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### Promoting Gastronomic Tourism to Foster Local Development: The Stakeholders' Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to highlight the potential of gastronomic tourism as a mechanism for local development by examining stakeholders' perceptions and the specific actions being carried out at a range of levels in Catalonia. The study reports the findings of a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) based on the responses gathered from semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal the strategies and the roles played by public and private agents. The study provides useful insights for planners and decision makers interested in instigating gastronomic tourism actions not only at the local but also at the regional level.

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**Keywords:** Gastronomic tourism, Local Development, Stakeholder Perceptions, Tourist Strategies, Touristic Planning.

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## Introduction

The significant implications of tourist food consumption on destinations globally have recently been highlighted in the context of tourism (Mak *et al.*, 2012). Food consumption, especially when dining out, is a pleasurable sensory experience, which in combination with the destination can act as a “pull factor” and as a marketing and merchandising tool that should not be underestimated (Kivela, 2006). Gastronomy today is a fundamental component of tourist travel (Bessiere, 1998) with food representing approximately a third of all tourist expenditure (Telfer and Wall, 1996; Hall and Sharples, 2003). As such, gastronomic tourism<sup>1</sup> appears to be a growing sector within the overall tourism market (Antonioli Corigliano, 2002).

Furthermore, the importance of gastronomy as an element for tourist development at the local level has been recognized in various studies (Bessiere, 1998; Hjalaguer and Richards, 2002; Hall and Sharples, 2003) with food and gastronomy being seen as the point of convergence for production and processing, storage, transport, cooking and preparation (Antonioli Corigliano, 2002). This chain of activities generates complex interrelationships in a territorial area, ranging from food production to the eventual sale of products.

Food, therefore, is not only important because it is a central element of the tourist's experience, but also because it has established itself as an important source of the identity of postmodern societies (see Bessiere, 1998; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Everett and Aitchison, 2008) and, as such, can contribute to local development. Thus, local and regional development should not be seen only in economic terms, but need to be perceived from a cultural, social and even ecological perspective (Rodriguez, 1998). These facets are all applicable to gastronomy, if it is understood as the appreciation of the relationship between culture and food (see Scarpato, 2002; Boniface, 2003; Espeteix, 2007) and not solely as an economic activity to be exploited by a destination.

According to Cohen and Avieli (2004), the relationship between tourism and a destination's various cultural elements have been exhaustively studied; but the interface between gastronomic tourism, local development and the territory in which it is developed have been largely neglected.

A better understanding of gastronomic tourism and its links to local development, and within this specific sector, of the role played by stakeholders and the networks they form, should contribute to a more effective implementation of development strategies in regions or local communities that look on their food products as a means of enhancing their socio-economic status. As Byrd *et al.* (2009) point out when citing De Oliveira (2003), for such development to be successful, the actions selected must be

planned and managed responsibly; hence, the involvement of stakeholders in the process is essential in ensuring the sustainable development of tourism.

Although there is a broad range of literature exploring the attitudes and perceptions of individual stakeholder groups, conducted in the hope of shedding light on their motivations (Byrd *et al.*, 2009), most studies have tended to undertake comparisons of different stakeholder groups primarily in association with a destination's residents (Murphy, 1983; Lankford, 1994; Andriotis, 2005).

The current case study conducted in Catalonia (Spain) seeks to examine the potential strategies for promoting gastronomic tourism based on the perspectives afforded by various stakeholders. These individuals, each involved in activities associated with Catalan gastronomy, include food producers, restaurateurs, and agents (both public and private) who promote this phenomenon in the region. Here, I examine conceptual questions relating to a) the relationship between gastronomic tourism and local development; b) the strategies being adopted to promote gastronomic tourism; and c) the potential of gastronomic tourism as a strategy for local development in this region seen from the perspective of the stakeholders involved.

## **1. Gastronomic tourism and local development: a literature overview**

The key features of local development or Local Economic Development (LED), as pointed out by Ramukumba *et al.* (2012), are to encourage economic growth and to diversify the local economic base. The authors show how the current economic crisis has led to a local search for innovative alternatives, one of which is the present-day boom in gastronomic activities in territories of all kinds.

