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**SLOW FOOD TOURISM:
The Mediating Role of
Destination Image in
Tourism Motivation, Satisfaction and
Competitiveness**

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Master in Hospitality and Tourism Management

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“Porque o caminho é mais importante do que o que te levou a andar” - Paulo Coelho -

Ursprung ist das Ziel - Karl Kraus -

Be not afraid of going slow, be afraid of standing still - Japanese proverb -

Travel to fast and you will miss all you travel for - Louis L'Amour -

En primer lugar y para no hacer mudanza en mi costumbre, I would like to thank my family, once again, for their patience during these months, and in general always, for sharing the tears and celebrating every smile.

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ABSTRACT

Slow food tourism has emerged as a recent topic in both the academic and the practical field. Studies reveal the role of food as a lifestyle market and a medium of cultural identification. Prior research identifies the involvement at the destination as the main goal of this new niche of tourism. However, there is limited knowledge of the current status of slow food tourism in different cities. This study, based on a sample of 206 tourists visiting the city of Valencia, develops and tests, using structural equation modeling (SEM), a conceptual model to assess the actual state of the slow food tourism within the city perceived by its tourists. Results indicate the importance of the destination image in mediating tourists satisfaction and Valencia's competitiveness as a tourist destination, by highlighting the role of tourism motivation, involvement and touristic infrastructure on the tourist satisfaction and the destination competitiveness, mediated by the destination image that tourists hold in their minds about the place visited. Moreover, the authors also find contradictions on the variables. More specifically, study results confirm the negative relationship between tourism infrastructure, involvement and motivation regarding tourists satisfaction, which contradicts previous research. Findings of this study enrich existing literature by addressing the slow food tourism from a quantitative approach and in a new city and explore practical implications to the tourist entrepreneurs of Valencia, as well as future paths for research.

Key words: slow tourism, food tourism, destination image, motivation, satisfaction, competitiveness, infrastructure.

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RESUMO

Turismo Slow Food é um tópico que vem surgindo recentemente tanto no âmbito acadêmico quanto no prático. Estudos revelam o papel da comida como um mercado de estilo de vida e um meio de identificação cultural. Pesquisas anteriores identificam o envolvimento com o local de destino como o principal objetivo nesse novo nicho de turismo. No entanto, há conhecimento limitado no status atual do turismo slow food em diferentes cidades. Este estudo, baseado em uma amostra de 206 turistas visitando a cidade de Valência, desenvolve e testa, usando modelagem por equações estruturais, um modelo conceitual para avaliar o atual estado do turismo slow food em cidades de acordo com a percepção de seus turistas. Os resultados indicam a importância da imagem do destino em mediar a satisfação dos turistas e a competitividade de Valência como um destino turístico, trazendo destaque o papel da motivação do turismo, o envolvimento e a infraestrutura turística na satisfação do turista e na competitividade do destino, mediado pela imagem do destino que os turistas mantêm na cabeça sobre o lugar visitado. Além disso, os autores encontram contradições nas variáveis. Mais especificamente, os resultados da pesquisa confirmam a relação negativa entre a infraestrutura turística, envolvimento e motivação levando em consideração a satisfação dos turistas, o que contradiz pesquisas anteriores. As descobertas presentes nessa pesquisa enriquece a literatura existente ao tratar do turismo slow food de uma forma quantitativa em uma nova cidade e explora implicações práticas aos empreendedores do turismo de Valência, além de criar futuros caminhos para pesquisas.

Key words: turismo lento, turismo gastronômico, imagem do destino, motivação, satisfação, competitividade, infraestrutura

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INTRODUCTION

Slow food tourism started as a consequence of the Slow food movement, which was born in Italy in the late 80s. Protesting against the globalization of fast food chains and the speed that population lifestyle was reaching, the movement defends the effort to promote regional ways to establish cultural identity by recognizing the important role of food habits in a community (Kivela & Crotts, 2005). Their motto was fast and easily applied to a new way of tourism, creating a new niche in the industry which is still lacking a representative literature review about the topic, due to the newness of the issue.

Since the introduction of the concept, researchers have tried to define slow food tourism as a way of tourism serving to inspire tourists to indulge in the rich diversity of locally-grown food (Miele & Murdoch, 2002). Recent studies (Sharma, 2019) define slow food tourism as a tool to promote local culture and tourism, while helping the nation's economy and sustainability and can only be developed taking all the stakeholders into consideration. For other authors (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2021), slow food tourism is an ethical paradigm and an important tourism micro-driver to address sustainability and climate change. Some literature suggests that the presence of slow food tourism is more able to happen in rural areas and countryside (Nummedal & Hall, 2006), while others defend the presence also in urban spaces like Berlin, London or New York (Lowry & Lee, 2016). People's motivation to choose slow food tourism has also been studied, as well as which niches of the tourist market are interested in this concrete type of tourism.

There have also been developed studies about slow food tourism in different cities and facets of the movement. Ahlawat, Sharma and Gautam (2019) examine the presence and the various slow food products being served in Uttarakhand, and try to identify the scope of development of slow food tourism by perception of major stakeholders; while Jung, Ineson and Miller (2014) focus more on the sustainable aspect of the slow food tourism in Wales. And the most recent (Sharma, 2019) followed a study to identify the factors promoting slow food tourism in South Asian countries.

Further than this, there are no practical applications of the studies in the real life, the previous studies about slow food tourism are more focused on the conceptual aspects rather than the empirical ones, so apart from the original locations where the concept of slow food tourism arose (Italy, Austria, and Switzerland) there are no studies related to the implementation of slow food tourism in other cities, that's why there's still a gap between theory and applied research on the topic.

As far as our knowledge covers, apart from these studies above exposed, there are no studies directly addressing the concept of slow food tourism. Slow food tourism is an important topic nowadays and the present research can contribute to improve the literature about the topic by adding a new point of view, since there are not so many studies about the implementation of slow food tourism in specific cities (Sharma, 2019; Ahlawat, Sharma & Gautam, 2019). Furthermore, in the city of Valencia it is a new issue as well, since there are no studies related with slow food, slow tourism or slow food tourism.

The gap in the literature in relation to slow food tourism is significant. As stated above, there is a lack of studies related with the slow food tourism in Spain, specifically in Valencia. In consequence, there is also no data about the implications or involvements of the tourists. In addition, the vast majority of researchers, due to the newness of the concept, had developed their works in a qualitative way, so little is studied in a quantitative or empirical approach.

Since slow food tourism has several meanings and interpretations regarding the context, it is important to address slow food tourism as an actual practice of tourists who engage in it. Consequently, this research looks at slow tourism from the tourist perspective. It considers the actual and potential slow tourism practices in Valencia, not promoted yet as a slow travel destination. The aim of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of slow food tourism and identify the current status of the movement from the perspectives of visitors in the city of Valencia. The main idea is to discover the extent to which the vision of Valencia's tourists are in line with slow food tourism and/or the opportunities to promote it in the mediterranean city. Thus, considering this, the objectives of

this study are (i) to discover the extent to which the vision of Valencia's tourist is in line with Slow Food Tourism by measuring the current status of the movement in the city and (ii) to identify the factors responsible for the development of Slow Food Tourism in Valencia.

The beginning of the Slow Food movement in Spain was not as successful as expected due to its potential. The country tried to create organizations associated with the movement without success since, unlike Italy, where slow food had thousands of followers all around the country, in Spain was perceived from an elitist approach, formed only by people interested in having a good time in relation to gastronomy. Spain experienced a small recovery when new organizational ideas coming from the international headquarters encouraged the creation of some conviviums¹ in different parts of the country, but lack of coordination and minimum link with the main organizations of gastronomy, as well as the economic failure of a first Slow Magazine in Spanish, left Spain at the beginning of the 2000s with practically a inexistent Slow Food movement.

