



# The role of summer markets in promoting authenticity and social sustainability of the regions: The case of La Santa market (Catalonia, Spain)

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## ABSTRACT

The greatest challenge for tourist destinations is to make themselves unique, to bet on cultural identity, with ethical values and sustainability, and to be successful over time. This is of particular interest in sun and beach tourism areas. Otherwise, in recent years, seasonal food and leisure markets have undergone significant growth as a strategy to promote regional authenticity and participation in local communities. The management of these ephemeral food markets tend to be associated to social sustainability, with a focus on issues such as the welfare of the local population; the conservation of cultural heritage; community participation in the development and planning of tourism; and health, hygiene and safety. This paper analyzes the relevance of these social sustainability matters to La Santa Market, a summer food and leisure event located in a beach and sun town in La Costa Brava (Catalonia). Using non-probability purposive sampling, the qualitative methodology is based on semi-structured interviews with 20 different stakeholders in this event. Secondary data on the economic situation and “grey” literature on this market are also used. The results reveal constant, positive involvement of the local community and private organizations in enhancing the La Santa Market experience, which is now an essential item on their summer agendas. This paper contributes to the literature acknowledging the potential of summer food markets to boost the economic and social sustainability of a coastal community. The results are useful for helping public and private sectors in the region to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of the role of local food products at summer markets to thus reinforce their authenticity and sociocultural value.

## 1. Introduction

Glocalization is a term that combines “globalization” and “localization,” referring to the adaptation of global products and services to fit the local culture and preferences of a particular region or market (Robertson, 1995). It involves balancing standardization (global consistency) with customization (local relevance) to create a product or service that resonates with diverse audiences worldwide. Glocalization aims to maintain a global identity while respecting local nuances, traditions, and consumer behaviors. This search for authenticity, for differentiation among rival destinations, is the common denominator of organizations struggling to maintain their position in the tourism market, sensitive to ethical values and sustainability in the face of climate change challenge. This global concern underscores the importance of understanding and addressing sustainable management practices.

Many studies have addressed the potential of food and gastronomy to support the development of sustainable tourism (Sims, 2009; Sidali

et al., 2015; O’Sullivan and Jackson, 2002). Indeed, sustainability is currently one of the most widely discussed issues in the world, and the tourism industry is no exception (Pahrudin et al., 2022). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020), sustainable tourism “takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.” The environmental dimension refers to the natural resources of destinations and their capacity to regenerate; the economic dimension, in turn, refers to safeguarding the economic needs and living standards of host populations; and, finally, socio-cultural sustainability is linked to the welfare of the local community, the conservation of cultural heritage (Kapelari et al., 2020), public participation in planning and development; and health, hygiene and safety (Crespi-Vallbona et al., 2019; Solís-Radilla et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2022).

Food has been identified as a relevant social, cultural and economic contributor to the development of tourism (Rinaldi et al., 2022). Cuisine

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is increasingly recognized as a core asset for promoting events and festivals (Kim et al., 2010) because it can generate cultural identity and express authenticity (Robinson and Clifford, 2012) in the branding and marketing of tourist destinations (Okumus et al., 2007). Food markets (Dimitrovski and Crespi-Vallbona, 2018) and street food (Fusté-Forné, 2021) have become popular tourist attractions, and seasonal food and leisure markets have gained significance as a strategy to promote the authenticity of a region and its local community (de Jong and Varley, 2018; Jantsch et al., 2024). However, to date no research has analysed the social sustainability of food trucks at summer markets.

This research hopes to address this gap by focusing on seasonal food markets and their social sustainability dimensions, as diversification and complementary drivers for mature coastal destinations and as an example of the efforts of the tourist offer to challenge the long-term sustainability that can safeguard their environment and enhance their resilience. It takes the form of a case study of La Santa Market, a summer food and leisure event in the small town of Santa Cristina d'Aro (Costa Brava, Catalonia). It begins with a review of the scientific literature on food tourism events and social sustainability and then explains why La Santa is such an illustrative example for observing the different dimensions of social sustainability. After analyzing the case study, a series of proposals are made to help managers to ensure both the social and economic sustainability of this market and of other similar food events, the aim being to boost the authenticity and sociocultural value of local produce. The methodology used for the empirical analysis is a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, gathering information from secondary as well as primary sources. This includes documentary analysis (municipal ordinances, strategic plans and grey information published in relation to the La Santa Market), as well as information gathered from 20 interviews with different stakeholders in this summer food event.

## 2. Food markets and summer markets

In terms of tourism, food markets are cultural icons and leisure venues. Their rising popularity can largely be attributed to the growing global importance of food tourism (Crespi-Vallbona & Dimitrovski, 2017; Robinson and Clifford, 2012). Typically located in historic city centers, they offer the chance to experience social contact and interaction, and to share particular emotions and feelings, while also maintaining their significance as places for local residents to shop for good value groceries. Hence, they are part of the rich community heritage, offering a glimpse of the past. They are typically located in buildings that reflect a city's history and its people, along with their tastes and eating habits (Crespi-Vallbona and Domínguez-Pérez, 2016), which are coveted elements by food-market lovers, including tourists who enthusiastically spend much of their holiday visiting these establishments in search of urban food market experiences (Crespi-Vallbona & Dimitrovski, 2016: 853).

Many destinations are engaging with food tourism because of the appeal to travelers of enjoying food in its correct cultural context (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Ellis et al., 2018; Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Mora et al., 2021). Hence tourism itineraries typically offer the chance to visit open-air gastronomic events, and with street food being such a trend nowadays, this is one of the most common formulae.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 1989) defines street foods as "ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors and hawkers especially in streets". As stated by Yuen May et al. (2021), street food is becoming popular in both under-developed and developed countries. In the former, it is an essential part of people's nutrition and a reliable source of income. In developed countries, street food is a cheaper and more accessible way to eat a nutritionally balanced meal outside of the home (Bellia et al., 2022). Hence its growing popularity even as a tourist attraction in many cities of the developed world, such as Paris, Lisbon, and Palermo (Fusté-Forné, 2021; Sgroi et al., 2022), especially among young people

(Islam et al., 2017). In Catalonia, the concept has usually been solely associated to fairs and festivals, for the exclusive purpose of feeding large numbers of people, although things are changing and street food is very much a growing trend.