For some authors, see Bessiere (1998), local development is more closely linked with the intrinsic value of a territorial area's cultural and regional identity in which the heritage can be seen as a social resource structure for local achievement. Indeed, in Europe, local development has been promoted through many rural development programmes and policies (Hjalaguer, 1996) that frequently include among their actions the promotion of typical, traditional local or regional products (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1998; Caldentey, 2001; Tregear *et al.*, 2007). Clearly, the promotion of such products can serve as part of a wider program for spurring regional development (Tregear *et al.*, 2007).

Indeed, there is a growing market sector that demands products with these characteristics (Bessiere, 1998; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000), which makes the promotion of local products a vital part of gastronomic tourism. Various scholars (see, for example, Ilbery and Kneafsey 1998; Kneafsey and Holloway, 2000; Watts *et al.*, 2010;) lead us to assume that these "regional or local products" come from small or medium-scale farmers, which means that their

promotion needs to be conducted collectively, with the support of institutions involved in local development (Caldentey, 2001).

According to Espeteix (2007), state and even supra-state authorities see the exploitation of local food products as a potential means for mitigating rising levels of depopulation in “marginal” territories, promoting a better balance between regions in a framework of “sustainable development”, providing support for the primary sector and stimulating exports through strategies such as quality certification. In a similar vein of thought, the authorities expect local products and dishes to provide a way of maintaining and even creating jobs, revitalizing areas and in the process “fixing” the population.

Gastronomic tourism is ultimately a means to achieving local development (Hall and Sharples, 2003) and serves as a basic tool for the promotion and distribution of local agro food products (Hjalaguer and Richards, 2002).

## **2. Stakeholder theory in application to gastronomic tourism**

The term stakeholder is employed throughout this paper in line with Freeman's (1994:46) definition, that is, “any group or individual who can affect or who is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives”. Clearly, this definition allows us to interpret the role played by stakeholders in a very broad sense — extending beyond those that recognize solely formal, official, or contractual ties to an organization (Sheehan and Brent, 2005:713). Further, stakeholder theory holds that an organization can capture a range of critical benefits by engaging effectively with its legitimate stakeholders.

There is no consensus in the literature as to how many groups should be considered major stakeholders in the analysis of tourism (see, for example Argenti, 1997; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2003). While the exact number has yet to be defined, the possibility of usefully applying stakeholder theory has been demonstrated as have the useful links that can be forged with decision makers when different groups of stakeholders are taken into consideration (Garrod *et al.*, 2012).

Following Donaldson and Preston (1995), the first step in the analysis conducted here involves identifying the stakeholders according to their specific interests in gastronomic tourism. In line with the aforementioned authors' reasoning it is assumed that all stakeholder interests can be considered intrinsically valuable.

Once the relevant stakeholders have been identified, analysis or differentiation is possible (Sheehan and Brent, 2005). Thus, for the purposes of undertaking this study the individual stakeholders interviewed were grouped into four separate categories according to the nature of their work; the geographical scale at which they operate; and, the group that they belong to based on the intrinsic value of their interests.

All in all the classification adopted here is in line with the typical pattern of actors involved in tourism as identified by Garrod *et al.*, (2012), namely, private, public and voluntary, since the provision of the products of tourism typically involves the interaction of a large number of suppliers from a wide range of economic sectors (Sheehan and Brent, 2005).

## 2. 1 Stakeholder's Groups

The first stakeholder group considered here, in this case study, comprises the “public institutions” whose role it is to design projects for the promotion of local and regional products and a range of diverse tourism strategies in Catalonia. Stakeholders in this category have been well described elsewhere (e.g. Caffyn and Jobbins, 2003; Sheehan and Brent, 2005; Garrod *et al.*, 2012;), especially in relation to the study of tourism planning, tourism policy communities and destination marketing, which are the main fields to which stakeholder theory associated with tourism has been applied (Garrod *et al.*, 2012).

The second stakeholder group can be defined as “gastronomic intermediaries”; this group, is associated with a wide range of institutions, in particular, those operating in the private sector, that have designed gastronomic strategies to promote local gastronomy in restaurants or via the creation of tourist products such as festivals, gastronomic routes, cooking schools, etc. Normally, the operating scale for these stakeholders extends from the local to the regional level; however, some of the intermediaries in the case of Catalonia work not only throughout the region but also in Spain and abroad.

The third group of stakeholders includes “farmers and restaurateurs”. These are private actors involved in the running of either small- or medium-sized farms or in the selling of final products to consumers via their restaurants, at farmers' markets, or on gastronomic routes, etc. For this group, the geographical scale of their operation is essentially local.