It was not until 2003, when the Slow Food organization began to organize several projects around the globe such as the Foundation for the Defense of Biodiversity, the Slow Food Prize, the Ark of Taste, when the movement really took off in Spain and new membership groups re-emerged and started organizing events. Throughout the year of 2003, decisive moments for the Slow Food movement in Spain: the reissue of the Slow magazine and the creation and development of new associations in different cities of the country like Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Córdoba, Madrid, Álava, Lleida, Tarragona, Bilbao, Huesca and Sevilla. Furthermore, a *Escuela del Gusto* (school of taste) has also been created where introductory wine courses, cheese and coffee tasting, or wine festivals and so on have been held on a monthly basis. Recently, in one of the latest forums of the movement, Spain was defined as one of the countries that “develops the largest number of activities throughout the year in relation to the Slow Food concept. It is also a place where the community of people committed to this movement grows day after day” (FWS, 2018). Up to date, in Spain, the

Conviviums are local sections of Slow Food. Present all over the world, Slow Food convivias or convivium organize events and activities at the local level that can consist of simple dinners and tastings, where members share the joys of food; in visits to local producers and farms, conferences and debates, film festivals or in tasting courses for both children and adults. The convivias are the fundamental pillar of Slow Food. These are made possible by members, who volunteer their time and energy. (Slow Food Website).

Slow Food association has Convivium (turismecarraixet, 2020) bases in Bilbao and Valencia, where our research is focused.

Valencia is located at the East coast of Spain and bathed by the Mediterranean sea, being the third most populated city and metropolitan area within the country, only behind Madrid and Barcelona. Its economy is focused on services, around 84% of the employed workforce belongs to the service sector. However, Valencia maintains an industrial base, with an employed population percentage of 5.5%. On the other hand, agricultural activities, even having a relatively minor importance, survive in the municipal term with a total of 3,973 hectares, which are occupied for the most part by crops of orchard and citrus. Valencia's historic center is one of the largest within the country, with approximately 169 hectares, and thanks to its historical and monumental heritage is one of the cities with the highest influx of national and international tourism in the whole country. Furthermore, the city offers natural reserves, parks and many outdoor spaces, as well as a remarkable gastronomic tradition.

Regarding the traditional cuisine of the city, the famous Mediterranean diet, prevails the use of rice, olive oil, vegetables from the local orchards and fish and shellfish from the Mediterranean coast. The notorious and international dish of Valencia is paella, originally a humble meal cooked by the inhabitants of the Albufera marsh. This plate is based on rice and complemented with local products, mainly chicken, rabbit, and fresh vegetables. Apart from that, Valencia has a lot of different gastronomic products depending on the season. According to this, Valencia seems to have the potential to develop as a slow food tourist destination.

Despite all this information above and the wide possibilities that the country offers, little research has been done in Spain about slow food. The main studies focus on defining the concepts or in the environmental and gastronomic areas (Blanco-Gregory et al., 2020; Narajo et al., 2010), not in the tourist counterpart. Just a few of them are set in specific cities or territories to carry out empirical research (Luis Blanco, 2011; Gonçalves et al., 2020). Due to its recent appearance and having in mind that this tourism niche is still not enjoying a conceptual determination unanimously accepted in the scientific literature, its academic presence in Spain is very limited.

Taking into consideration all stated above, the current study presents an approach to the concept of slow food tourism in Valencia through the compilation of quantitative data based on a survey administered to tourists who have visited the city. We attempted to investigate the tourist's perception of slow food tourism in the city of Valencia by addressing the actual moment of the tourist destination within the movement, measuring its tourism infrastructure, competitiveness, involvement and satisfaction of the tourists in the destination, and their motivations and destination image of the Mediterranean city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Slow Food, Slow Tourism and Food Tourism

Slow food has attracted remarkable attention since its beginning, practical and academic. The movement becomes a new practice in which the consumption of food is seen as a matter of culture, identities and aesthetic distinction (Miele & Murdoch, 2002). Numerous researches focus on the relation between time and eating (Nilsson et al., 2011), and in some of the anthropological and business-related literature, there is a special interest in “authentic” gastronomic products and the importance of local production and marketing (Nosi & Zanni, 2004).

The Slow Food Movement was founded in Italy in 1989, whose main objective was seeking for an alternative to the unsustainable trends of contemporary culture mainstream and rapid consumer society. The goal of the movement is creating a new “culinary science” and “new model” of food systems (Lacková & Rogovská, 2015). While dedicating more time to meals we give value to the work of those who have produced the foods we find on our table, knowing the quality of every substance, verifying the sustainability of the supply chain, and ultimately underlining the socializing value of eating together (Corvo & Matakana, 2017). Slow food is the practice of consuming local food that has a local identity, is locally produced and regionally branded products. The concept of slow food has associated the act of eating with social culture and upholding a sense of community and enduring sustainability through healthy and nutritious food (Sharma, 2019). The term “slow” must be understood in a qualitative rather than quantitative sense, since it refers not to prolonging time to arrive *later*, but to a remodeling of time to arrive *better* (Corvo & Matakana, 2017). The movement also takes into consideration the distance food travels from producers to consumers when those foods could have been produced locally (Serdane, 2019).

Over the years, this movement has emerged as an unexplored contributor to promotion of local tourism (Ahlawat, Sharma & Gautam, 2019). Several studies have focused on the application of the movements in different touristic cities (Miele & Murdoch, 2002; Jung, Ineson & Miller, 2014; Ahlawat, Sharma & Gautam, 2019; Sharma, 2019) and the tourist

experience with slow food in the destination (Bruwer & Huang, 2012) as well as its latest trends (Peesapati, 2020).

2.1.1. Slow Tourism

Slow travel and tourism have been defined as an overall approach to tourism. It has emerged as a reaction to fast travel or mass tourism and many authors refer to *slow* as the opposite of *fast* (Dickinson et al., 2010; Groenendaal, 2012; Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011; Conway & Timms, 2010), while others refer to *slow* as the antithesis of *speed* (Matos, 2004). However, slow is about the “lack of speed rather than slowness per se” (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011, p. 265).

The slow tourism movement was born in the 2000s, inspired by the slow food movement along with three innovations in the tourism sector: (1) a reaction against fast food products in favor of local products, (2) healthy eating, and (3) foods of recognized traceability (Valls et al., 2019). According to the existence literature, slow tourism, as the slow food movement, is a very recent topic. Slow tourism consists in fewer vacations and longer stays, air travel is not used, but other forms of transport, more environmentally friendly, become part of the tourist experience (Dickinson et al., 2010). As Caffyn (2007) defined it, the movement upholds a way of tourism which involves “making real and meaningful connections with people, places, culture, food, heritage and the environment.”

Slow tourism is gaining popularity in both advertising and in the strategic planning literature of destinations. It has been acknowledged that slow food has contributed to the development of slow travel and tourism and vice versa (Nummedal & Hall, 2006; Conway & Timms, 2010). It is an outgrowth of the sociopolitical ideology and consumption practices of the Slow Food Movement and has developed as an alternative to the fast paced, unhealthy, and unsustainable lifestyle of modern society (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2011). Slow tourism practitioners are willing to dive into a complex and purposeful experience, enabling analysis, experimentation, and exchange, not only eating and drinking local products, but also taking part in thematic events, getting in touch with producers, visiting production sites and

artisan workshops, enjoying museums, exhibitions and artistic sites, and participating in the historical events and traditional rituals (Corvo & Maticena, 2017)

The literature of slow tourism has studied the motivations, goals and dimensions of the movement (Oh et al., 2014; Özdemir & Çelebi, 2018), its implementation advantages (Valls et al., 2019; Moira et al., 2017), the tourists experiences (Bruwer & Huang, 2012) and the situation of slow tourism as an opportunity in the post pandemic world (Nikolić, 2021).