Street food is a way to showcase the local food identity to visitors (Altamore et al., 2018) and also to promote interaction between hosts and guests (Pill, 2014) as visitors experience the local produce on the street just like the locals do (Chironi and Ingrassia, 2015). Street food vendors hence play an important role in offering a very raw, local experience (Fusté-Forné, 2021), and that is despite their fare often tending to be a mix of traditional local produce and global, fast food (Sgroi et al., 2022). Not in vain, local cuisine represents the personal identity of a destination and can reinforce its image (Choe and Kim, 2018). Furthermore, local food are local products that use to reflect the authenticity of the destination (Sert, 2019) through tastes and flavors (Ryu and Jang, 2006). In this sense, different scholars (Zainal et al., 2010) state that food is a pillar of tourism products and it uses to be perceived much more significant than other attractive aspects such as accommodation, climate or scenic landscapes.

Like food markets, street food contributes to a unique travel experience (Sortino et al., 2016) and to the protection of cultural heritage and local landscapes (Sgroi et al., 2022), while encouraging the consumption of good quality, local produce (Chironi and Ingrassia, 2015) and consequently contributing to the sustainability of local communities (Jeaheng and Han, 2020). The growing popularity of food trucks has piqued the interest of researchers, with studies showing how they contribute to communal identity (Hernández-López, 2011; Lichy et al., 2022), generate employment and socio-economic value (Bhowmik, 2012), and preserve cultural identity and social heritage (Steyn et al., 2014; da Silva et al., 2014). But although open-air summer markets based on food trucks are a rising trend, there are several factors that they need to bear in mind in order to be successful, which include observing the sustainability recommendations of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) as well as sustainability indicators that are specific to food markets (Crespi-Vallbona et al., 2019). In fact, de Jong and Varley (2018) state that food tourism events have been regarded as tools for enhancing social sustainability.

Food is a vital economic resource for tourism destinations (Kim et al., 2019) as it is a key element of daily consumption and cultural identity. Hence, both permanent and seasonal food markets underline the importance of local food, traditional agriculture and rural communities, supporting businesses and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, creating benefits for both host communities and visitors alike (Sims, 2009). The social sustainability dimension of food markets entails issues that have to do with the welfare of the local population; the conservation of cultural heritage; community participation in the planning and development of tourism; and health, hygiene and safety (Crespi-Vallbona et al., 2019).

Firstly, the welfare of the local population is directly linked to their food consumption habits. Food preferences, choices and eating habits are notoriously hard to change as they are such a central aspect of people's lifestyles (Sonestedt et al., 2005; Flaherty et al., 2018) and their socio-cultural environment (Wright et al., 2001; Carrus et al., 2018; Cairns, 2019). However, eco-friendliness is a gradually growing trend around the world, and the associated behaviours among consumers is now one of the key criteria for market segmentation in developed countries (Lorek, 2015). Health is one of the main reasons why people buy green products, and that especially applies to food, with organic produce being considered healthier than conventional fare. As more companies incorporate into their business models such practices as conservation of natural resources, waste reduction and recycling, sustainable packaging, and sustainable supply chains (Larson, 2009), food is also being produced, manufactured, packaged, transported and consumed in a more eco-friendly way than ever before.

Environmentally Sustainable Food Consumption (ESFC) has been defined as the use of food products "that respond to basic needs and

bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (Oslo Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption, 1994), which can be supported by buying locally (MacGregor and Vorley, 2006) and/or organically produced food (Hughner et al., 2007). These aspects are present in the sustainable food market typology proposed by Crespi-Vallbona and Domínguez-Pérez (2016) and considered in this study. According to these authors, indoor sustainable food markets sell gourmet and ecological goods, as well as traditional, healthy, and quality groceries. These factors also tend to be an integral part of seasonal food markets.

Second, the conservation of cultural heritage. Open-air events based on street food served from food trucks tend to boost pride in and conservation and revitalization of the inherent culture (customs, resources, traditions, food, lifestyle and so on) of their specific geographic regions (Topal et al., 2021). And these are all tangible and intangible attributes that a destination recognizes and uses as a brand image to be promoted abroad (Crespi-Vallbona and Richards, 2007). As Salazar puts it (2005, p. 629), “the ‘local’ not only refers to a spatially limited locality; it is, above all, a space inhabited by people who have a particular sense of place, a specific way of life, and a certain ethos and worldview.” Furthermore, as Richards et al. (2001) state, cultural products that are intended to attract tourists should include living and popular culture, to create and support an authentic atmosphere. Peña (2005) defines this local identity as a combination of socially shared traits, ideas, and images: awareness (to a greater or lesser degree of involvement) of the feeling of being part of a territory or a group of human beings who live and build their lives within its scope. It should also be noted that because events and festivals reinforce local identities and traditional lifestyles (González Reverté and Pérez, 2017), they consequently foster a positive host-guest relationship and help to reduce the socioculturally negative impacts of tourism (Rinaldi et al., 2022).

Since the 1980s, there has been a new approach to heritage management and tourism planning that emphasizes citizen engagement as a crucial factor for sustainable development (Oevermann et al., 2016). Key aspects of this process are attachment to the place, collective identity, social cohesion, and a sense of belongingness.