The fourth and final group is classified as the “Universities”. These stakeholders, in line with Garrod *et al.*, (2012), could be incorporated within a group classed as volunteers, but for the purposes of the current case and given their role in gastronomic tourism, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider them as “neutral stakeholders”. This group was specifically formed in response to the lack of studies, again according to Garrod *et al.*, (2012), to capture stakeholder engagement strategies in a context of mixed public-private-volunteers. This group is represented by experts that are well known for their work and contribution to a better understanding of gastronomy and tourism in the region.

An understanding of the role played by each group, of the scale at which they work, and of their particular interests should provide insights as to which actions are best suited for the creation of gastronomic tourism strategies that can help foster local development.

### **3. Research methodology**

In order to understand the perceptions of stakeholders in the gastronomic tourism sector, and to determine how these might constitute elements for the development of gastronomic tourism strategies that in turn contribute to local development, a qualitative approach was adopted. The case study of Catalonia undertaken here comprises a longitudinal “procedural and contextual” analysis, therefore, of the various actions undertaken and of the meanings constructed within this specific social and organizational context (Hartley, 1994: 212). In this respect, case study methodologists have outlined a series of procedures that can be employed in a variety of contexts (Xiao and Smith, 2006).

In line with Eisenhardt's (1989) review of the field, inducting theory from case study research is primarily associated with qualitative methodologies, which is true of the study reported here. Thus, what it is exploited here is a viewpoint that can establish validity, that is, “a lens not based on scores, instruments, or research designs but a lens established using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study” (Creswell and Miller, 2000: 125). From an epistemological perspective, it is assumed that interests are inherent within humans and, therefore, research can never be value free and objective (Hardy, 2005). On this understanding, the case study reported here is subjective and the result of the interaction between the researcher and the respondent (Guba, 1990).

The methodological approach adopted here triangulates the data in the search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information and, hence, validation of the qualitative findings. Triangulation also constitutes a systematic procedure for sifting through the data to detect common themes and overlapping areas. Furthermore, Alain (1999) argues that, by combining data sources, methods, investigators, and theories, triangulation opens up the way for richer and potentially more valid interpretations, which are particularly appropriate for understanding the perceptions of different stakeholder groups.

#### **3.1 Study area**

The study is conducted in Catalonia, which lies in the north-eastern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, extending from the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean Sea. Its territory covers an area of 31,932 km<sup>2</sup>, roughly half of which (15,902 km<sup>2</sup>) lie at altitudes higher than 600m a.s.l. and about 17% (5,288 km<sup>2</sup>) rise above 1000m a.s.l. These variations between sea level and the highest peaks in the Pyrenees (reaching 3000m a.s.l.)

account for the marked climatic and biogeographic contrasts in the region (see, Lopez Palomeque *et al.*, 2002). In 2011, the region became the largest recipient of international tourists in the whole of Spain, accounting for 24.28% of the country's total (IET, 2011).

### 3.2 The interviews and data collection

The primary data were drawn from fifteen semi-structured interviews, of no less than 45 minutes in duration, comprising a number of open-ended questions (see Table 1) posed to “key” stakeholders involved in this sector either as promoters or as agents of the production and marketing of Catalan gastronomy at different scales.

**Table 1** List of individuals interviewed

	Name	Institution	Role	Public/ Private	Scale
<b>Public Institutions</b>	Rocío Baez	Tourism Catalan Agency– Catalan government	Gastronomy Club Manager	Public	Regional (all Catalonia)
	Ramón Santmartí	Gastroteca Catalan government	Gastroteca Manager	Public	Regional (all Catalonia)
	Damià Serrano	Regional Administration of Barcelona Province- Diputació de Barcelona	Director of tourism laboratory	Public	County council
	Guillem Miralles	Regional Administration of Barcelona Province- Diputació de Barcelona	Director of the “terroir products” project	Public	County council
	Anna Bastidas	Tourism Catalan Agency – Catalan government	International tourism marketing and promotion Manager in Paris-France	Public	International
<b>Gastronomic intermediaries</b>	Pepa Aymami	Catalan Cuisine Institute Foundation	Catalan Cuisine Institute Foundation Manager	Private	Regional (all Catalonia)
	Cecilia Lorenzo	Magazine “Viatges.cat”	Magazine “Viatges.cat- Manager	Private	Regional (all Catalonia)
	Manuel Colmenero	Travel Agency - Ocio Vital	Travel Agency - Ocio Vital owner and manager	Private	International, national, regional and local
	Pep Palau	Pep Palau, von Arend & Associats	Gastronomic consultancy manager	Private	International, national, regional and local
	Nuria Rius	Tourism Consortium Penedes region	Manager wine tourism brand	Public and private	County council
	Anna Sants Puig	Tourism Consortium Valles western region	Manager tourism promotion	Public and private	County council
	Marina Duñach	Gallecs Park	Farmer	Private farming organization	Local (municipality)