2.1.2. Food Tourism

During the last decades, food has become a very important part of traveling, but the majority of the literature focus on gastronomy tourism in general, and not in slow food tourism in particular. Food tourism refers to the visit to a destination in order to discover the idiosyncrasies of its culture and nature through its culinary heritages (UNWTO, 2019), can be considered a subset of cultural tourism (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020), and can enhance the identity of destinations due to its tight relation to ways of life, local production, cultural celebration and heritage.

Food tourism also enhances the participation of tourists in food-related activities during the trip, such as purchasing local foods and consuming local cuisine. Hall (2003) established levels of interest in food when traveling: (1) high interest, such as gourmet tourism, which consider food to be the primary motivation for traveling; (2) moderate interest, where tourists view food-related activities as essential to understand a destination's local lifestyle; (3) low interest, through which tourists participate in food-related activities because they want different experiences; and (4) low interest/no interest, where tourists consider food and eating as simply satisfying needs. Other studies regarding food tourism have focused on different aspects like its experiential value (Tsai & Wang, 2017; Fusté-Forné et al., 2021), how food tourism can contribute to destination management (du Rand & Heath, 2006; Knollenberg et al., 2020; McKercher et al., 2008), the tourist perception of food tourism (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2019; Amuquandoh, 2011; Peštek & Činjarević, 2014) and other authors still refer to it as gastronomy or culinary tourism (Guzel & Apaydin, 2016; Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014).

2.2. Implications of tourism motivations in slow tourism

Motivation is defined as the wish to satisfy biological and psychological needs and wants (Dann, 1981; Pearce, 1983) on different levels, which are influenced by internal/social-psychological push factors and external/situational pull factors (Levitt et al., 2017). These inner motives are described as “internal stimuli” or personal needs which can be physiological, social, and egocentric. On the other hand, external stimuli are related to environmental, physical and social factors from commercials and advertisements (Kim et al., 2010).

Tourist motivation has been widely researched in the literature and through all fields of tourism, including pleasure tourism (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981), rural tourism (Park et al., 2008), and special-event planning (Uysal et al., 1991). Different theories have tried to explain tourists’ motivations, being these the push–pull model (Crompton, 1979; Jang & Cai, 2002; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994), the travel career ladder (Pearce & Lee, 2005), and the functional theory (Fodness, 1994). The Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scale is extensively used to understand factors that motivate visitors and to investigate differences in motivation in leisure studies. Raadik et al., (2010) identified four major REP factors: self-discovery, experience of places, seeking solitude, and challenging self.

Studies demonstrate that one of the best ways to understand tourist motivation is by examining and conceptualizing tourists’ behavior using push and pull (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Kim et al., 2003; Klenosky, 2002). Individuals are pushed by motivation variables into making travel decisions and are pulled by destination attributes (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). Push factors include tourists’ desires such as escape, rest and relaxation, prestige, health and fitness, adventure and social interaction, family togetherness, and excitement, while pull factors relate with the features, attractions, or attributes of the destination (Kim et al., 2010).

Previous research suggests that food involvement, as well as motivation, each positively influences attitudes and intentions, respectively (Levitt et al., 2017). Hsu & Lam (2003) argued that since motivation is an initial driving force of behavior, tourist motivation

will affect revisit intention. Lin (2012) added that specific tourism motivations, such as cuisine experiences, affect revisit intention. Formally, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1a There is a positive association between tourists motivation and tourist satisfaction

H1b Tourist motivation positively affects destination image

H1c Tourist motivation positively affects destination competitiveness

Food involvement and motivation are important concepts for food tourism. Individuals who have higher levels of food involvement or motivation, are more likely to participate in food tourism (Levitt et al., 2017). Understanding which motivations drive food tourists to revisit is a key element in developing successful strategies for the destination marketing (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Afonso et al., 2018).

2.2.1. Tourists Involvement

Involvement has been defined by some authors as the association between individuals with an activity or product (Zaichkowsky, 1985), and for others (Brennan & Mavondo, 2000) such a state of emotion directed by consumer motivations and goals determining the relevance of a purchase to an individual. Involvement has been proved to have a strong influence in consumer decision making (Kim et al., 2014).

In the tourists field, involvement is identified as an important predictor to describe the behaviors, perceptions, attitudes and decision-making of tourists (Marshall & Bell, 2004; Omar et al., 2020). Prebensen et al. (2012) maintain that involvement is a core antecedent for tourism experiences, as the level of involvement a tourist feels with a holiday affects the level of participation in creating experience value. The concept has been extensively studied throughout the hospitality and tourism industries (Beldona et al., 2010; Bruwer & Huang, 2012; Clements & Josiam, 1995; Kantanen & Tikkanen, 2006; Kim, Duncan, & Chung, 2014). Previous works have explored the links between the tourists' personal involvement with travel experiences and their ability to recollect them in the future (Kim et al., 2010), and other studies have explored the relation between motivation and involvement (Josiam et al.,

2005; Kyle et al., 2006), but the relation between tourist involvement and gastronomy at the destination is a recent subject.

The influence of food involvement in shaping tourists' perception on food tourism image of a host destination is still new and not yet highly investigated. Food or gastronomic involvement is simplified as the meaning of food and its significance as perceived by an individual (Marshall & Bell, 2004). Involvement in cultural food ways or any food related activities in tourism might help tourists to have better understanding of a destination. As stated by Sims (2009), "eating and drinking thus become a three-dimensional experience that enables the visitor to connect with the place and the culture of their destination." The personal involvement that a consumer feels with gastronomy leads to memorable moments associated with specific ingredients or local products which can drive positive future intentions of buying the local specialties in the future. This can establish a long-lasting commercial relationship between the tourists and the destination that will keep receiving positive economic impacts over the long term (Di-Clemente et al., 2019). Thus, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H2a There is a positive association between tourists involvement and tourist satisfaction

H2b Tourist involvement positively affects destination image

H2c There is a positive relationship between destination competitiveness and tourist involvement

2.3. Tourism Infrastructure

The touristic infrastructure encompasses all the facilities and services necessary to develop a tourist area, such as accommodation, catering, transport, information, museums and tourist attractions. Each of these elements boosts tourism development mostly by raising the attractiveness and competitiveness of a destination (Mandić et al., 2018). Tourism infrastructure also includes physical, legal, environmental and mental amenities which contribute to making touristic products enjoyable, reliable and sustainable (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007). Middleton and Hawkins (1998) distinguished between public and private

tourism infrastructure, being the public tourism infrastructure any general and basic physical asset provided by government agencies to support tourism activities at minimum or no charge.

Development and provision of tourism infrastructure is seen as a prerequisite to become a popular tourist destination. An attractive tourist destination is not only relying on its natural resources, but also on its available infrastructure and facilities. Along with technology and other physical elements, it is a visible feature of tourism products that influences travel experience (Murphy et al. 2000). In the majority of the cases, it is provided by public authorities and intended to support the local community and its development. A good infrastructure is essential in the early stages of tourism development (Russo, 2002).