These connections with places, landscapes or environments lead on to the third variable, namely active community involvement and participation in the planning and development of tourism. Even today, participatory programmes are typically implemented in a top-down manner, but local residents are increasingly demanding and playing a greater role in the defence of their own interests in the planning and decision-making of tourism projects. Oevermann (2019, p. 161) suggests that a distinction should be made between community involvement and community engagement, for the former involves top-down processes and the latter adopts a more appropriate bottom-up focus. On rare occasions, the community can even be completely in charge of the process (Häyrynen, 2018). This shift towards “citizen-engagement” has gained much ground on official political agendas, for it is so connected to such vogue notions as sustainable development and governance, and the circular economy. Besides its social and cultural dimensions, citizen participation has also been viewed as a decisive asset when it comes to the finance of tourism projects (Crespi-Vallbona and Plana-Farran, 2022). Localized food events are particularly associated with sustainable tourism because they boost the regional identity and support economic development and the conservation of resources (de Jong and Varley, 2018; Ellis et al., 2018; Everett and Slocum, 2013; Gössling et al., 2011).

The final dimension is that of health, hygiene and safety. Street food is frequently associated to safety, hygiene and sanitation problems (FAO, 2019), as well as the occupation of sidewalks and unfair competition to formal trade (Bellia et al., 2022). Especially in developed countries, and even more so in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, consumers are more careful about food consumption and hygienic protocols

(Auriemma and Iannaccone, 2020), and obviously the street food sector was significantly affected (De Freitas and Stedefeldt, 2020; Zeb et al., 2021). Therefore, health, hygiene, and safety are more and more important factors for all event organizers and participants to consider in order to ensure a satisfactory experience for both sides.

Considering their focus on the quality of food served and prepared, the emphasis on the local culture, the participation of the local community, and the care taken over health, hygiene and safety, it would seem that all of the above factors are relevant to seasonal food fairs.

### 3. Case study. La Santa arket

La Santa is a recreational and cultural market that has been held annually since 2017 in July and August in the natural park of Les Gavarres, in the heart of the Catalan Costa Brava, specifically in the town of Santa Cristina d’Aro at the Santa Cristina Horse Club (see Fig. 1). Traditionally, the Costa Brava is one of the most visited areas in Spain, with more than 3.5 million tourists every year (Statista, 2023).

The case study approach has been widely used in management studies and the social sciences as they provide an in-depth description and analysis to gain comprehensive insights into complex phenomena. They contribute to theory development by proposing new propositions regarding the observed phenomenon. They serve not only to confirm knowledge but also to overturn preconceived ideas, fostering theoretical and empirical advancements (Wünsch Takahashi and Araujo, 2020). Specifically, La Santa Market case study is interesting because it has maintained its essence (despite the pandemic), increasing the affluence and interest of visitors, despite the increase of similar markets in the area. Other summer markets that were held in the same territory have stagnated and their image has deteriorated, to the point of having a residual attraction.

According to the company report (2023), in 2022, La Santa received 200,127 visitors, 71% of whom were domestic visitors and 29% were international, with an average stay time of 2.56 h. These are typically families (64% in 2022) who are staying on the Costa Brava, although the event also welcomes young people, adults without children and groups of friends.

In 2022, La Santa was open for 45 days and had 114 exhibitors, 32 food outlets, 295 musical performances and more than 100 workshops and activities. 179,601 people visited its website, which received 2.2 million image views and 1.3 million Google searches. In the summer of 2023, the number of visitors to La Santa has risen to 240,000 (Fig. 2).

After six years of activity, it has positioned itself as a nationally recognized summer activity that involves a huge variety of local producers driving the regional economy (Fig. 3). These are not just food trucks, but also a wide variety of wineries, artisans, musicians and health and beauty producers, who are all a vital part of its structure and are aligned with the main principles of La Santa’s promoters.

The organization that created and designed La Santa Market is certified with the UNE ISO 20121:2013 Systems of Management of Sustainability of Events (from June 2021 to June 2024) in recognition of the planning, organization, setup, execution and disassembly of its different elements.

They are committed to SDGs 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and 15, and to the 2030 Agenda. The company’s four core areas for future sustainability, and which are applied throughout the value chain, are inclusiveness, transparency, integrity, and responsibility. These principles are the basis of its Corporate Governance (ethical and socially responsible management); Integrated Management (Q+ (Quality, Environment, Security and Health)); and Sustainable Purchase and Innovation policies, the latter aimed at balancing profitability with positive long-term impacts for society.

### 4. Methodology

The purpose of this research is to analyse the social sustainability of



Fig. 1. Location of La Santa market. Source: La Santa market.

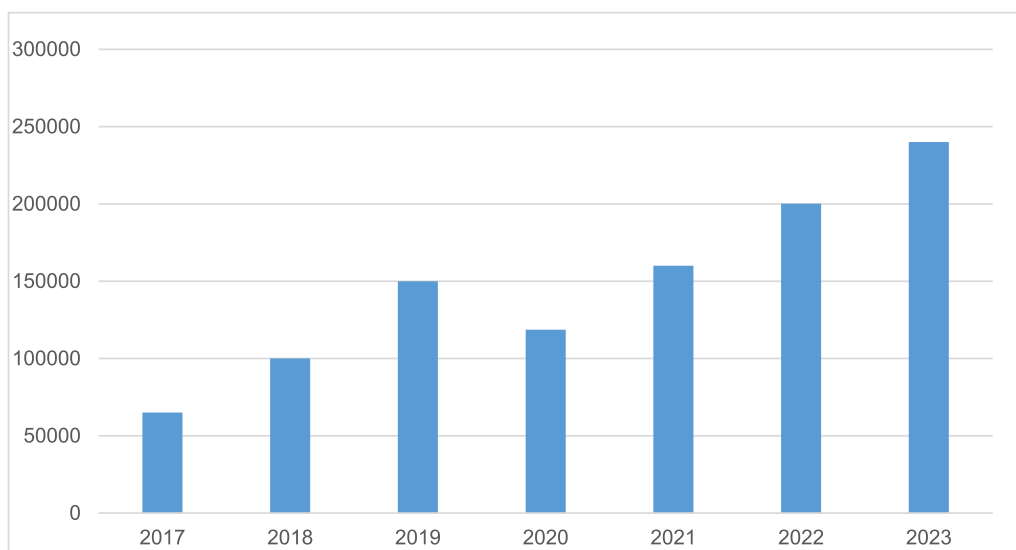


Fig. 2. La Santa Market visitors (2017–2023). Source: Own elaboration according to the company report (2023).

