



Valorising the rural pantry: Bridges between the preservation of fruits and slow tourism in Catalonia

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Catalonia
Culinary heritage
Food tourism
Gastronomy
Rural experience

ABSTRACT

The presence of local products in food experiences is an added value for tourists who seek both a physical and symbolic relation with the place they visit. This article aims to study the role of jams and marmalades as local products that protect and promote the local identity in rural Catalonia (Spain). The qualitative methodology is based on 18 semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders involved in the production, distribution and commercialization of jams and marmalades to explore their tourism value. Results show that the tradition of growing fruits is a source for producing jams and marmalades, which, in turn, contributes to sustainable consumption of locals and visitors. While results reveal the connections between fruits and tourism from the stakeholders' perspectives, the study also opens a new research avenue where the relationships between preserved fruit products and tourism is still underexplored.

1. Introduction

The valorisation of gastronomy leads to a cultural experience that does not only include a system of production, distribution and consumption of products, but it also represents a path to communicate the social identities and memories of a particular region and time [7]. Within the framework of tourist experiences, food tourism enhances a 'gourmet spirit' and it is a form of tourism that shows respect to the culinary traditions embedded in the lifestyles of local people and the natural environment (Ellis et al., 2021). This is especially relevant in rural areas [17]. When tourism value is awarded to local products, the traditions attached to regional cuisine are highlighted [22] and, at the same time, the 'sense of place' is communicated from the perspectives of artisans, museums, tours, visits, workshops or tastings, among others [71]. Since these experiences are a source of tourist motivation and satisfaction, the habit of consuming local products is increasing among tourists [10].

In this sense, previous research shows the relevance of local products as an essential element of the tourist experience and as part of the tourism system [26,29,31]. This is not only because of the economic impact of tourism on job creation or agricultural development, but also because tourism "enhances destination attractiveness, reinforces

destination brand identity, and builds community pride pertaining to food and related culture" [77]; p.1). In addition, according to Ref. [61]; the discovery of local foods and drinks, for example through the use of particular ingredients or the preparation of iconic dishes, leads to the memorability of the food tourist experience [11,69].

The aim of this research is to analyse, from a local perspective, the case of jams and marmalades in rural areas of Catalonia to understand the participation of these products in the tourism system. This includes addressing the topic from the perspectives of production (independent producers and associations of producers) and commercialization (traditional agri-food stores and restaurants), which also receive political support to protect and promote Catalan identity products. Drawing from a study case approach and interviews with 18 local stakeholders, this article aims to fill the literature gap about the tourism value of rural pantry based on the case of preserved fruits which has been scarcely investigated. In particular, the research reveals the relevance of preserved products for the configuration of a food-based offer which can attract locals and visitors.

This paper aims to expand the understanding of the local-based offer of fruits in Catalonia, previously analysed in a recent study in Mercat del Lleó, in Girona (see Ref. [20]). It is worth to mention that Catalonia is a region known by the uniqueness of its gastronomy [1], which is a mix of

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jafr.2022.100386>

Received 2 August 2022; Received in revised form 31 August 2022; Accepted 10 September 2022

Available online 13 September 2022

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local products that come from the land and the sea, and whose culinary traditions are marked by a very strong seasonality. Among these products, fruits are one of the most representative foods in Catalan gastronomy. For example, some Catalan fruits are recognised with quality labels such as the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Girona apple or the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Lleida pear [2].

Empirical evidence shows that while it exists an artisanal production of preserved fruits in Catalonia due to the quality of raw materials and the implementation of traditional food preservation techniques, the tourism attraction factor is still underexploited. This will also help destination management organizations to design food experiences in rural areas that meet both producers and tourists' needs. According to Ref. [12] Brown and Green (2013), while food tourism that relies on local produce represents a 'green' model for community development, a specific public program is required to support the stakeholders. In Catalonia there are more than 55 thousand hectares of fruit plantations, with a production of more than a million tons of sweet fruit and citrus fruit a year, mainly based on peach, apple, pear, nectarine, apricot and cherries, among others [60]. The fruit sector holds the third position in the ranking of international exports. In this sense, the high production also requires resources to prolong the life of the product and its uses, and to avoid food waste. In this sense, jams and marmalades are some of these resources. This paper argues that they may also be used as part of the tourism marketing strategy to develop the relationships between local food, tourism and the sustainability of places (see Ref. [49] as drivers short food supply chains).