The scope of tourism infrastructure is broad and related to all those elements in a destination that enable and boost tourism development and it includes all those facilities that tourists use when they leave their homes, reach their destination and return back home (Lohmann & Netto, 2017). Recent research by Mandić et al. (2018) suggests how to proper management tourism infrastructure by (1) creating tourism offer and promotion, (2) cooperating with different public stakeholders (3) performing maintenance of the parks and promenades and other existing infrastructure, (4) planning and preparing projects, (5) building new infrastructure, (6) improving accessibility of sights, (7) managing historical and cultural sights and (8) marking tourism sights and thematic trails. Once developed, tourism infrastructure highly influences destination competitiveness (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999) and increases the efficiency of producing and distributing tourism services. Destinations have to ensure their general infrastructure is properly developed and user-friendly (Wilde & Cox, 2008), many destinations fail to do so (Buhalis, 2000) which consequently negatively affects their image and competitiveness (Jenkins, 1999).

The importance of tourism infrastructure is evident, since it can contribute to increasing the efficiency of production and distribution of tourism services. For tourists to be able to reach some tourist destinations, there should be the developed transport infrastructure,

which is a precondition for consuming other tourism services of the destination itself. Thus, we state the following hypothesis:

H3a Tourist infrastructure will have a positive impact on destination image

H3b There is a positive relationship between tourism infrastructure and destination competitiveness

H3c Tourism infrastructure positively affects tourist satisfaction

2.4. The outcomes of Destination Image in tourist satisfaction

The role of image in destination selection has been widely studied in the literature, and has been proven to be an important factor in the selection of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chi et al., 2013). Studies on destination image began in the early 70s, becoming the subject of extensive research across diverse disciplines such as social and environment psychology, marketing or consumer behavior. In tourism and hospitality literature, there is a growing body of research on destination image measurement, its components, and its role in travel decision making, post-trip evaluation and future intentions (Zhang et al., 2014; Peštek & Činjarević, 2014).

Destination image is defined as an attitudinal concept consisting of the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a tourist holds about a destination (Crompton, 1979). Numerous researchers across fields and disciplines agree that image is mainly caused by two major forces: stimulus factors, those which stem from the external stimulus and physical object as well as previous experience, and personal factors, being those the characteristics (social and psychological) of the perceiver (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). On the other hand, an increasing number of researchers support the view that the destination image is a multidimensional construct comprising two primary dimensions: cognitive and affective (Baud-Bovy & Lawson, 2002). The cognitive component can be interpreted as beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination, while the affective component refers to the appraisal of the affective quality of feelings towards the attributes and the surrounding environments (Hosany et al., 2006).

Despite the recognition that food is an important determinant in the overall perception of a destination by tourists, the literature discussing the attributes of local cuisine from a tourist perspective is rather limited. Authors Kivela and Crofts (2005) believed that culinary experience is inextricably linked to the destination and its image. Researchers (Jang et al., 2009) classified food attributes into four categories by examining the destination food image, such as (1) appearance (fresh, looks pleasing, clean, attractive, neat); (2) health-related characteristics (digestible, healthy, nutritiously balanced); (3) uniqueness (aromatic, unique, spicy, exotic); and (4) other (quality and inexpensive). Another research conceptualized food image as a multifaceted construct comprising three components: (i) food distinctiveness and accessibility; (ii) food diversity and enjoyment; and (iii) food quality and presentation (Chi et al., 2013). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is stated:

H1d Destination Image mediates the relationship between tourist motivation and Destination Competitiveness

2.4.1. Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a central variable in consumer behavior research due to its strong influence on customer loyalty and intention to revisit a location. If a positive culinary image is formed in tourists' minds, it will lead to tourist satisfaction, which will in turn affect tourists' behaviors (Chi et al., 2013). Some researchers believed that tourists' food satisfaction at a destination depends on how much prior image they had about the destination's cuisine compared with the real culinary experience. An empirical study by Kivela and Crofts (2005) stated that tourists' level of conception of the local culinary prior to consumption is likely to be less than their post visit evaluation. Consumer's satisfaction is commonly measured with their repeated intention or behavior (Kim et al., 2014).

Satisfaction is defined in the literature by Tse and Wilton (1988) as "the consumer's response to the evaluation of discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption" (p. 204). Many studies highlighted the effects of satisfaction on both loyalty and intention to revisit, often utilizing structural equation modeling to verify pathways between these three elements (Kim et al.,

2010; Mason & Nassivera, 2013). Others, consider tourists' satisfaction as the key determinant of tourists' likelihood of recommending a particular destination (Hui et al., 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Wan and Chan (2011) examined factors influencing consumer satisfaction, where they cited eight influential factors affecting satisfaction levels of attendees of a food festival.

Regarding to the concern of this research, only a few empirical studies have examined the effects of local cuisine on tourist satisfaction (Chi et al., 2013; Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Peštek & Činjarević, 2014). Tourists' satisfaction is considered as the key determinant of tourists' likelihood of recommending and revisiting a particular destination (Hui et al., 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chi et al., 2013). In the context of food tourism, it is possible to attract tourists who may not go back to the visited destination again, but who would rather patronize its typical products over the long-term and from their place of origin (Di-Clemente et al., 2019). Thus, we hypothesize:

H1e Destination Images mediates the relationship between tourist motivation and tourist satisfaction

H3d Destination Image mediates the relationship between tourist infrastructure and tourist satisfaction

2.5. Destination Competitiveness

According to researchers Crouch and Ritchie (1999), a destination's competitiveness is a country's ability to create added value and increase the national wealth by managing assets and processes, attractiveness, aggressiveness and proximity, and integrating these relationships within an economic and social model that takes into account a destination's natural capital and its preservation for future generations. The ultimate goal of competitiveness is to maintain and increase the real income of its citizens, usually reflected in the living standards of the country (Porter et al., 2001). From this perspective, the competitiveness of a nation is not an end in itself but a means to an end (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

In the field of tourism, many authors have tried to define and understand competitiveness in the area of touristic destinations (De Keyser & Vanhove, 1994; Evans et al., 1995; Thomas & Long, 2000; Brent & Crouch, 2003). Tourist destination competitiveness is defined as “a general concept that encompasses price differentials coupled with exchange rate movements, productivity levels of various components of the tourist industry, and qualitative factors affecting the attractiveness or otherwise of a destination.” (Dwyer et al., 2004).

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Measures & Instruments

The current research followed a quantitative approach, since the previous data on the area of research is mainly qualitative and based in case studies (Ahlawat et al., 2019; Ernszt & Marton, 2021; Kim et al., 2021). A self-administered questionnaire was used for the present study, divided in seven sections, being those demographics, tourist motivation, destination competitiveness, tourist involvement and tourist infrastructure, tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness.

The questionnaire was developed based on the literature review and validated by a pre-test performed on a small sample of six people to validate adequacy of the terminology used. The study adopted pre-existing scales and these scales used a likert-type scale. Administered in Spanish and English, the questions went through a reverse translation to prove that the meaning did not vary with the transcription.