seasonal food markets by drawing on a qualitative design that analyses the four components of sustainability described earlier (welfare of the local population; conservation of cultural heritage; community participation in the planning and development of tourism; and health, hygiene and safety). The qualitative analysis was based on semi-structured interviews with producers and developers, which was deemed the most

appropriate method to capture in-depth details about phenomena that cannot be conveyed in quantitative data (Bryman, 2015), offering the possibility to study things in their natural settings and understand how people view a particular issue and why (Walsh, 2003; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This enables researchers to understand the situation from a local perspective and facilitates more detailed analysis than a



Fig. 3. El Espeto de La Santa (Food Corner).  
Source: La Sant Market Corporation

quantitative approach (Barrow, 1977; Berg and Lune, 2014) and hence, in this case, provides a more robust picture of the relationships between seasonal food markets and sustainability.

During the edition of 2023, there were 32 cooking stations (distributed into restaurants, food trucks and food corners) and 7 partners and sponsors. Related to this cooking stations, 25% of suppliers come from the closer geographical area (named Baix Empordà), this is, they are local businesses that collaborate with La Santa Market. The rest comes from other cities in Catalonia or online companies (as their essence is the itinerancy of food trucks). Almost half of the entire gastronomic offer is Mediterranean, complemented by another offer recognized by the palates of food lovers, as it is seen in Table 1.

According to that data, using a non-probabilistic sample, 20 interviews were conducted, consisting of open questions about topics that emerged from the literature about the social sustainability dimensions of summer markets in local regions. A pilot study was first undertaken with 3 participants. This aided to rephrase and clarify some of the questions, determining the sequence of questions, the approximate duration and the interview format. Finally, the interviews were conducted between November 2022 and August 2023. Ten of the interviews were conducted using online video conference platforms and the remainder were held in person on the producers' premises. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 min and were carried out in Catalan. Table 2 shows the profile of the interviewees.

## 5. Results and discussion

After data collection, all the interviews were transcribed and analysed, including categorization into thematic topics according to the four social sustainability dimensions: a) the welfare of the local population; b) conservation of cultural heritage; c) community participation in planning and development of tourism; and d) health, hygiene and safety. These dimensions are further described below and illustrated with quotes from the interviews, which have been translated from the original Catalan into English.

### 5.1. The welfare of the local population

There is a general demand for sustainability that comes from the bottom, from the public and seeks to persuade governments and private organizations. Organizations are obliged to be socially responsible in order to be more accepted and valued by general and active consumers. The organization of La Santa Market is especially sensitive to sustainable issues, and bases its whole corporate strategy on it and the SDGs. As I1 states, "... society inspires us to pursue with sustainability and care for our Earth ... we are sincerely aware of that, and therefore we support the SDGs ... specifically SDGs 3, 8, 12, 13 14 and 15 .... It is not for nothing that ... our organization has an ISO Certification ... We have to fight for an economic and social ecosystem ... Being aware of sustainability and behaving in a sustainable manner (as a private business) has higher costs, but there is no doubt that the future is heading in that direction, and we have to be there" (I1).

This sustainability is holistic, as it means reconsidering suppliers, taking care of one's own employees, providing sustainable products to consumers, and more. For instance, La Santa Market insists that all of its suppliers are committed to its sustainability corpus and disclose their sustainable actions. For example, Coca-Coca participates in the Circular Seas programme to enhance the quality of beaches, Font Vella only sells its water in bottles made of recycled plastic and the Hola Luz energy company is committed to renewable energy, all three of which supply La Santa Market.

La Santa Market also requires all of its suppliers to uphold strict policies with regard to location, transport, cost, equal opportunities of work and recognition of merits, hiring disabled people, and the use of materials and their reuse at the end of their lifecycle. Many of the food trucks observe recycling practices, as I3 explains: "all our packaging is compostable, our cutlery is made of corn, we also have a plastic and organic paper bin. And we keep all of the glasses and cardboard and throw them away when we close the truck". And although I2 adds that recycling logistics can sometimes be difficult, "that's not the case with La Santa, but sometimes the organizers don't make it easy for us, like for example when the containers are