In the following section, the theoretical framework presents the relationships between local products and slow food tourism. Following this, the methodology and the results of the analysis are presented. The paper ends with the discussion of the results, conclusions, implications, limitations and the opportunities for future research.

1.1. The relevance of local-sourced products in slow food tourism

There is a rapid increase of studies that highlight the link between food and tourism (see for example [14,52,75]). Food is a relevant part of tourism management and marketing [13,27,39]. Previous research understands food as a cultural identity marker embedded in local products and culinary traditions that identify a specific territory or a group of people [51]. Food is an element that improves the uniqueness of the tourist experience [18,44] and helps to develop rural areas [3,54]. Also, a local-based food offer diversifies the portfolio of destinations [40]. In this sense, food tourism products increase the attractiveness of a destination [39,45], contribute to the reduction of the seasonality derived from sun and beach and urban destinations [23] and become a key element in the image formation [35]. This is for example manifested in the case of Catalonia, where Barcelona and the coastal areas are the most visited destinations [33], and rural areas remain as a repository of ancient and often undiscovered culinary traditions which may inform the path towards slow tourism [21].

Previous research also shows that food destinations attract tourists interested in culinary-based events and festivals, and tours, which are focused on local and seasonal products and dishes that change according to the cycles of nature [19,43]. Food is a driver of visitor motivation and satisfaction [41,76]. From a local perspective, food experiences provide an opportunity for local communities to show the local culture and generate a storytelling based on the senses of place as a source of learning [42,53,67]. The practice of food tourism allows visitors to discover the identities of the region through food. While this has been analysed from the perspectives of different food and drink products such as, to name a few, beer [58], chocolate [28], tea [36] or, obviously, wine [9], previous research has scarcely focused on the role of fruits to study the connections between local identity and slow tourism.

Slow tourism allows visitors to build a relationship with people and places [68], and slow experiences in tourism are a source of responsible "relationships and practices that foster resilience, sustainability and

social plus ecological well-being" [21]; p.228). According to Ref. [55]; there is an increasing interest to consume local-based products. The protection and promotion of traditional food and iconic dishes show a close relationship with the slow food movement [57]. Slow food production and consumption lead to the recovery of local production and the valorisation of food through a direct connection between producers and consumers [63]. However, many products are sold and distributed using long food supply chains [72], and consequently, the contact between producers and consumers is reduced. This has generated a progressive social discomfort between producers and large-scale supply chains and also between supply chains and final consumers due to the environmental damage and the carbon footprint derived from global distribution strategies [73].

This has supposed the creation of local supply chains where the relationship between producers and consumers is closer [72]. Short food supply chains (SFSC) are an example [24]. Following [63]; local food products that are commercialized, for example, through local fairs and direct e-commerce systems give the consumer the opportunity to observe first-hand the quality of the product as well as the attributes in relation to its authenticity, freshness and seasonality, because the product is directly sold by the producers. This enhances the commercialization of local products and also strengthens the relationships between production and consumption.

Recent research also highlights the relevance of agritourism from the perspective of small producers who engage with sustainable food production and responsible local food systems [50] that contribute to the preservation of local food heritage and landscapes. This, in turn, informs a sustainable development of tourism where "food emerges as an avenue toward the configuration of a food-based tourism offering that relies on locally grown products and can lead to the development of slow food tourism experiences" [20]; p.1995). In relation to the tourism activity [25], states that local products distributed through SFSC help to develop tourism in rural areas through a powerful tourist image based on agri-food production which is regarded as a source of slow food tourism [56,70].

In this context, the current paper analyses the link between rural tourism and jams and marmalades in Catalonia, north-eastern Spain, to understand the use of these products in the food tourism system and its potentialities to protect local identities and to promote tourist experiences. How fruit-based products can contribute to the economic, environmental and sociocultural well-being of the territory through slow tourism?

2. Materials and methods

The main aim of this paper is to analyse the role of local products, specifically jams and marmalades, based on the production and consumption dynamics and the relationship with tourism in rural Catalonia. The need to adopt an exploratory approach led the researchers to use a qualitative design since it is appropriate to analyse the situation from a local perspective [48] in order to capture in-depth details about the phenomena [6]. The validity of the research is achieved through the description of the interviewee speeches [74], which are analysed in the next section. Using a non-probability purposive sampling, 18 semi structured interviews were conducted with different Catalan fruit-based stakeholders (Table 1). The researchers stopped the interviews when theoretical saturation was reached and no new information emerged [46]. The convenience sample allowed the researchers to establish rapport quickly with the participants because of the comfortable and trustworthy environment [4] that emerged from a positive relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees [47].

