
almost always	38.1	30.8	<b>53.0</b>
Always	<b>52.4</b>	<b>46.1</b>	23.5
Display local foods (%)			
Never	9.5	15.4	0.0
almost never	9.5	15.4	41.2
almost always	33.3	23.1	<b>29.4</b>
Always	47.7	46.1	29.4
Change by seasons (%)			
Never	0.0	0.0	0.0
almost never	0.0	0.0	0.0
almost always	14.3	7.7	29.4
Always	85.7	92.3	70.6
Customer attitudes (average)			
Perception of the importance of price	3.2 (1.2)	3.7 (1.1)	4.0 (0.6)
Perception of the importance the label typical products has to the customer	3.5 (0.6)	3.6 (1.3)	3.9 (1.2)
Perception of the importance the label organic products has to the customer	2.3 (1.0)	3.5 (1.0)	3.4 (1.2)
Perception of the importance the label local products has to the customer	3.1 (1.0)	3.6 (1.3)	3.6 (1.2)
Perception of the importance the information about origin of products has to the customer	3.2 (1.0)	4.2 (1.0)	3.8 (1.1)
Barriers to adoption (average)			
Costs for the study and preparation of local dishes	2.6 (1.3)	2.7 (1.7)	2.3 (1.1)
Skills	2.5 (1.0)	2.7 (1.8)	2.6 (1.5)
Promotion costs	2.7 (1.2)	3.1 (1.4)	2.6 (1.1)
Competitors	2.1 (1.0)	2.7 (1.7)	2.4 (1.2)
Educate customers about local food	3.3 (1.2)	3.2 (1.6)	3.2 (1.3)
Specific skills on local gastronomy (%)			
No	0.0	0.0	0.0
Education	4.3	0.0	16.7
Training course	21.7	20.0	5.6
Self-directed learning	39.1	<b>46.7</b>	27.8
Handed down by relatives/colleagues	65.2	46.7	50.0
I have a chef in my staff	65.2	86.7	66.7

*Note: Standard deviation in parentheses. For “Cuisine”, “Customer attitudes” and “Barriers to adoption” respondents rated the attributes on a scale of “1” to “5,” where “1” was least important and “5” was most important.*

With regard to barriers to the adoption of local products in their kitchen, for all groups the most significant is to educate customers about local food. Other barriers are represented by costs and the preparation of local dishes, skills, and promotion costs.

The fact that local gastronomy is related to tradition is confirmed by the answers of most restaurateurs. In fact, family and social situations influence the entrepreneur's behaviour, so that the specific knowledge about cuisine and local food is "handed down by relatives/colleagues". Other items have received lower response rates, in particular education and training course.

### *Gastronomy tourism and restaurant attitudes*

We investigated the importance of collaboration with stakeholders in restaurant's management. The results are quite high for all three groups. The importance of relationships between restaurants and the public and private stakeholders is also a part of the actions related to the development of local gastronomy tourism (Table 4). The North considers the collaboration with local suppliers and local government (4.6; 4.5) the most important, as well as the promotion of a positive image and reputation (4.6); the Centre judges the collaboration with other restaurants (4.4), the enhancement of professionalism of restaurants and other tourism operators (4.9) and the enhancement of professionalism of other tourism players to be the most relevant (4.9); the South considers collaboration with other tourism operators (4.6), promotion of a local gastronomy brand (4.3), creation of a discipline (4.0), organisation of gastronomy events (4.2) and integrated tourism package (4.3), implementing of destination web marketing (4.1), and promotion of gastronomy culture among residents (3.9).

The analysis reveals that the interviewees are interested in local development (create, organise and promote specific interventions), as well as to cooperate with public and private stakeholders.

**Table 4. Gastronomy tourism and restaurant attitudes**

Actions for gastronomy tourism (average)	North	Centre	South
Collaboration with other restaurants	4.3 (0.8)	<b>4.4 (0.8)</b>	4.2 (0.8)
Collaboration with other tourism players	4.4 (0.7)	4.4 (0.9)	<b>4.6 (0.6)</b>
Collaboration with local suppliers	<b>4.6 (0.8)</b>	4.6 (1.0)	4.5 (0.7)
Collaboration with local government	<b>4.5 (1.0)</b>	4.3 (1.3)	4.3 (1.3)
Promotion of a local gastronomy brand	4.2 (1.1)	3.8 (1.5)	<b>4.3 (0.8)</b>
Promotion of positive image and reputation	<b>4.6 (0.7)</b>	4.2 (1.5)	4.4 (0.6)
Creation of a disciplinary	3.6 (1.4)	3.6 (1.6)	<b>4.0 (1.4)</b>
Organisation of gastronomy events	3.8 (1.1)	3.7 (1.2)	<b>4.2 (0.8)</b>
Organisation of integrated tourism packages	3.7 (1.1)	3.4 (1.2)	<b>4.3 (1.1)</b>