**Table 1**  
Typology of cooking stations in La Santa Market (2023).

Type of business	Commercial name	Typology of food	Origin	Others
Restaurant	1994 EXPERIENCE by Josep Llorens	Mediterranean	Girona	
Food truck	1994 EXPERIENCE Food Truck by Josep Llorens	Mediterranean	Girona	
Food corner	CAL PEPITO	Mediterranean	Olesa de Montserrat (Barcelona)	
Food corner	CAN SIBARITA	Mexican	Girona	
Food corner	CASA VALLES-FRANKFURT PEDRALBES	German	Terrassa (Barcelona)	
Food corner	COQUES DE PERAFITA	Mediterranean	Perafita (Barcelona)	
Food corner	CROCK & ROLL	Mediterranean	Barcelona	
Food corner	DELEITO	American	Barcelona	
Food corner	DONUTTELLA	Candies	Vic (Barcelona)	
Food corner	EL ESPETO DE LA SANTA	Mediterranean	Santa Cristina d'Aro (Girona)	
Food corner	EL QUINCHITO	Argentine	Quart (Girona)	
Food truck	EL RACO DE LA GARRAPINYADA	Candies	Platja d'Aro (Girona)	
Food truck	KABUKI CARAMEL	Candies	Sant Miquel de Balenyà (Barcelona)	
Food corner	KAIZEN ON THE ROAD	Mediterranean	Llicà de Munt (Barcelona)	
Food corner	KS'O	American	Sant Feliu de Guíxols (Girona)	
Food truck	LA MORENETA	American	<a href="mailto:info@lamorenetafoodtruck.com">info@lamorenetafoodtruck.com</a>	
Food corner	LA XIXONENCA	Icecreams		Business chain
Restaurant	LAS PALMERAS	Signature cuisine	Santa Cristina d'Aro (Girona)	
Food corner	NOOR	Lebanese	Santa Cristina d'Aro (Girona)	
Food corner	PA-CIFIC	Snacks and sandwiches	Girona	
Food corner	PALAWAN	Cocktails and mojitos	Barcelona	
Food corner	POKE HOUSE	Poke cuisine	Santa Cristina d'Aro (Girona)	Business chain
Food corner	PORCA MISERIA	Mediterranean	Platja d'Aro (Girona)	
Food corner	SQUADRA PIZZA LAB	Italian	Girona	
Food corner	TEIKIT	Japanese	Barcelona	
Food truck	THAI FOOD CARAVAN	Thai	Santa Coloma de Gramanet (Barcelona)	
Food truck	THE BIG WHIM	Hamburguers	<a href="https://www.thebigwhim.com">https://www.thebigwhim.com</a>	
Food corner	UNA PIZZA	Italian	El Masnou (Barcelona)	

**Table 1 (continued)**

Type of business	Commercial name	Typology of food	Origin	Others
Food truck	VA DE CREPS	French	Vic (Barcelona)	
Food corner	WE LOVE ASIA	Thai	Sant Antoni de Calonge (Girona)	
Food truck	WHITE GARDEN STREET FOOD	Mediterranean	Granollers (Barcelona)	
Food truck	YAYIKA	Italian		

Source: the authors from La Santa Market reports.

**Table 2**  
Interviews.

Interviewee Code	Responsibility/Activity	Date	Place of interview
I1	Santa Market promoter	November 9, 2022	La Santa Market
I2	Santa Market promoter	November 21, 2022	La Santa Market
I3	Restaurateur	November 17, 2022	Video-conference
I4	Food truck	November 17, 2022	Video-conference
I5	Food truck	December 13, 2022	Video-conference
I6	Food truck	January 23, 2023	Video-conference
I7	Food Truck	March 22, 2023	Video-conference
I8	Food Truck	April 14, 2023	Video-conference
I9	Sponsor	April 20, 2023	Owner's premises
I10	Food Truck	April 26, 2023	Video-conference
I11	Sponsor	April 27, 2023	Owner's premises
I12	DMO	May 24, 2023	DMO premises
I13	Sponsor	June 8, 2023	Video-conference
I14	Sponsor	July 24, 2023	Video-conference
I15	Sponsor	July 24, 2023	Video-conference
I16	Food Truck	July 29, 2023	Owner's premises
I17	Food Truck	August 16, 2023	Owner's premises
I18	Food Truck	July 26, 2023	Owner's premises
I19	Food Truck	July 28, 2023	Owner's premises
I20	Food Truck	August 16, 2023	Owner's premises

so far from our location”.

Some food trucks admit that they need to improve in this area, but claim they need training because it is so difficult and new. As I6 says, “last summer we had corn dishes, but we need to work hard on that issue ... but there are so many things and so many new concepts and topics for us”. Indeed, La Santa Market’s developers provide training and support to small suppliers with little experience of sustainability but who are an important part of the event due to their local and regional links.

Also, some interviewees pointed out that they apply social sustainability policies, such as I7, who says “every year we hire local people, most of them are university students who want to or have to work in the summer ... and it’s been a success because some of them come back the year after” and I18, who says “we tend to hire young people who fit in with the business atmosphere we’re looking for”. Meanwhile, I16 insists that “these young

people create a sense of community after work, when they finish they tend to go out together. They're waiters, young students from the town looking for summer work .... Problem I have is that I can't find cooks. Apart from La Santa I also attend other summer markets, and it's hard to find cooks."

Other partners highlight their sustainable principles that involve the whole system. For instance, Bodegas Beronia was founded in 1973 by a group of friends and today is considered the most sustainable winery in the world. I10, speaking on behalf of that company, remarks that they recently received the LEED V4 BD + CN and LEED Gold certifications from the US Green Building Council. This winemaking region was selected as a prototype for sustainable and digital transformation throughout the value chain, from its production and design being totally integrated in the territory to the treatment of its employees and customers. This kind of added value means a lot to the developers of La Santa Market.

As people are now greener and have healthier preferences, organizations must design business plans according to those expectations. Font Vella is a great example, I13 stating that "it is a pleasure for us to accompany La Santa in its commitment to family leisure in such an iconic area for us as the Costa Brava. Since the beginning, we have sponsored the children's workshop, a unique space that supports families and encourages healthy hydration with natural mineral water during their time in the Market."

## 5.2. Conservation of cultural heritage

La Santa Market is based on food and leisure entertainment, which its own developer claims to be linked to its commitment to the conservation of the region's cultural heritage. The area where the event is held has a total of 300 hackberries, an autochthonous riverside tree that was dying out due to invasive species, such as eucalyptus, until the first edition of La Santa, when the owner decided to plant them to contribute to the preservation of local plant life. I1 claims that local aspects are the most

important feature of a product: "Forty years ago, all shops in Platja d'Aro (the area around La Santa Market) were local, which represented authenticity, originality and differentiation. When localism is lost, tourist interest is also lost (I1).