As observed in Table 1, all the respondents were selected in relation to their knowledge about fruit and tourism systems. The panel of respondents selected included a range of different stakeholders to provide a more robust picture of the integration of this local product in the tourism system of rural Catalonia. The interviewees are stakeholders

Table 1
Interviewees' profiles (the authors).

Interviewee	Sector	Organization	Region of Catalonia	Number of years within the business
E1	Production	Melmelades El Vinyet	Alt Penedès	8 years
E2	Production	Melmelades Cal Casal	Alt Urgell	20 years
E3	Public administration	Associació Menja't l'Alt Urgell	Alt Urgell	6 years
E4	Commercial	Museu de la Confitura	Baix Empordà	+15 years
E5	Commercial	Botiga Abricoc	Baix Empordà	3 years
E6	Production/Commercial	Can Bech	Baix Empordà	5 years
E7	Production/Restaurant	El Ginjoler	Baix Empordà	+20 years
E8	Public administration	Consell Comarcal del Baix Empordà	Baix Empordà	2 years
E9	Non profitable organization	Fundació Espigoladors	Baix Llobregat	+20 years
E10	Production/Tourism	Cooperativa La Fageda	Garrotxa	6 year
E11	Commercial	Botiga Petit Paradís	Gironès	+30 years
E12	Promotion	La Foodlovers	Gironès	2 years
E13	Production	Melmelades de la Vall de Llèmena	Gironès	6 years
E14	Production	Melmelades Calada	Maresme	7 years
E15	Public administration	Ajuntament d'Alcarràs	Segrià	5 years
E16	Artista	Cook and culinary expert	La Selva	+20 years
E17	Production/Restaurant	Can Moragues i Fundació Emys	La Selva	5 years
E18	Production	Melmelades Llèpol	Alt Camp	+10 years

with different interests, such as producers, sales managers, restaurateurs, and representatives of public administration. These participants are from different regions of Catalonia, have a solid experience in the business, hold diverse positions and have impact on the different stages of the production, distribution and commercialization of fruit-based products.

The interview guide discussed the current situation of the production and consumption of jams and marmalades, as well as their distribution and commercialization in Catalonia, together with their relationship with tourism. In this sense, while the interview guide was the same for all the interviews, the development of semi structured interviews allowed the researchers to add questions according to the nature and the responses of the interviewees. Overall, the interviews discussed the role of jams and marmalades as part of the Catalan identity, the culinary uses of the preserved fruits, food pairing, the challenges and opportunities of production and consumption, the marketing strategies, the role of markets and restaurants in the protection and promotion of preserved fruits, and the relationships between jams and marmalades, and tourism. The semi-structured interviews were conducted between March and June 2021. Six interviews were carried out at the interviewee's offices and twelve using virtual platforms according to the availability of the participants. The interviews lasted 45 min on average and they were recorded. After data collection, the interviews were transcribed. The interviews and the analysis were carried out in Catalan, and the quotations presented in this paper have been translated from the original language into English. As part of the analysis of the interviewees' responses, a process of codification into thematic topics was conducted by the first author and discussed and agreed with the other authors of the

paper. Specifically, the results of the interviews were based on four thematic categories which are based on the production, consumption, distribution and commercialization dynamics of marmalades and jams in rural Catalonia.

3. Results

Results are structured in four sections in relation to the production, consumption, distribution and commercialization of jams and marmalades in Catalonia. This allows to analyse the relationships between local products and tourism activities and to study the role that preserved fruit products play in the creation of experiences in rural areas.

3.1. The tradition of growing fruits

The first issue to consider, which is often forgotten, is the quality of the fruits and vegetables used to produce marmalades and jams. Frequently, while jams and marmalades are used as products to take the most advantage of fruits and vegetables, they will have more or less quality depending on the raw products. This is illustrated by E7 who states that "every season we have to work with the available product, that is, when fruits are good, then we make good marmalades and jams" and E18 who emphasizes that "I will not make tomato jam when it is not tomato season, I will wait because this is noticeable in terms of quality". Although jams and marmalades are made of fruits and vegetables, the quality of the raw products affects the taste and texture.