The first section of the survey contained the demographic information of the sample for gender, age, education, occupation, income, length of stay, purpose of visiting the city of Valencia as well as their country of origin. The second category, tourist motivation, contained 18 items adapted from previous studies (Gardner, 2009; Özdemir & Çelebi, 2018) and based on the purpose of tourist visits to certain destinations, locality of the region, sustainability, social well-being and the experience based approach within others. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with all the statements using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree and 5 = totally agree). The following section measured the destination image that tourists held of Valencia. Adapted 21 items from previous works, mostly focused on destination food image from authors Roustta and Jamshidi (2019), Jiménez-Beltrán et al., 2016 and Peštek and Činjarević (2014), to measure the quality, diversity, uniqueness and cultural aspects of Valencia's cuisine. The fourth category, tourist involvement, presented 14 items adapted from researchers (Marshall & Bell, 2004; Sharma & Dyer, 2009; Beldona et al., 2010) measuring the level of participation of tourists in the different tourist attractions presented in Valencia. Tourist infrastructure was measured in fifth place, with 11 items

adapted from precedent studies (Raina, 2005; Amuquandoh, 2011), respondents were asked to punctuate different Valencia's services using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = low score and 5 = high score). The sixth category, measured by 12 items, was tourist satisfaction and adapted questions from Chi et al. (2013); Kivela and Crofts (2005) and Peštek and Činjarević (2014) previous studies to measure the level of satisfaction tourists had after visiting and experiencing the city. Last section was the competitiveness of the tourist destination, measured by 19 items adapted from the works of Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2014) and Dwyer and Kim (2003).

3.2. Procedures

Data for the present research was collected between the months of March and April of 2022. An online questionnaire was spreaded through the internet. Respondents were selected for the survey through a criteria-based snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling relies on referrals from initial subjects to generate additional subjects (Breakwell et al., 2006). To select the respondents, a purposive sampling method was used. Tourists visiting Valencia were randomly selected at major tourist attractions as well as in the airport of the city by providing the tourists with a printed QR code with a link to the online survey. To include respondents in the investigation the criteria we followed was that the interviewed should be a tourist in the city, no local participants were accepted.

A total of 206 completed questionnaires were obtained. Within them, 63.6% of the respondents were females, 35.9% of them were males and only 0.5% of the respondents preferred not to answer. The most common range of age was the one between 21-35 years old, with a 37.9% of the total, followed by 35-50 range accounting for a 29.6% of the sampling, and the rest was similarly distributed within respondents under 21 (12.6%), between 51-65 years old (11.2%) and over 65 year-old with the lowest score, 8.7%. Spanish tourists accounted for 53.4% of the sample, showing the high importance of domestic tourism, followed by Italians and Portugueses tourists with a percentage of 8.3 each. Other nationalities with a relevant presence were Germans with 5.8% of the total sampling, North Americans with 5.3% and tourists from the United Kingdom with 4.4%. The rest of the European countries, such as Belgium, Poland, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Ireland, Czech

Republic, Latvia or Switzerland were present in the study but with a presence roughly surpassing 1% of the sample. To highlight, as well, a minoritarian appearance of latin American countries like Argentina and Chile with 0.9% and 1% respectively as some asian countries, Japan and China with a percentage of 0.5 both. Approximately 60% were university graduates, meanwhile 19.4% of the respondents had had their last education from secondary/ high school and around 10% hold a post graduate diploma or any studies at all. This indicates that the majority of them possessed a high level of education. Majority of the respondents were employed (41.3%), leaving 13.1% from the sample being self-employed, students achieved the elevated percentage of 35.2 and only 10.4% of the sampling were already retired. Around 36.9% of the respondents possessed a monthly income below 700€ and only 8.7% had a salary above 2.500€, the rest were in between 700-1.000€ with 10.7% of the total sampling, 19.4% had an income among 1.001 and 1.500 and the range between 1.500-2500 accounted for 24.3% of the respondents.

Regarding the length of the stay, around 34% of the tourists stayed between 3 to 5 days in Valencia, followed by those staying one week accounting for 25.7% of the total and 15% of the sample preferred to stay for more than one month. Only 4.9% percent of the respondents were day travelers, 6.8% stayed 1 or 2 days and 9.7% and 2.9% stayed for 2 and 3 weeks respectively. About the motivation of the trip, more than half of the respondents were in Valencia to enjoy their holidays, only 8.3% of the respondents were there for business related affairs, and 22.3% were visiting friends and/or family. Taking into consideration other purposes of the visit to the city, we found Erasmus being the most common one, and others like football games, concerts or local holidays.

The objective of the study was tourists who have visited the city of Valencia, and since the program employed was the structural equation modeling (SEM), a sample of 206 respondents was considered adequate to run the analysis.

RESULTS, FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1. Statistical Analysis

To test our conceptual model we used structural equation modeling (SEM). More specifically, we used partial least squares (PLS), which is a variance-based structural equation modeling technique, by means of SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle et al., 2015). The analyses and interpretation of the results followed a two-stage approach. We first evaluated the reliability and validity of the measurement model and then assessed the structural model.

To assess the quality of the measurement model, we examined the individual indicators of the reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability and discriminant validity. The results showed that the standardized factor loadings of all items were above 0.6 (with a minimum value of 0.642) and were all significant at $p < 0.001$, which provided evidence for the individual indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2022). Internal consistency reliability was confirmed because all the constructs' Cronbach alphas and composite reliability (CR) values surpassed the cut-off of 0.7 (See Table 1).

Convergent validity was also confirmed for three key reasons. First, as noted before all items loaded positively and significantly on their respective constructs. Second, all constructs had CR values higher than 0.70. Third, as Table 1 shows, the average variance extract (AVE) for all constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The discriminant validity was assessed using two approaches. First, we used the Fornell and Larcker criterion. This criterion requires that a construct's square root of AVE (shown on the diagonal with bold values in Table 1) is larger than its biggest correlation with any construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 shows that this criterion is satisfied for all constructs. Second, we used the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015). As Table 1 shows, all HTMT ratios are below the more conservative threshold value of 0.85 (Hair et al., 2022). They provide additional evidence of discriminant validity.

The structural model was assessed using the sign, magnitude, and significant of the structural path coefficients; the magnitude of R² value for each endogenous variable as a measure of the model's predictive accuracy; and the Stone Stone-Geisser's Q² values as a measure of the model's predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). However, we checked for collinearity before evaluating the structural model (Hair et al., 2022). The coefficient of the determination R² for the two endogenous variables of tourist satisfaction, and destination competitiveness, were 93%, and 96.4%, respectively. These values surpassed the threshold value of 10% (Falk & Miller, 1992). The Q² values for all endogenous variables (0.77 and 0.76 respectively) were above zero that indicated the predictive relevance of the model. We used bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to evaluate the significance of the parameter estimates (Hair et al., 2022).

4.2. Quantitative results

The results in Table 2 show that destination image has a significantly positive effect on destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.398$, $p < 0.001$) as well as a significant effect on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = 0.961$, $p < 0.001$). The results expose a direct influence of tourist infrastructure in the destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.273$, $p < 0.001$) and also on the destination image ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$), but the relation between tourist infrastructure and tourist satisfaction is not supported ($\beta = 0.099$, n.s.). The results highlight the positive relation between the tourist involvement and the destination competitiveness ($\beta = 0.116$, $p < 0.05$) but shows a negative correlation between the tourist involvement and tourist satisfaction ($\beta = -0.153$, n.s.) as well as with tourist involvement and destination image ($\beta = 0.054$, n.s.). Regarding the relation between tourist motivation and destination competitiveness, Table 2 shows that the relation between them two is not supported ($\beta = 0.217$, n.s.) and even the relation between tourist motivation and tourist satisfaction is also negative ($\beta = 0.051$, n.s.). On the opposite side, the results show that motivation has a positive effect on the destination image ($\beta = 0.636$, $p < 0.001$).