For the manager of La Santa Market, visitor satisfaction is the most important objective, which is achieved by presenting the local cultural vibe. Everything is perfectly planned, nothing is mere chance. The streets are 16 m wide so there is just enough space for the stalls and for people to have no trouble walking along the broad avenues (Fig. 4). He also designed a circular street, to encourage customers to keep walking around in a loop: "La Santa Market recreates a town with different moods: an area for youngsters, a habanera district, a posh zone, etc." (I1).

However, he has gone even further by trying to recreate a market as it would have been in the 17th century, to thus offer a truly historical visitor experience. "All visitors have historic memories" he says. "I want to take them back to their ancestors' time (I1). La Santa Market is an open-air market, in a green, leafy environment, with an abundance of trees and nature. The restaurants (or food trucks) are integrated in this natural setting. Diners share tables with strangers, the lighting is warm to create an intimate ambience (and also to recreate the atmosphere of 17th century markets), and restaurateurs engage directly with the customers, who can watch their food as it is being cooked. The market is a mix of colours, noises, music, shouting and much more, all reflecting the chaos of the 17th century. At the entrance to La Santa Market there is even a sign that says: *Free Wi-Fi not available. Please talk to each other.*

No industrial materials were used to build the market. Everything is wood or hand-made, "to reproduce the historical energy" (I1). Further details include the coastal and maritime elements, such as the Norwegian whaleboat on the stage. There is live music every night, and the market is especially keen to showcase the local music scene and to promote young, rising talent.

The market schedules all kinds of other activities that are addressed at a huge diversity of audiences, including children, such as traditional



Fig. 4. La Santa Market and its social area.  
Source: La Santa Market Corporation

games that encourage interaction, and a horse show. Everything is geared towards hedonism, participation and giving exposure to the local identity, all to ensure a satisfactory, holistic experience (Crespi-Vallbona, 2021). As I1 says, “*This business is focused on domestic visitors, on local residents and summer holidaymakers. This is a trendy business, and we have to fight to make our audience interested on it.*”

Obviously, there is a large diversity of food on offer, but local Catalan produce, such as fish, bread with tomato and sausage, are an indispensable item on the menu. As I2 explains: “*We look for a diversified offer ... each food truck has to present five dishes and these proposals are evaluated by the gastronomic committee, where originality, quality and variety of product are prioritized.*” Even the famous chefs from Cañitas Maite (a Michelin starred restaurant in Albacete, central Spain) presented such Catalan dishes as chicken with lobster in tribute to Josep Pla’s Catalan cookery book called “Lobster and Chicken” (Fig. 5).

Many of the interviewees use local or home-made products. As I4 explains, “*we buy meat and basic products from small producers, but we do a lot of things ourselves. We use quality KMO produce. So, it could be KMO but from other parts of Catalonia or Spain, for example we buy beef from Galicia ... We have a workshop in Barcelona and an orchard in Sant Esteve de Palautordera.*” I5 adds that, “*there are no intermediaries, and we work directly from the countryside to the grill. We buy the beef directly from producers that have a quality label.*”

Most food trucks use short food supply chains (SFSC) so there are few intermediaries and lots of small businesses. I6 points out that, “*we buy the eggs from our neighbour, tomatoes from a producer in Girona ... and all the meat from Can Miquel butcher’s here in Sant Feliu de Guíxols.*” Even the food trucks that specialize in non-local food, such as the Asian one (I16), prefer to source raw materials locally: “*our signature dish is teriyaki chicken. Last summer we sold 2000 kilos of teriyaki chicken ... that’s a huge amount, and all that chicken was bought from a farmer in Sant Feliu de Guíxols ... the sauces and other stuff, we obviously buy from Japanese and Vietnamese producers.*”

### 5.3. Community participation in planning and development of tourism

As Crespi-Vallbona and Farran-Plana (2022) observe in rural areas, sustainable tourism events depend on private and public collaboration. They need each other, and it is that mutual understanding that guarantees their success, and such a positive and accepting response among local residents. The developers of La Santa Market are constantly inviting other organizations and companies to be part of their project through different forms of collaboration and by sponsoring the wide variety of spaces, micro events and supports offered at the site. As I1 states, “*... collaborations add value and are the lever that substantially promotes the market*”. I9 remarks on the importance of being transversal



Fig. 5. The best croquette in the world (Cañitas Maite). Source: La Sant Market Corporation

and reaching out to different audiences. The promotional endeavours of the Communication Department have played a key role in this. As one collaborator (I14) makes clear, “*It has been a pleasure for MINI to collaborate with La Santa Market ... It is very well attended by local and international visitors and has a close, friendly environment. The spirit that reigns among all collaborating companies and participants has to do with a shared commitment to youth and entrepreneurship*”.

The public administration also has an indispensable role in facilitating the good praxis and deeds of La Santa Market. The head of the local DMO (I12) says that, “*Santa Cristina d’Aro is one of the gateways into the Empordà and La Santa is one of the most important events to take place in this area on a cultural, leisure and tourist level ... The Empordà brand is rooted in its local territory, which includes a set of values that define us, values such as a job well done, recognition of craftsmanship and quality, local produce ... values that are fully shared by La Santa. That’s why we hope our partnership will be a long-lasting one and that La Santa can continue to showcase the Empordà to everyone who visits us*”.

Therefore, commitment to and the participation of the local community is a basic element for the success implementation of such events. The locals need to feel the event is theirs, and they must feel proud of it. It is important to promote it in the local press and radio, and to do so in the vernacular language, which is Catalan, and to also get the message across to holidaymakers in the area. That is the secret to the success of La Santa, a local event, designed for local people, and made by locals, with local restaurateurs. As I1 says, “*Unlike White Summer (another summer market located 30 km away), La Santa Market is not viewed as an elitist event. And that’s the key to its success. In fact, local restaurateurs have their own clients, and La Santa is just a prescriber*”.