In Catalonia, the production and commercialization of jams and marmalades is regulated by *Real Decreto 863/2003* of July 4 which defines the quality standards for the production, commercialization and sale of jams, jellies, fruit marmalades and chestnut cream [5]. Regarding the regulation, E9 states that "in the rest of Europe jam is a quality product and highly appreciated because the law is stricter with the use of fruits and sub fruit products like juice, but in Spain the legislation is less severe". It means that, for some European regulations, if a product it is made with sub fruit products, such as peel or juice, it is not considered a quality product. On the other hand, the Spanish regulation accepts jams and marmalades produced using whole fruits or sub-fruit products, and consequently, this affects the quality of the final product.

In this sense, E18 provides evidence of the existing lack of knowledge about the production of jams and other preserved fruit products mentioning that "we had problems with the production of jams and we went to the *Fundación Alicia* [a culinary research centre that investigates products and processes, and promotes the improvement of eating habits and the food heritage of the territories] to help us to understand the balance between pectin, acidity and sugar. Every jam must be made considering that the perfect combination of this triangle is mandatory". Also, most of the interviewees stated that the sector of preserved products is not sufficiently exploited, despite these products generate a higher economic profitability than unprocessed fruit. E15 points out that "there are many producers of fruit that also produce marmalades and jams because preserved fruit products emerge as a system of conservation that can make fruit last more than a year. This is excellent for growers". However, it is evident that at the Catalan level, unlike other European areas, there is a lack of knowledge about the production processes and benefits of jams and marmalades which is also transferred to the limited consumption of this product.

3.2. The potential of preserved fruits

The interviewees pointed out that the production of jams and marmalades in Catalonia is more traditional than its consumption. E9 explains that "in general, in Spain and also in Catalonia, marmalades and jams are less consumed than in other countries, such as France, Germany or England, since here we have a very wide range of fresh fruit. However, in these countries they do not have much fresh fruit and, therefore, they tend to consume more preserved fruits". E6 mentions that they have

customers in the Netherlands and in Belgium. The interviewees confirm that the consumption of jams and marmalades is higher in other European countries compared to Catalonia, which is in line with the results obtained in the previous section. At the same time, E18 also highlights the more ancient food tradition that these countries have in relation to jams and marmalades and add that “we do not have sweets as much integrated in the diet as Nordics, or in France people prefer more cooked and more caramelized jams”. In this sense, “the jams produced in the Pyrenees are excessively sweet for the Catalan palate, as we usually prefer to feel the taste of the fruit”. This may be useful to create a tourism attraction factor for European visitors, who are more used to sweeter preserved fruit products, but it could be a challenge for targeting domestic visitors.

According to the interviewees, another reason that influences the Catalan consumption of jams and marmalades is the organization of the mealtimes. E9 explains that “usually in Spain and in Catalonia we have dinner at 9pm or 10pm, and consequently, we are not much hungry at breakfast time, but in other countries where people have dinner earlier, at 6pm, they are hungrier at breakfast time”, when the consumption of preserved fruit products is more widespread. The majority of the interviewees stated that there is a low consumption of jams and marmalades also due to the lack of knowledge about culinary uses. For example, E13 explains that “people believe that jams are for breakfast only”. While the lack of knowledge influences the type of production and reduces the consumption, it is necessary to highlight the optimistic scenario pointed out by some interviewees. E1, E6 and E14 indicate that there is an increasing number of people that ask about the pairing of jams and marmalades and who make an effort to learn about their culinary uses beyond a toast for breakfast, and which include the combination of preserved fruits with fish, meat or cheese.

According to E7, “it is necessary to show food pairings because the customers could know different culinary purposes of these products. We need to organize workshops and tastings”. E17 mentions that a big portion of customers do not know how to consume jams and marmalades, and they decided to add a recipe for each product on the label to allow customers to learn about the culinary uses of their products. In this sense, they do not only contribute to share knowledge, as mentioned by some interviewees, but also to create a close link between producers and consumers.