4.3. Contributions to existing theory and practical implications

Study findings confirmed the positive relationship between the tourists' motivation and the destination image tourists held of the city of Valencia, thus confirming hypothesis H1b, while the association among tourists' motivation with destination competitiveness and tourist satisfaction is not confirmed. This contradicts hypothesis H1a y H1c, enhancing that even tourists have a good predisposition to the visit, after experiencing the city, their previous motivations were not enough to have a positive image after it, regarding their satisfaction and how they conceived the local competitiveness. Although, it is interesting to address that the relation mediated by the destination image within these last three variables, end up in an affirmative relation, confirming hypothesis H1d y H1e. Meaning that even tourists are not satisfied and their perception of the competitiveness of Valencia has not been positive, if the conveyed image of the city is well perceived, the result would be genuine and would end up with satisfied tourists and a solid tourism competitiveness.

In view of that, the mediation effect of destination image between the relationships of destination competitiveness and tourist satisfaction truly envisaged the importance of the local tourist organizations in providing information to tourists for a better perception of the image of slow food tourism in Valencia. Information about slow food tourism destinations can be delivered, as stated in previous studies (Omar et al., 2020), in different forms such as booklets, social media and so on. In their study Omar et al. (2020) demonstrated that pamphlets, brochures and advertisements of Taiwanese food clearly presented the food image of Taiwan. Restricted gastronomy information on a destination can affect the perceptions that tourist hold of it. Thus, positive culinary images in tourism destination will pull more tourists to savor the local food and experience the cultures. Also, a good way of achieving tourists satisfaction is by food culture involvement, tourists can be exposed to the local culture during the immersion with locals.

The results also allow us to identify the direct implications of the destination competitiveness and the tourist involvement, confirming hypothesis H2c and in line with the studies of Shenoy (2005) where was observed involvement as one of the most important

Table 1. Composite reliability, average variance extracted, correlations, and discriminant validity checks.

Latent Variables	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6
Destination Competitiveness	0.986	0.987	0.795	0.892	0.984	0.974	0.932	0.985	0.952
Destination Image	0.986	0.987	0.797	0.971	0.893	0.962	0.925	0.984	0.976
Infrastructure	0.922	0.941	0.629	0.952	0.941	0.793	0.909	0.972	0.930
Involvement	0.970	0.974	0.726	0.924	0.916	0.871	0.852	0.973	0.861
Motivation	0.973	0.975	0.687	0.968	0.966	0.938	0.948	0.829	0.937
Satisfaction	0.980	0.983	0.838	0.937	0.962	0.917	0.861	0.926	0.915

elements in tourism, which makes the tourist to immerse themselves in a destination's food culture and therefore increasing destination appealing and competitiveness. Regarding the

Table 2. Structural model assessment.

Path	Path Coefficient	Standard errors	t statistics	p values
Destination Image → Destination Competitiveness	0,398	0,101	3,932	0,000
Destination Image → Satisfaction	0,961	0,122	7,871	0,000
Infrastructure → Destination Competitiveness	0,273	0,069	3,971	0,000
Infrastructure → Destination Image	0,298	0,079	3,791	0,000
Infrastructure → Satisfaction	0,099	0,066	1,491	0,137
Involvement → Destination Competitiveness	0,116	0,055	2,086	0,037
Involvement → Destination Image	0,054	0,093	0,574	0,566
Involvement → Satisfaction	-0,153	0,107	1,432	0,153
Motivation → Destination Competitiveness	0,217	0,125	1,734	0,084
Motivation → Destination Image	0,636	0,134	4,755	0,000
Motivation → Satisfaction	0,051	0,159	0,320	0,749

relationship between tourist involvement and tourist satisfaction, as well as within tourist involvement and destination image, our hypothesis H2a and H2b are not supported, opposing

Table 3. Bootstraps results for indirect effects.

Indirect effect	Estimate	Standard errors	t statistics	p values
Mot -> DI -> DC	0,254	0,069	3,699	0,000
Inv -> DI -> Sat	0,051	0,091	0,564	0,573
Inv -> DI -> DC	0,021	0,039	0,548	0,584
Inf -> DI -> DC	0,119	0,050	2,357	0,019
Inf -> DI -> Sat	0,286	0,081	3,536	0,000
Mot -> DI -> Sat	0,611	0,143	4,260	0,000

with previous studies (Chon, 1991; Tang et al., 2009) in which researchers found that tourists involvement played a great contribution in establishing a positive image of Mauritius as a tourism destination (Praga & Ryan, 2011). As well as a significant effect linking tourists' involvement and destination image was also reported in a study by Lu et al., (2015) investigating tourists in Litchi Bay throughout the summertime. These results have a high impact on the practical implication level, since the involvement of tourists should have a positive impact on their satisfaction and their image of the destination, not inversely.

Accordingly, we suggest an investment in the activities, experiences and services offered in Valencia, so the tourists could leave satisfied and with a good image of the city. In order to increase tourist involvement, food tourism managers and stakeholders should promote activities that encourage the interaction with the local foods and cultures, and participation in food-related events. As well to boost involvement, managers could create slow food tourism offers that combine socialization with local gastronomic experiences. A positive image of a food tourism destination is a cue to welcome more future visitors, thus doubling the benefits for the tourist sector. As an example, local tour guides are the main source to convey information as they perform as an intercultural mediator to enlarge the knowledge of tourists about a destination (Hua, 2019). Furthermore, as stated by Horng and Tsai (2010), "marketers need to have a very good knowledge of the local cuisine, the local foods and food culture to establish a strong image and brand name of a tourism destination". Additionally, the government tourism official website has a crucial role to promote food culture globally (Omar et al., 2020).

Respecting our hypothesis stated about the tourism infrastructure present in Valencia, two out of three were supported. Hypothesis H3a confirmed the positive impact that tourism infrastructure plays on the image of the destination that tourists hold, following the line of previous studies as Jenkins (1999). About the relation of the tourism infrastructure and the destination competitiveness, this study also establishes a positive association. In opposition to precedent research, H3c contradicts the studies of Devesa et al. (2010) and Sukiman et al., (2013) by denying the relationship between tourism infrastructure and tourists satisfaction. However, the indirect effect of destination image mediating the relationship between these

two variables, confirms their positive association. Thus, hypothesis H3d is confirmed and supports previous studies. According to Mamirkulova et al. (2020), tourism infrastructure projects can stimulate marketing campaigns to attract visitors, and these projects can refine the sustainable development of tourism, in line with the slow food tourism practices that should be developed in Valencia.

Since the results of the present study revealed that tourists were not satisfied with the infrastructure of Valencia, and already stated its importance for the proper development as a slow food tourist destination, we recommend the following; firstly, promoting green mobility, such as developing urban cycle paths and parking areas and adopting low-environmental impact technologies to minimize traffic congestion. This will follow the slow city concept of encouraging sustainable ways to take a break, rather than simply going slow and being anti-growth (Kim et al., 2021).

This study contributes to the slow food tourism literature by providing evidence of the importance of the movement among tourists nowadays. By highlighting the role of tourism motivation, involvement and touristic infrastructure on the tourist satisfaction and the destination competitiveness, mediated by the destination image that tourists hold in their minds about the place visited. Furthermore, by exploring the underlying relations between these elements, this study expands the knowledge on more competitive and integrative solutions for slow food tourism practices and development.

Another important contribution is the increment in the literature corpus of the movement and also adding information about new countries and cities where it has not been studied before, so the slow food tourism gets more visibility and reach, both in practice and in the academia. Although previous research has brought knowledge about qualitative and case studies in the field of slow tourism and food tourism, there is a remarkable lack of quantitative studies in the field. Due to this, we focused the present study on expanding and adding to the existing knowledge by assessing quantitative methods and approaching tourists about slow food tourism in particular and as the main character, not as a sub niche of the previous ones.

Based on our findings, the following relations can be considered in the slow food tourism in the city of Valencia.