The local populace are key actors in the success of La Santa Market. Before the event starts, there is not much work in the town, but there is plenty in August. La Santa has created a domino effect and has revitalised life for its residents. Whenever La Santa needs a plumber or an electrician, it recruits local labour or goes to small companies based in Santa Cristina d’Aro. And food trucks that participate in the event are supplied by local businesses. For example, when the owner of Frankfurt Pedralbes (a food-truck that comes from Barcelona every summer) has to buy the 2000 rolls to prepare the 1700 sandwiches that he sells every day, he gets them from the local baker .... while other traders source their fruit from the greengrocer in Santa Cristina d’Aro.

Even local businesses are indirectly participating in La Santa Market’s strategy. Most of the selected restaurateurs have regular customers, food lovers who will follow them around the country to different food events. “*The online community is essential for promoting a trendy activity like La Santa Market. ... obviously, he has his own community that came here (I1).*” A similar case is Deleito, a food truck run by Alberto Gras, who was a contestant on MasterChef who started his own business at La Santa Market. These marketing campaigns centred on suppliers with their own groups of consumers are an important aspect of seasonal projects like La Santa Market as they depend on people’s motivations and demands. However, these interests tend to fluctuate frequently as new trends and influencers come to the fore.

The Corporate Social Responsibility on which La Santa Market bases its strategy envisions partner companies that showcase their own social and cultural commitments by promoting the same values with which La Santa is aligned. This implies that the staff, suppliers, and stakeholders are aware of, understand and act in accordance with the sustainable development policy. Inclusiveness and integrity are core elements of the company’s sustainable policy of generating competitive advantage by fostering the involvement of local producers. The goal is to be one step ahead of the competition in terms of market trends in sustainability, knowing that there are financial and reputational gains to be made in this respect.

The values shared by all the different entities that work with La Santa are sustainability, environmental protection, animal protection, circular economy, promotion of young talent, exposure of local art and crafts, entrepreneurship and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, I11 says, “*it*



is an honour to form part of the La Santa family. We wish to continue building together this solid relationship based on shared DNA: support for creativity and culture pivoting on local talent, a passion for cuisine, and the generation of vital experiences for our public.” And I15 emphasizes that “La Santa is a perfect space for our consumers to enjoy our appetizers accompanied by emerging musical talent, quality local crafts and produce, and lots of fun for all audiences.”

Most of the food trucks return to La Santa Market every year as they feel comfortable with the promoters’ general vision. As I16 says, “... if the figures keep adding up, we’ll keep working together ... you know, this is the sixth year that we’ve come to La Santa. We started with a food truck, last year we had a 6 m food corner, this year it’s 20 m ....we feel it’s a good place to sell our Asian food at a good value-for-money price ....and Julio -the developer-is always ready to improve and innovate, taking into consideration our suggestions.”

Only I18 said that 2022 was its first time at La Santa Market and that they would not be returning in 2023 due to the poor financial profits made: “we won’t be going back this year because last year was not a success ... the organization is brilliant ... but perhaps we didn’t offer the right food, or we were new, but it was a great experience.”

#### 5.4. Health, hygiene and safety

The Santa’s marked land is a space of sociability, security, identity, health care, with a regulation that takes into consideration the economy of proximity. In this sense, its site is totally delimited and have access control, which allows to mark, in a clear way, the limits of the established space. In this way it is possible to control the entry and exit of people, avoiding agglomerations. Furthermore, they use a people counting system and social distancing control measures, as well as, surveillance of the La Santa area is guaranteed during operating hours. This process was specifically strict after the pandemic. The creator of La Santa proudly states that this was the only event that dared to go ahead in the summer of 2020 (at the height of the pandemic restrictions). Every day they checked 3500 people at the entrance (body temperature, masks) and monitored the visitors’ behaviour and attitudes when inside the venue. He took a risk, and it paid off. Despite the loss of 100% of the international visitors, 50% of families with children, and most people over 55 years of age, the season was saved thanks to the 18 to 25 year-olds who could not go to discos and instead made La Santa their favourite leisure venue. “Covid-19 changed our habits” (I1). The interviewees expressed satisfaction with the policies implemented by La Santa, as I2 pointed out: “in 2020, the year of the pandemic, the managers dealt with the situation very well and they achieved a better position than The White Summer. The security and hygiene control system was extensive and excellent. La Santa saved a lot of entrepreneurs financially, and consequently many families, because we could work every day for 45 days, after months of being unable to. Obviously, La Santa had to hire more police to control compliance with Covid measures and had to phone the governor daily to report how everything was going. Fortunately, there were no new outbreaks of Covid” (I1).

Regarding hygiene measures, a complete disinfection of La Santa’s common areas is done before each opening, paying special attention to the cleaning of public areas (rest areas, restrooms, changing rooms, etc.) and waste disposal points. Ordinary waste management respects waste separation protocols, this is paper, plastic, metal, and glass to increase recycling quantity and quality.

The health, hygiene, and safety of visitors is a key aspect of the creator of La Santa’s mission to make the market a must-do summer experience in the Costa Brava. Even after deciding to charge an entrance fee this year (in previous editions only cars had to pay in the form of a beer ticket), the number of visitors has increased. There is also a 52-day season ticket that costs €20.00. As I1 pointed out, an entrance fee is a way to guarantee a satisfactory experience, as it prevents overcrowding and reduces the queues for the toilets and food trucks.

On the other side, maintaining high hygiene standards in food trucks

is essential to ensure food safety and customer satisfaction. Hence, beside hygiene practices preparing food in a clean and safe environment, it is also crucial to store and handle ingredients correctly to prevent contamination and maintain their quality and safety. Our interviewees noted that health and hygiene are also a priority aspect for food trucks in terms of transportation of food from the kitchens to the market. I16 explains that the main ingredients are vacuum packed, which guarantees food preservation and customer well-being. This kind of packaging also helps to prevent unnecessary food wastage, as producers only need to use the amounts they actually need.