<b>Farmers and restaurateurs</b>	Josep Pamies	Pamies Hortícolas	Farmer	Private	Local (municipality)
	Eva Martínez Picó	Owner of a restaurant in Camprodon Valley	Restaurant owner Intermunicipality Camprodon Valley Manager	Private/Public	County
<b>University</b>	Jesús Contreras	University of Barcelona	Professor (Anthropologist)	Public	International, national, regional and local
	Xavier Medina	Open University of Catalonia	Professor (Anthropologist)	Public and private	International, national, regional and local
	Jordi Tresserras	University of Barcelona	Professor (Geographer)	Public	International, national, regional and local

**Source:** Leal, 2012

The semi-structured interview allows issues to be explored in some depth (Robson, 1993). Thus, the interviewees were asked to outline opinions as to how they believed strategies of gastronomic tourism might contribute to local economic development and what type of relationship they had established with other stakeholders and institutions at the local, regional, national and international levels in order to promote gastronomic strategies in Catalonia. The aim of this was to capture similarities or differences in the perceptions of the groups.

The three-dimensional framework of the triangulation of the data, aimed at ensuring validity, comprised the use of a variety of data sources (internet information, the gastronomy press, marketing brochures, gastronomy events in Catalonia, a literature review and the direct observation of the phenomenon). The information gathered was then analyzed using a strategic planning methodology: SWOT to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as a primary tool for identifying the internal and external factors involved in the implementation of gastronomic tourism strategies in Catalonia. When applied effectively, SWOT can provide a sound basis for a strategy formulation (Kajanus *et al.*, 2004) and is an important support tool for decision-making (Yuksel and Deviren, 2004).

#### **4. Gastronomic tourism strategies in Catalonia designed by the government (the *Generalitat*): the context**

As Byrd *et al.* (2009) point out, present-day concepts about stakeholders and their role in the promotion of tourism have been built on ideas developed in the public

administration literature, which illustrate the importance and impact these stakeholders can have on a territory when promoting its tourism strategies. Therefore, it is important to consider briefly the main gastronomic strategies that have been promoted in Catalonia by the region's public institutions.

In 2003, the administration led by the Generalitat's Catalan Tourist Board created the Gastronomic Club as the first step in its strategy to help market and, thereby, boost gastronomic tourism "in close cooperation with all companies, organizations and bodies engaged in this sector of the tourist industry" (Catalan Tourism Board website, 2011). This institution and its role in promoting gastronomic tourism in Catalonia responds to the profile of a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). As such, it provides an essential liaison service in assisting external organizations, including meeting planners, tour wholesalers, and travel agents that work to bring visitors to the destination (Gartrell, 1994). In this sense, the club allows companies to participate in various strategies designed to promote Catalonia as a tourist product.

The second step in the administration's strategy to promote gastronomy tourism throughout the region was the founding in 2007 of the *Gastroteca* by the Directorate General for Trade of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. This comprises a website providing promotional and marketing support for local food products. This interactive channel of communication is open to producers, distributors and establishments working in the catering industry as well as to consumers and stakeholders with an interest in gastronomy tourism. The *Gastroteca* database today holds more than 3,000 records and documents.

## **5. The stakeholders involved and their perceptions: the results**

The discussion reported here combines elements of "stakeholder theory" as developed in organizational and business management (see above). As such, this study is very much in line with previous research focused on the perceptions and interests of different stakeholders (Yuksel *et al.*, 1999; Hall and Mitchell, 2001; Hardy, 2005). The specific analysis reported is conducted from an inter-organizational perspective, also reflecting previously described research, including Selin and Beason (1991), in which the authors examined the relationships between various institutions (such as the U.S. Forest Service and tourism advocacy organizations) in their attempts to establish cooperative relationships.