The involvement of tourists on a destination and their satisfaction is defined by their traveling motivations (Devesa et al., 2010). Tourist satisfaction within the destination infrastructure and touristic attractions, will definitely increase their involvement on the destination. It is very interesting to note the involvement of the tourists in Valencia and its consequences. According to the results of the present study, tourists' involvement in Valencia has a positive relationship with the competitiveness of the city, but the relation between tourists' involvement with destination image and with their satisfaction, contradicts previous studies (Chon, 1991; Tang et al., 2009). Tourism activities or having the tourist involved on the destination, generates new business, increases the taxes and revenue for the local management funds, which can contribute to future promotion of policies and attractions of the destination (Mamirkulova et al., 2020). Additionally, since the results of the present study highlights the low involvement of the tourist within the city and consequently their low satisfaction, we recommend that tourism service providers create opportunities for longer stays by offering elaborated tourism experiences, so tourist got motivated to extend their stays and to be more involved with the surroundings and culture.

Previous studies have already remarked on the importance of a well developed tourist infrastructure for the competitiveness of the destination as well as for the satisfaction of the tourists (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Jenkins, 1999; Buhalis, 2000). A study described that a tourism destination with comfortable, modern, new infrastructural attributes satisfies tourists' needs and enhances the opportunities of having loyal tourists (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017; Sukiman et al., 2013). The present study supports this relationship, showing that tourists that visited the city of Valencia leave the city with a positive image of the destination as well as high levels of tourist satisfaction regarding the infrastructure of the city, also positively affecting the competitiveness of Valencia. But since the direct relation between the tourism infrastructure and tourist satisfaction was not supported, we proposed that Valencia could use the bases of the existing infrastructure for the initial development of slow food tourism, since results of the present study upholds this.

Apart from physical infrastructure, improvement in training and skill capital is also an important driver for growth in slow food tourism (Ahlawat et al., 2019). Language barriers and lack of information can act as major barriers to enjoyment of slow food served to tourists (Amuquandoh, 2011), although the results showed that Valencia is embracing those aspects really efficiently, taking into consideration that in the city coexist two different languages, Spanish and Valencia's own language called *valenciano*.

Hence, it is acknowledged the importance of tourist involvement as an antecedent for shaping a favorable destination image. To be able to develop this image of the destination, tourists must be provided with information. Information seems to be crucial in pre-determining the food image of a destination (Omar et al., 2020). In a study conducted by Bertella (2011), it was found that transmission of knowledge was crucial in strategizing the food image of Lofoten (Norway), presenting knowledge/information as an accelerator for tourist involvement (Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

Studies focusing on tourist behaviors related with local food have been conducted worldwide and massive, but the focus on slow tourism is still under-studied. Overall, the findings of this study are beneficial to slow food tourism research, as well as destination marketers and tourism organizations in the city of Valencia. Notably, findings suggest that the city has already existing traits focused in the slow food movement and can be potentially considered a slow food tourism city destination. The current study also expands the literature of slow food tourism into the context of the Mediterranean city, and these findings may also be relevant to other niche of tourism studies such food or gastronomy tourism, slow tourism or agritourism and slow food studies within others. The results from this study indicate that Valencia's destination image was a significant factor that positively contributed to the tourist satisfaction and the destination competitiveness.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was set with the objective of extending existing knowledge about slow food tourism. As stated in the previous chapters, this field of tourism has been widely under-studied and the limited studies have been centered on qualitative research or case studies. As such, we decided to develop a quantitative approach by using SEM analysis on our results, in order to increase the literature review about the topic and to add a different perspective.

This study explores Valencia's tourists' perception of food culture, the potential of slow tourism and its current status focusing on the competitiveness of the region, its infrastructure, and tourists' image of the destination, their motivations and their satisfaction within the city. These worthwhile findings have implied that the tourist image of a destination has the capability of mediating the different relationships of the variables here studied and turn them into favorable relations. The analysis carried out in this paper could be viewed as imperative to prove the relationship between variables like the above-mentioned. Yet, there is no previous study investigating these relationships in the slow food tourism although there is a statistically significant positive relation between these variables.

To test the hypotheses, a quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 206 international and national tourists visiting the city of Valencia, during the months of March and April 2022. The results allowed the identification of a set of interrelationships within variables associated with the slow food tourism. Firstly, the direct and positive relationship between the tourists' infrastructure and destination image and competitiveness were identified, as well as an indirect relationship among touristic infrastructure and tourists satisfaction, mediated by the image that tourists hold of a destination. Secondly, it was also found that tourist involvement negatively correlates with tourist satisfaction and their destination image, but destination competitiveness was positively influenced by the involvement of tourists. Furthermore, the results showed the positive relationship between tourist motivation and tourist destination image, but opposed the relation of tourist motivation with destination

competitiveness and tourist satisfaction, even though these two relationships were indirectly positively influenced by the mediation of destination image.

In spite of the overall results, there are limitations that should be considered. First, the sample size used in the study was relatively small, and so findings cannot be generalized to the wider tourist population. Secondly, it is also essential to take into consideration the diversity of cultures among the tourists who took the questionnaire, which might indicate different perceptions in terms of their knowledge and involvement towards the slow food tourism in Valencia, as cannot be the same as a tourist from Madrid rather than one from Japan. Furthermore, the majority of tourists who traveled to the Mediterranean city in this research was not a group that had a deep interest in the slow tourism or slow food movement. They did stay for short periods and accidentally consumed local products, thus the accidental slow tourists who were defined as slow because of the slow nature of the tourist attractions in Valencia. Another limitation is regarding the nature of the study, even we addressed the novelty of conducting the research on the quantitative approach for better results and adding to the little literature, a study adopting both dimensions, such as focus groups or personal interviews could give more in depth knowledge of the current status of the slow food tourism in Valencia.

Finally, it is important to highlight the limitations of the variables. This study only uses the tourist motivation, involvement and the touristic infrastructure as independent variables, being tourist satisfaction and destination competitiveness the dependent variables, and only destination image as a mediating variable. Other variables should be incorporated to the study for better understanding and higher contribution to the slow food tourism literature and future practical implications, like the destination product, tourists' intentions of revisiting the destination or tourism development among others.

As stated above, due to the limitation of the sample, future research could use a larger sample size to determine the generalizability of the findings. The sample was, as previously noted, limited to 206 respondents, only in a two months period and with completely different backgrounds. Generalizability may be reached through research with samples from other

populations and replications or during a longer period of time. Analogies with similar geographical locations within the country could be taken into account for future, since there are no precedent studies of this type in Spain. Another area for potential study could be the investigation of the destination's unique gastronomy heritage, like its cultural and traditional food products, how they are produced and prepared, etc. Finally, due to the emergence of multitude foodies groups on social networks, the influence of social media channels on food travel motivation and involvement within the destination is also an interesting future research idea, not only to understand tourist behaviors but to address and focus future marketing campaigns.

The current research contributes to the mainstream culinary tourism literature and entrepreneurship, but with a strong focus on the slow food tourism, which is significantly under-studied. While early research on gastronomic tourism was focused on the principal stakeholders and tourists, recent studies have been dedicated to study the factors and motivations influencing this type of tourists, to be able to develop and apply a tourism strategy effective for the niche. The results of this study also provides important insights to the improvement of the tourism destination competitiveness on different levels. First, it has been demonstrated the importance of slow food tourism as a meaningful and possibly a highly loyal market segment. Gastronomy experiences are powerful tools for destination marketing, that is so we recommend to the public and private tourism organizations to have in mind this and develop strategies to add value to the eating experience to convey a memorable participation. The literature suggests that the destinations with best chances for developing gastronomy tourism are those destinations that already have the advantageous elements to support a culinary tourism strategy (Kivela & Crofts, 2005).