In relation to the pairing opportunities of jams and marmalades, most of the interviewees point that the cheese table is the most iconic and popular. Specifically, E6 explains that “we found that northern European countries, for example Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, they love cheese and tell us that our jams are very good but very sweet. A jam is a jam because of the percentage of sugar it includes. If it does not have sugar, it will not be a jam. Then we contacted different cheesemakers to find a system to combine jams and cheeses, and to keep the flavour of cheese”. Thus, it is obvious that there are endless possibilities of pairings as well as options of fruits, vegetables, and even flowers to produce jams and marmalades. However, the interviewees mentioned that the most famous preserved products are made of bitter orange, strawberry, peach, tomato and figs. Also, it should be noted that there are more innovative producers such as E4 and E18 who have achieved success by producing jams made of mushrooms, peppers, watermelon and melon; while others such as E10 explained that they decided to make gourmet jams made of pineapple and chocolate, but they were not widely accepted in the market.

3.3. *The relationships between producers and consumers*

Respondents have different perspectives about the distribution of jams and marmalades. On the one hand, some of the interviewees are in favour of direct sales and think that it is important the producers themselves manage the sale points and do not depend on distribution channels. E1 and E14 emphasized that they basically sell the products directly at the workshop, and also in fairs and markets. It should be

noted that some of the interviewees, in addition to direct sales, also distribute their products in regional agri-food and butchery shops that are respectful with the local product and contribute to the food sustainability through the protection of local growers and the promotion of short food supply chains. For example, E10 explains that “we distribute to local supermarkets and shops and often to some restaurants” and E7 says that “we sell to small shops where they sell cheeses and other local food products”. These examples reveal different contact points with customers and, drawing from the case of restaurants, show a connection with tourism systems. Also, it is worth to mention that some interviewees point out that due to the pandemic and the discontinuity of events and markets, they had to find other distribution channels. This led to the creation of online stores and, consequently, the online sales. Thus, the interviewees highlighted the adaptation of their businesses to the digital environment accelerated by the pandemic as the only way to continue working during the confinement periods. This innovation is especially relevant in rural environments, where the digitization of distribution and commercialization processes is lower.

Another important issue observed in terms of distribution is the presence of jams and marmalades in Christmas baskets. Many respondents highlighted the use of Christmas baskets for both businesses and individuals as a distribution channel that has a great success. It is also an interesting path to generate visibility to the producer, the product, the project and the territory. According to E8, “the creation of Christmas baskets with different products of the region serves to develop networks and synergies between producers as well as promoting the region and its products”. Also, E5 highlighted that “I prepare baskets because is increasing the number of people aware of the value of local products and when they have to do a present, they choose local products”. This emerges as another path to generate knowledge about the products and increase the consumption of jams and marmalades among local consumers.

In the same line, most of the interviewees refers to the collaboration between producers and hospitality services as a distribution channel with a high potential, as pointed above. Some interviewees explained that they have collaborated with hotels, offering jams and marmalades as welcome details to customers. However, almost all respondents believe that it does not work as a distribution channel, as hospitality managers consider the artisanal preserved products are too expensive compared with larger industrial producers of jams and marmalades, despite the quality and the proximity of the product. There are also several interviewees who distribute their products to restaurants. Specifically, E2 explains that “in this area, both the restaurants and the accommodations have my jams and they also promote products from local artisans. They can offer quality local products, and make us visible”. Thus, it is evident that restaurants can play a relevant role in the protection of the product and the producers, and the promotion of the territory and its identity.

3.4. *The identity values of jams and marmalades*

There are several interviewees who highlight the challenges to develop joint promotional strategies between producers and the public administration. In relation to the participation in fairs, E18 indicates that “often the reputation of the fair itself is more important than the interests of the producers” and E3 says that “it is very difficult to achieve a direct public participation because some public administrations see us as a group of small businesses despite the fact that we work to improve the knowledge of the territory through food tours or local markets”. In this sense, territorial associations of producers have developed initiatives, such as those illustrated by E2 who highlights the cooperation between producers in the Alt Urgell and the Baix Empordà.

However, some interviewees also point out the difficulty of networking. E18 explains that “frequently networking does not create interest ... we are around 30 producers and we do not develop initiatives because there is not a good management and a good promotion” and E8

says that “I think there are about 50–60 companies that collaborate with the association, although it is very difficult to achieve participation if members do not see a short-term economic result”. This short-term economic impact is also one of the challenges the agri-food sector is dealing with, especially when it comes to the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of the relationships between local-sourced food and the tourism sector.