### **5.1 The stakeholders in gastronomic tourism**

From the perceptions recorded at interview and as part of the analysis conducted within each group (including the type of institution and scale at which they operate), below it is seek to describe the main interests of the stakeholders. Attempts are then made to determine how these responses can shed some light on the strategies for developing gastronomic tourism throughout a territory or in a more specific destination (see Table 1).

### **5.1.1. Public institutions**

Intervention by government in tourism is generally based on a combination of the “merit good” argument and the theory of “market failure” (Getz, 2008), a reference to a situation typified by low demand for a tourist product. This theory serves to explain the important role played by public institutions in promoting gastronomic tourism in a region and in creating or boosting demand for a specific tourist product. In the case of Catalonia, this sector is a relatively recent phenomenon in the tourist industry and so requires the full backing and support of the public institutions.

From the five interviews conducted with members of this stakeholder group, it is apparent that not all the behaviours recorded respond to those of a destination management organization, which according to Bornhorst *et al.*, (2010) should chiefly comprise: coordination, leadership and advocacy, development of facilities and provision of visitors service. Here, it was found that the role of regional administrations in this specific sector is concerned not solely with the promotion of gastronomic tourism products but also, quite specifically, with the production of food catalogues and regional gastronomic activities. Thus, they seek to help by employing alternative strategies concerned primarily with strengthening links between farmers and food retailers.

The strategies of those actors seek the dissemination and promotion of tourism products and are concerned primarily with the organisation of gastronomic events, including festivals, tastings, and gastronomic routes. Indeed, food-related events for the stakeholders of this group are the key to promoting tourism and as such figure prominently in the development and marketing plans of most destinations (Getz, 2008).

### **5.1.2. Gastronomic intermediaries**

This group of stakeholders comprises private firms, including a tourist operator (its inclusion in the case study responds to the nature of its particular interests and actions in the sector of gastronomic tourism), foundations and Public Private Partnerships (PPP) such as the Tourism Consortium. These stakeholders are found at times to act as destination management organizations (DMO) as reflected by their concern for the creation and support of various gastronomic events and activities (Bornhorst *et al.*, 2010). As such, they operate on the supply side, as defined by Getz (2008), and contribute to the development of the destination, promoting events that act as a catalyst for the attraction of tourists.

Of the six stakeholders in this group, four represent institutions whose scale of operations extends from the local to the national and even international levels (see Table 1). Overall, their work demonstrates the importance of gastronomic

intermediaries in the promotion of tourism. They promote their interests via the design and scheduling of events, which is an intrinsic behaviour from the perspective of the tourism industry according to Getz (2008).

All in all, this group of stakeholders are considered “key actors” in forging links with other stakeholder groups, in particular for connecting producers and restaurateurs with public institutions through the design and promotion of gastronomic tourist products that might include gastronomy routes, cooking schools, food tours, among others, and of course, the aforementioned events that have such a marked impact on local development.

### **5.1.3 Farmers and restaurateurs**

Three stakeholders were interviewed in this group: two producers and one restaurant owner. For these actors, gastronomic tourism represents a great opportunity for producers and restaurateurs to combine their efforts, which can be jointly articulated in the sale and promotion of local products. In this way, the group contributes to the revitalization of the territory thanks to a process of product diversification. Private firms in the tourism industry generally consider that they are better equipped to carry out a more effective job in the promotion of destinations (Anderson and Getz, 2009). This belief was also held by this group of stakeholders, but to do so they recognised the need for direct public funding or tax support to ensure the excellence of their work.

As Anderson and Getz (2009:848) point out, profit is a goal that secures long-term survival for private firms, and it is usually necessary to generate high revenues as well as maintain low costs in order to attain that goal. Indeed, from the answers received this appeared to be the main motivation among these stakeholders. Their central goal is to sell their products, which they consider as being highly competitive and distinctive (being local, traditional, ecological and of low-scale, artisan production) from those found in supermarkets or served in fast food restaurants. The stakeholders are motivated to engage in gastronomic tourism strategies as a means of marketing their products in a particular market niche, with good opportunities for producers, retailers, and restaurateurs of products that can be differentiated from agroindustrial production.

### **5.1.4 Universities**

This group can be included within what Anderson and Getz (2008) define as the voluntary stakeholders, that is, “not-for-profit associations which are based on common goals and interests”. That said, they do not act as associations or societies striving to achieve the goals and interests of their members within a tourism event or activity, as would be more specifically the case of voluntary stakeholders. Yet, today’s universities play an important role in regional development, above all in the knowledge-based economy, as they seek to promote synergies with the business

community through the transfer of technology from academia to industry (McAdam *et al.*, 2011). Based on the responses recorded from the stakeholders in this group, it seems they are most concerned with transferring their knowledge and research via involvement in the promotion of gastronomic tourism in the region. As such, they are active promoters of the “Gastronomic Club” strategy in which both private and public stakeholders participate.