## 6. Conclusions

This research has focused on a case study of an open-air summer market located in a trendy coastal area, the Costa Brava, a tourist event based on food heritage that contributes to the local economy and the conservation of identity and authenticity, based on sustainable principles. These two dimensions are the most significant contributions to the tourism theoretical approaches. Specifically, sustainable gastronomic events that focus their offer on local food becoming a source of attraction for a destination (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Derek, 2021; Jantsch et al., 2024) and the presence of food in tourism engages visitors with local people and practices (Fusté-Forné and Noguer-Juncà, 2023).

La Santa Market is a good example of a sustainable seasonal event, as it is based on a series of core principles: (1) maintaining the host community’s sociocultural authenticity, preserving its cultural legacy, traditional architecture and typical lifestyle, and promoting intercultural understanding and tolerance (Kapelari et al., 2020), (2) making efficient use of environmental resources (Noguer-Juncà and Fusté-Forné, 2023), and (3) ensuring long-term economic viability and contributing to poverty reduction (Achmad and Yulianah, 2022). Also, this case study is a good example of the efforts of the tourist offer of the coastal areas to achieve the implementation of social sustainable practices to ensure the long-term viability of the destination.

Both at the managerial and operational level, the organization of La Santa Market has contributed to the sustainability of the event, since they have assimilated the above mentioned principles as an indispensable soul of its celebration. Specifically, this includes support for the welfare of the local population; the conservation of cultural heritage; community participation in the planning and development of tourism; and aspects related to health, hygiene and safety, as it has been analysed in traditional food markets (Crespi-Vallbona et al., 2019).

The success of such leisure events depends on the quality and value-for-money of the products that they offer. We have observed that there are similar summer entertainment and food events in many other towns on the Costa Brava, which all compete to outdo each other and in doing so provide work to the local people, source materials in the area and attract food trucks that are keen to attend as many of these events as possible in the hope of maximising the returns on their investments. All of this makes these events very financially and socially sustainable. The results also show that the application of sustainability policies is not related to the types of businesses, as SMEs can also apply measures to the best of their abilities. However, sustainability is clearly a new concept for society and affects all areas, including seasonal events and mobile food sales.

The success of all economic, political and organizational systems depends on the effective and efficient guidance of their leaders (Barrow, 1977), as La Santa’s sustainability policies show. The companies’ policies are evidently closely tied to the background, culture and values of their managers, promoters, sponsors and so on. Not in vain, a critical factor to understand the success of La Santa is its leader and his strategy to achieve his goals, as Northouse (2019) stated. Almost all of the operators return to La Santa Market year after year, showing their ethical responsibilities and how committed they are too to its organizational goals and values. Additionally, this research shows that sustainability

practices of La Santa Market are not *greenwashing* or *socialwashing* strategies, but the managers of the event are encouraging to assume sustainable practices with regard to stakeholders, such as sponsors and suppliers. However, there are a few exceptions who have struggled to stand out from the competition.

The research shows that the success of the food tourism ephemeral events depends on the capacity of the stakeholders to develop a commercial brand, and consequently, to achieve loyal customers and visitors. There are several food tourism events that has no success, and few editions are repeated. Therefore, this is not the case of La Santa Market that grows every year due to its added value as a modern, healthy and authentic ephemeral event that looks for the social, environmental, and economic sustainability of the different stakeholders, such as visitors, sponsors and food trucks, among others. That is, La Santa Market.

## 7. Implications for theory and practice

Results can be useful for managers of food tourism events and for policy-makers and local authorities of the region to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the social, economic and environmental sustainability of La Santa Market. Findings suggest that the coastal destination could use this typology of events to create a territorial identity, based on the authenticity of the place, and consequently, to diversify and to enlarge a sustainable tourist offer in the long-term period and to enhance the resilience in the future. Findings also indicate that the values of the managers and the continuous and positive involvement of the stakeholders (sponsors, food trucks, managers, visitors ...) are necessary to achieve the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of the events, and consequently, to create an added value and a commercial and touristic brand. It is evident that the implementation of sustainable strategies has no relation with the typology, size or economic situation of the organization, but it depends on the culture and ideologies of the managers.

This paper contributes to the literature by evidencing how food tourism ephemeral events, despite being provisional and discontinuous in time, could contribute to the local economy and authenticity and identity of the regions. Furthermore, this research contributes to understand that food trucks, despite being a nomadic gastronomic offer, could have a relevant role to understand the authenticity and identity of the regions and to achieve the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of the events, and also, to avoid the gastronomic gentrification of the tourist places.

## 8. Limitations and further research

This research has focused on the promoter and supplier perspective by drawing data from a case study of La Santa Market, whose main mission is to work collaboratively with different partners and sponsors to produce and design a memorable event for everyone. Following on from this, our future aim is to investigate the views of visitors and tourists in order to further enhance our knowledge of how La Santa Market is run. We have observed that participation, hedonism, local culture, nostalgia and knowledge are present at this event. Future research could compare the evolution of La Santa Market with other summer markets in Catalonia and elsewhere in the Mediterranean area.

However, another kind of summer market in Catalonia are nomadic open-air food markets, which have similar characteristics to La Santa but are not permanent fixtures in any specific town. These mobile markets open for five days in each location. It would be interesting to draw comparisons with these in order to study the similarities and differences in relation to their success and survival.

## 9. Implications

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strengths and weaknesses of the social, economic and environmental sustainability of La Santa Market. Findings suggest that the coastal destination could use this typology of events to create a territorial identity, based on the authenticity of the place, and consequently, to diversify and to enlarge a sustainable tourist offer. Findings also indicate that the values of the managers and the continuous and positive involvement of the stakeholders (sponsors, food trucks, managers, visitors ...) are necessary to achieve the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of the events, and consequently, to create an added value and a commercial and touristic brand.

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## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Montserrat Crespi-Vallbona:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Ester Noguer-Juncà:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

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 article.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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