Additionally, the interviewees mention the relevance of workshops, and the organization of pairings and tastings. E2 emphasizes that these “are activities that attract people’s attention and allow us to explain the different culinary uses of the different products”. E17 notes that “we do guided visits to our facilities to show our project, we always try to end the visit with a tasting of our jams both to explain our identity and to promote the products”. The storytelling is a relevant attraction factor. They also organize workshops mainly focused on the relevance of these products from a conservation perspective and their use in food pairing. At the same time, E10 states that “our idea is that people come here, visit our facilities, we explain the project and at the end of the visit we organize a tasting of the product”. These initiatives also impact on the loyalty of the customers because the food experience allows people to get immersed in the work of the producer, and to understand the close link between producers, the process of production, and the natural origin of the product.

At the same time, the interviewees highlighted the importance of social networks not only to promote their products but also to make visible their projects and enhance the value of local foods and drinks. E9 mentions that “through social networks we have the opportunity to show what we do and why we do”. Among the social networks, Instagram is the most used. However, some interviewees such as E13 and E14, pointed out that while they have social networks they are not active because they do not have enough time and they do not believe that with social media they can get a positive economic result. However, a marketing strategy contributes to commercialise the product based on a unique selling proposition. Jams and marmalades are not only quality ‘products’, but they also encapsulate the cultural and geographical values of rural areas which are protected and promoted as part of the direct and virtual storytelling of the producers.

4. Discussion

Food is a cultural identity marker that generates tourist flows [10, 32] with the purpose to taste physically and symbolically a place. Food is a key aspect for destination management and marketing [39]. A food identity involves a cultural background [15,35,66] which protects and promotes the local landscapes and lifestyles of places through the production and consumption of foods, such as jams and marmalades, used to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables. Results of this research show that jams and marmalades are no longer understood only as conservation products due to the technologies that allow to preserve food but also as a path to enhance the close relationships between food and the territory. This is the main implication of the study, which contributes to the valorisation of the rural pantry through the understanding of the production and consumption dynamics of local products. In this sense, the interest in local products is increasing and movements like slow food urge people to recover sustainable habits that contribute to economic, environmental and sociocultural well-being. A local product is a key element to guarantee food quality and to promote a sustainable development [16,63]. According to Ref. [62]; “there are parts of the fruits that can be reused, such as stones and skins, and all the organic substance is transformed into compost, a natural fertilizer”. This paper shows that jams and marmalades could contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in rural Catalonia because of a tourism attraction factor based on traditional foods and beverages, which valorises the local people and local practices through a close connection between producers and consumers [63,72].

The results of the interviews also indicate that some European

countries, like France, Germany or England, have a much better-defined concept of marmalade and jam than Catalonia and Spain. For example, in terms of the balance between ingredients and the final taste of the product. This issue is a challenge when Catalan producers offer jams and marmalades to both domestic and international visitors because the products could be less sweet, and consequently, less attractive to the palate of some European tourists which may result in a turn towards domestic visitors – as a path to develop proximity tourism (see Refs. [64, 65] in the framework of slow tourism. The connection between producers and consumers also involves the need to show the customers the culinary uses of preserved fruit products. While results highlight that it exists a lack of knowledge about the pairings of jams and marmalades, some statistics (see, for example, PRODECA, 2020) show that the region consumes a lot of fresh fruit. It is worth mentioning that, however, different stakeholders of the sector work to introduce new pairings in cheese tables or in combination with fish and meat.

While the best sellers in Catalonia are still the traditional jams and marmalades (for example, made of orange), results also show that exotic products (for example, made of mushrooms) are also successful. That is, the combination of tradition and innovation is an avenue towards an authentic culinary experience, with a close link to the territory where the raw products come from. A local product is regarded as a product consumed in the same territory where it is produced. This is crucial to add value to food tourists who want to taste the culinary delicacies of the region (Filipiak-Florkiewicz et al., 2021 [38]; but also to taste new flavours and learn different ways to cook and prepare food [26,37]. In other words, the development of food tourism from the perspective of local stakeholders has a positive and relevant impact on the economy, the environment and the sociocultural capital of the destination.