In this study, three university professors (working at two different universities) were interviewed. The academic history of all three is very much marked by their interest in tourism and, specifically, its relationship with food. These experts, whose actions extend beyond the local scene to the regional and national scales, qualify the gastronomic tourism of Catalonia as a recent phenomenon, but one with considerable opportunities to make a contribution to local development. To ensure success, the academics stress the need to maintain a permanent dialogue between public and private stakeholders.

## **5.2 Gastronomic tourism and local development: the stakeholders' perspectives**

The stakeholders were asked two main questions to determine their perceptions of the potential relationship between gastronomic tourism and local development: (1) How can gastronomic tourism help contribute to regional development? (2) What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of gastronomic tourism in Catalonia?

In reply to the first question, all the respondents in each of the four groups were unanimous in declaring that gastronomic tourism could serve to promote local development. This unanimity across stakeholder groups contrasts with the findings in other studies of stakeholder perceptions, such as Byrd and Gustke (2004) for example, who reported statistically significant differences between three stakeholder groups: namely, residents, entrepreneurs and tourists; as did Murphy (1983) and Lankford (1994), when including government officials' perceptions of tourism, instead of those of tourists. It could be argued that the perceptions recorded in the aforementioned studies differ from those reported here; yet, despite this, it seems evident that when links are forged between gastronomic tourism and local development a range of different stakeholders are able to find points in common, regardless of the group they belong to.

As such, it seems safe to affirm that the organizations involved in gastronomic tourism are representative of those that, according to Sheehan and Brent (2005) when citing Levine and White (1961), have “achieved a high degree of domain consensus, or mutually agreed-upon conceptions of activities engaged in and, therefore, have also been found to correlate with cooperative relations”.

In specifying how they believed gastronomic tourism could help contribute to regional development, the representatives of the public institutions and universities mentioned

both the potential impact of the activity on aggregate demand, i.e., on trade and the catering industry, and the effect the product has in promoting a region. The promotion of local products in specialty stores, sold as souvenirs and the like, is seen as a means of promoting and developing a territory. These ideas are confirmed by the discussions in a range of studies, including Antonioli Corigliano (2002); Hjalager and Richards (2002); Mitchell and Sharples (2003) and Caldentey (2001), which all seem to identify the opportunities for local development that can be exploited through the marketing of differentiated and specialty food products as a part of gastronomic tourism.