Implementing of destination web marketing activities	3.8 (1.0)	3.4 (1.3)	<b>4.1 (1.0)</b>
Promotion of gastronomy culture among residents	3.6 (1.3)	3.6 (1.4)	<b>3.9 (1.3)</b>
Enhance professionalism of restaurants	4.4 (0.9)	<b>4.9 (0.3)</b>	4.7 (0.6)
Enhance professionalism of other tourism operators	4.6 (0.7)	<b>4.9 (0.3)</b>	4.7 (0.6)

*Note: Standard deviation in parentheses. For "Actions for gastronomy tourism" respondents rated the attributes on a scale of "1" to "5," where "1" was least important and "5" was most important.*

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this work was to create a portrait of the entrepreneurs in the specific field of the high cuisine restaurant sector, seeking confirmation of entrepreneurship theory. Several findings were obtained concerning restaurants, gastronomy and local tourism development.

First of all, the observed data have shown that the entrepreneurial orientation of the Italian high cuisine restaurants is influenced by special characteristics, not only referring to the figure of the entrepreneur but also to the geographical and social context in which the enterprise is located. Interesting findings are also related to their approach to innovation so that they rely on creativity as the major influence input. Creativity – the generation of novel and useful ideas – and creativity management – the management of that process – have become key buzzwords across a range of fields. More and more we hear the argument that "ideas" have become the most important economic resource for individuals, firms and nations. Yet, in spite of its importance, creativity remains a poorly understood issue. This suggests that the links between innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship and competitive advantage have to become an important field also for tourism studies because it can help entrepreneurs and policy-makers to discover new important ways for sustaining tourism competitiveness. Related to this topic is the role of education. Research has highlighted how high cuisine Italian restaurants don't have in general a high education level and the specialisation in tourism is not so diffuse. This is also noticeable if we focus on the knowledge of specific local gastronomy, where it is evident that family is the first source of information and the main field of training.

The research discovered the interest of restaurants to participate in local networking activities.

Various studies confirm the importance of inter-organisational networks in tourism destination competitiveness (Ruhanen, Scott, Ritchie, & Tkaczynski, 2010). The presence of links in the network is an important driver to transfer and share knowledge. As stated by Presenza and Cipollina (2010: 18) "knowledge and ideas diffuse through busi-

ness systems via the relations and networks connecting economic actors and, as result, they allow and restrict what individual actors can do, know and think”.

A significant involvement of high cuisine restaurants in the destination community context can represent an important factor in enhancing the management's level of all destination stakeholders and the destination image. These restaurants, that have generally higher capacities and skills, may function as opinion leaders in the destination, transmitting new inputs and knowledge and facilitating information dissemination. They may function as opinion leaders also in relation to diners because they can educate, inform, and draw customer attention to local foods (Inwood et al., 2009). The idea of connecting food and place has a powerful effect and the evidence presented here demonstrates that offering visitors a way to experience some form of authenticity through food can assist the development of sustainable tourism. Restaurants can play a fundamental role assisting the local economy in several ways, such as encouraging the development of sustainable agriculture and of conservation and the enhancement of traditions.

This research is explorative in the sense that it is conducted into an issue where there are few studies to refer to. For this reason, several limitations can arise. Furthermore, the small size of the sample does not permit to generalise the results beyond the analysed context, despite having raised interesting insights for later investigations, so that several topics can be explored. Among all, creativity, as a fundamental driver of innovation, and network approach, as facilitator for sharing knowledge and expertise, reinforce the restaurant competitiveness.

Next steps should also consider the importance to do cross-regional analysis, comparing restaurants from different Italian regions and widening the population to all categories of restaurants. In this case, the results will contribute to highlight the main differences and similarities among the different categories of restaurants, from “stars” to other groups such as agritourism, and among different local systems.

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