According to Ref. [59]; the projection of local cultural activities could encourage people to accept and respect other cultures which, in turn, contributes to the engagement with other places through the development of slow food tourism. In this sense, previous research shows that “the farms’ involvement in agribusiness and efforts in food heritagisation contributes towards a more sustainable LFS [local food system] and stimulates the rural area as a reinvigorated space for agritourism transactions” [50]; p.1). Departing from the preservation of fruits as an illustrative example of local food in rural Catalonia, this paper contributes to the previous literature showing that the bridges between food (the growing of fruits), territory (Catalonia), identity (cultural and natural heritage) and tourism attraction (a slow food tourism experience) are manifested in a jam pot. In this sense, the singularities of the natural environment [9] are a source of local identity which, added to the cultural traditions (Riviezzo et al., 2017), also contribute to the development of marketing strategies which enhance the terroir connection through jams and marmalades.

Furthermore, the research highlights that the producers of jams and marmalades in rural areas of Catalonia use direct sales as distribution channels through their workshop and the participation in fairs and markets. At the same time, they also distribute jams and marmalades in small local agri-food shops and, less frequently, they collaborate with regional supermarkets. Also, Christmas baskets and the creation of welcome details by hotels were mentioned, although the latter is not very successful as the accommodations often find the price of the product high and local producers cannot compete with more industrialized producers, despite being in general less artisanal and less sustainable. The role of restaurants as a distribution and commercial channel is also highlighted (see, for example, Noguer-Juncà and Fusté-Forné, 2022), which will also require further analysis in relation to the development of ‘farm-to-table food experiences.

5. Conclusions

Results have observed that while there is a wide range of initiatives that generate visibility to the products and the producers, they are disorganized. It is obvious that tourism can greatly contribute to the

protection and promotion of the production's processes of marmalades and jams, as long as tourists have the opportunity to visit the producer and the workshop to understand the soul behind the rural pantry. This highlights the need to create a strategic marketing plan with the aim to organize gastronomic events linked to jams and marmalades to communicate these traditional products, which can also be consumed in more modern formats linked to culinary innovation.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The research emphasizes that the restrictions to prevent the spread of Covid-19 have supposed that some producers have implemented digital distribution and promotion channels, such as the creation of online shops and accounts on Instagram. However, while most producers have social networks they are not very active as they are small family producers with few resources, as it happens in other agri-food sectors in rural Catalonia (Fusté-Forné and Mundet, 2021). Also, while the quality of the raw food is a source of jams and marmalades' quality, this market is underexploited in Catalonia. Locals are not used to a regular consumption of jams and marmalades in their diets, beyond breakfast. However, it is noted that other countries do consume it and, therefore, there is a potential link between this pantry product and European tourism. This opportunity may also apply to local tourism because food has become a relevant factor in the attractiveness of a destination [32, 39]. In this sense, the paper contributes to the literature about the development of local food as a relevant part of the tourist experience by acknowledging the significance of preserved fruit products. These products also emerge as a souvenir through which visitors can know the product but also the culture and the environment of the region, and the people behind the product from the growers to the cooks.

5.2. Practical implications

The stakeholders (producers, distributors, public administration, and tourism actors) need to create synergies to understand marmalades and jams as a food tourism attraction of rural Catalonia based on the uniqueness of the fresh fruit grown in the Catalan countryside, and to develop strategies of differentiation based on these products, as it happens with wine (see Ref. [34]), olive oil (see Ref. [30]) or tea [8]. These examples confirm to what extent territories all over the world establish meaningful connections between food and tourism through the preservation of local identity. This is the main practical implication of this paper which results in a call to action for the preserved fruit-based stakeholders (production and distribution) to connect the marketing strategy for this product (consumption) to the territorial marketing (tourism) for defining the product as iconic and symbol of the territory.

5.3. Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the research is that it focuses exclusively on the analysis of the stakeholders. Future research could analyse the local and tourist demand in relation to these traditional products, and thus know the relation between food experiences and visitor satisfaction to compare motivations to buy preserved fruit products, and to participate in activities that engage tourists with learning about the production and consumption of jams and marmalades. While visitors can experience the culinary uses of preserved fruit products at restaurants, future research should emphasize the gastronomic use of this local product as a gateway to improve the tourism value chain, transmitting the knowledge from producers to consumers. The paper is also based on stakeholders located in rural Catalonia and it would be appropriate to compare the results with other areas in Spain and Europe. Future studies with quantitative designs will also provide more robust results in relation to the valorisation of the rural pantry through the protection and promotion of jams and marmalades as a source of rural identity.

Declaration of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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