The studies make it visible the capability and potential of the city of Valencia to become a highly developed slow food tourism destination, but for successful tourism development, there is an existing need of intensive investment in infrastructure, so this is becoming an important component of tourism competitiveness (Jovanovic & Ilic, 2016).

Slow food tourism is an appealing pathway in the modern era, it can add significant contributions to the overall development of a tourist destination. In this paper it has been highlighted that Valencia has several unique features that indicate its broad opportunity for a successful slow food tourism destination development.

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ANNEXES

1. Questionnaire

Slow Food Tourism in Valencia 🍷

Welcome back intrepid tourist !! Hope you had a lovely stay in brighten Valencia. Now you can give a little back to the community by filling this questionnaire for the development of my thesis for the MSc Hospitality & Tourism Management. I'm Laura, student of tourism at ISCTE Business School in Lisbon and I'm writing my thesis about Slow Food Tourism in Valencia (my city).

Thank you in advanced for your time to complete this form and ad a little step forward to my graduation 🎓 . The questionnaire won't take long, is completely anonymous and today you will do a good action.

See you soon 🙌 .

For future questions you can contact us through the following email: lrpss@iscte-iul.pt

*Obligatorio

Demographics

A little about yourself...

1. Gender *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

2. Age *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- under 21
- 21-35
- 36-50
- 51-65
- over 65

3. Education *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- Primary School
- Secondary School
- High School Diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Post graduate degree

4. Occupation *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- Employee
- Self-employed
- Student
- Retired

5. Income *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- <700€
- 700-1000€
- 1001-1500€
- 1501-2500€
- +2500€

6. Length of stay *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- Less than 1 day
- 1-2 days
- 3-5 days
- 1 week
- About 2 weeks
- About 3 weeks
- About 1 month
- More than 1 month

7. Purpose of visiting Valencia *

Selecciona todos los que correspondan.

- Holiday/pleasure
- Business/Meeting
- Visiting friends/relatives
- Others

8. Country of origin *

Motivations Why/What/Who were the motivations of your trip to Valencia...

9. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) how will you agree with the following statements: *

I travel to Valencia to relax

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

10. *

I travel to Valencia to scape from daily life and routine

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

11. *

I travel to Valencia to discover new experiences and meet new people

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

12. *

I travel to Valencia to immerse into local culture

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

13. *

I travel to Valencia to get food experience

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

14. *

I am interested in participating in food-related activities in Valencia

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

15. *

I am interested in participating in food-related activities in Valencia if it means seeing landmarks

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

16. *

I am interested in participating in seeing and learning about culinary performance and skills in Valencia

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

17. *

I am interested in buying local food in Valencia

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

18. *

I am interested in increasing my food knowledge

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

19. *
I am interested in trying different and new foods in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

23. *
I am interested in fine dining and gourmet restaurants in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

20. *
I am interested in being with family and friends in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

24. *
I am interested in food tours in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

21. *
I am interested in get rest and relaxation in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

25. *
I am interested in cooking clases in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

22. *
I am interested in Valencia's traditional farmer markets
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

26. *
I am interested in food festivals and events in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

Destination Image

The picture you make in your mind of Valencia...

27. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) how will you agree with *
the following statements:
Valencia provides rich food culture as a tourism destination
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

31. *
Valencia's cuisine uses fresh culinary ingredients
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

28. *
Valencia provides unique/original food as a tourism destination
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

32. *
Valencia's cuisine has good quality/price ratio
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

29. *
Valencia provides recognizable food as a tourism destination
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

33. *
Valencia's cuisine has attractive presentation
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

30. *
Valencia's cuisine is an element of socialization
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

34. *
Valencia's cuisine is part of cultural heritage
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

35. *
The food products in Valencia are rich in flavor
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

36. *
The food products in Valencia are appealing
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

37. *
The food products in Valencia are located in convenient places
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

38. *
The food products in Valencia use variety of cooking methods
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

43. *
Valencia's cuisine is unique/original
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

44. *
Valencia's cuisine is tasty
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

45. *
Valencia's cuisine is high quality
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

46. *
Valencia's cuisine is easily digestible
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

39. *
The food products in Valencia have comfortable eating surroundings
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

40. *
The food products in Valencia have information guide on local food
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

41. *
Valencia's cuisine is authentic
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

42. *
Valencia's cuisine is recognizable
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

47. *
Valencia's cuisine is healthy
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

Involvement How much did you get inside the city...

48. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) how will you agree with *
the following statements:
I like meeting local people, their lives and their cultures in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

49. *
I like trying the local specialties in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

50. *
I like getting personalized services in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

51. *
I like experimenting with food from different cultures
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

52. *
I go to local markets in Valencia if I have the opportunity
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

53. *
I ate at local restaurants in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

54. *
I learnt a few sentences in the local language of Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

59. *
I collect food-related "trophies" like souvenirs menus, etc from Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

60. *
Talking about what I ate in Valencia is something I like to do
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

61. *
Experience Valencia's food culture is important to me
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

Infrastructure

How prepared is the city...

62. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) how will you agree with * the following statements:
Difficulty in identifying local food has prevented me from taking them in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

55. *
I choose an environmentally friendly transportation while in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

56. *
I prefer longer stays while in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

57. *
Food experiences prompt me to learn more about Valencia's culture
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

58. *
When I travel, one of the things I anticipate most is eating the food in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

63. *
Difficulty in ordering local dishes discourage me from taking them in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

64. On a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 5 (the highest), how will you rate: *
Hotels in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

65. *
Restaurants in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

66. *
Transportation in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

67. *
Water and electricity in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

68. *
Culture, heritage and festivals in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

69. *
Banking facilities in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

70. *
Travel agencies in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

75. *
I really enjoyed eating Valencia's food/dishes
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

76. *
There is easy access to traditional food in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

77. *
There is variety of food choices in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

78. *
The food experience in Valencia add to visiting enjoyment
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

71. *
Insurance agencies in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

72. *
Tourist guides in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

Satisfaction

73. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) how will you agree with * the following statements:
Eating local food has contributed to the overall satisfaction of my visit to Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

74. *
The food and dining experience in Valencia exceeded my expectations
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

79. *
I am satisfied with Valencia's food as I expected to be
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

80. *
I strongly remember my food experiences in Valencia
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

81. *
I will recommend Valencia to my friends and family
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

82. *
I will recommend Valencia's food to my friends and family
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

83. *

I will revisit Valencia

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

84. *

I will revisit Valencia for its food

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

Destination Competitiveness

Valencia Vs. The world

85. On a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) how will you grade the following statements: *

Valencia's cuisine

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

86. *

Valencia's tourism attractions

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

87. *

Valencia's culture

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

88. *

Valencia's local way of life

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

89. *

Valencia's interesting architecture

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

90. *

Valencia's climate

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

94. *

Valencia's festivals and special events

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

91. *

Valencia's museums and galleries

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

95. *

Valencia's history

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

92. *

Valencia's visual appeal

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

96. *

Valencia's communication facilities

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

93. *

Valencia's nightlife

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

97. *

Valencia's access to information

Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

98. *
Valencia's high-quality accommodation
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

99. *
Valencia's international access
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

100. *
Valencia's geographical location
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

101. *
Valencia's economic conditions
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

102. *
Valencia's cost of holidays
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

103. *
Valencia's safety
Marca solo un óvalo.

1 2 3 4 5

Low score High score

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