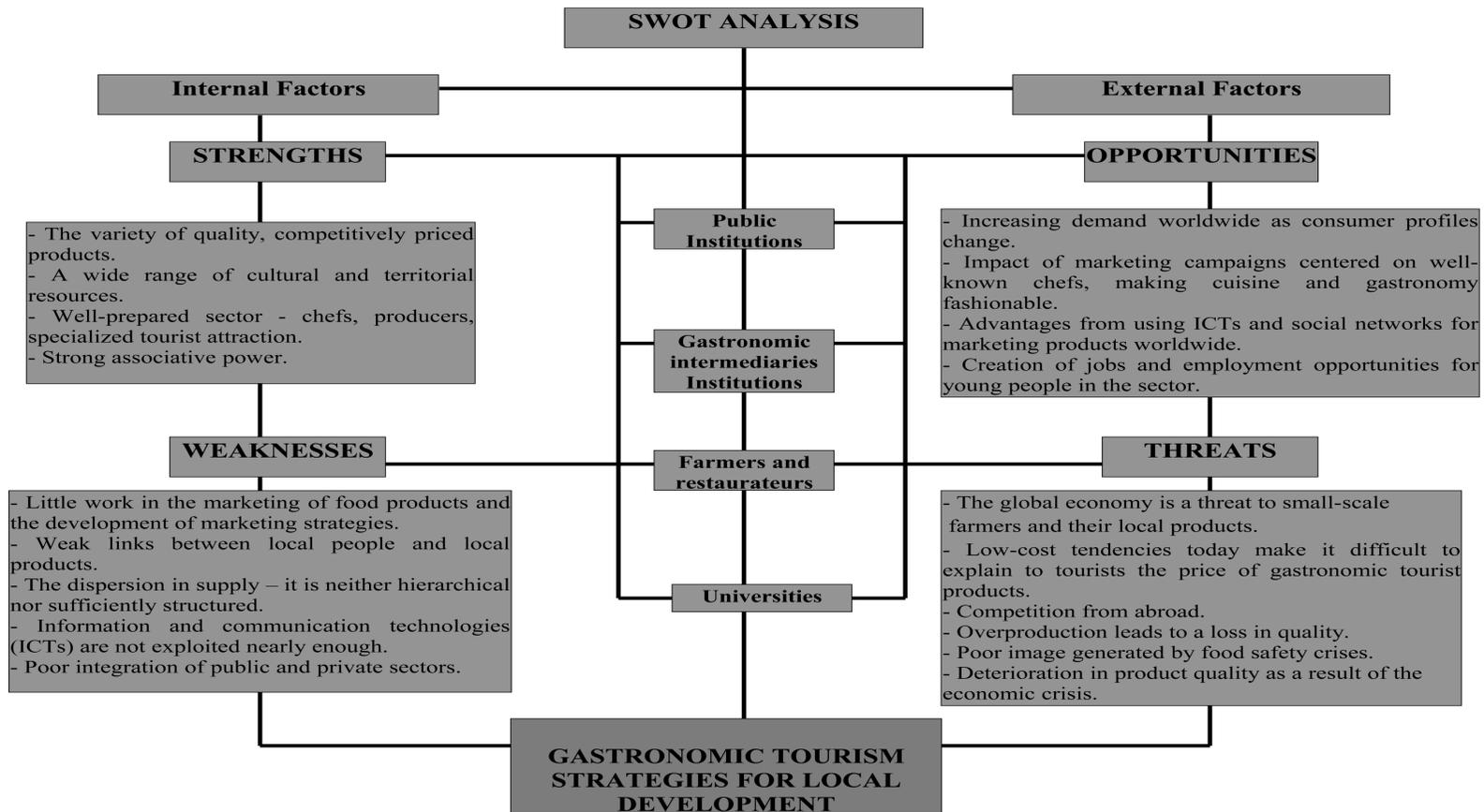
Based on the responses given to the first question, all the stakeholders, but above all the producers and restaurateurs, were at pains to highlight the important synergies, in economic terms, which could be established with the creation and design of gastronomic strategies. Generally speaking, therefore, in relation to the first question, no significant differences were found in the responses recorded by the stakeholders, independently of the institution they represented or the scale at which they worked.

### **5.3 Data triangulation: SWOT analysis**

Applying the SWOT methodology and exploiting the possibilities that the technique furnishes for identifying the internal and external factors that have an impact on a phenomenon (in this instance, gastronomic tourism), here I sought to implement a strategy that would provide a good fit between these SWOT factors, in line with the objectives of the decision makers (Kajanus *et al.*, 2012), and the perceptions and interests of the stakeholders involved. Figure 1 summarizes the stakeholders' responses grouped according to the respective strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified in the gastronomic tourism specifically of Catalonia, although they should apply to almost any territory. The figure's central axis represents the stakeholders and indicates how their perceptions "feed" into the SWOT groups identified by Kajanus *et al.*, (2012).

At the bottom of this axis emerges the ultimate goal of a SWOT analysis, namely the development of specific strategies, in this instance those of gastronomic tourism aimed at boosting local development. Based on the interviews conducted, some of the strategies that emerge include the promotion of joint actions drawing on the efforts of all the stakeholder groups and the creation of stronger links with restaurateurs so that local products might be promoted in their restaurants. In this last case, the motivation is derived from the more competitive prices offered when buying locally and, as such, the shortening of restaurants' food supply chains.

Figure 1 SWOT Analysis



Source: Leal, 2013

The more global perspective provided by the SWOT analysis allows a number of recurrent features to be detected in the perceptions of all the stakeholders. Significant among these is the lack of coordination identified between the public and private sectors. Similar findings are reported by Selin and Beasons (1991), and in the present case such shortcomings can hinder the introduction of initiatives or attempts to strengthen those already introduced. However, as Selin and Beason (1991) point out the problem might also be seen as an opportunity for establishing future cooperative relationships. As far as the strategies adopted by the Generalitat are concerned, most notably those involving the *Gastroteca* and the Gastronomic Club, the stakeholders are unanimous in expressing a need for greater coordination between the two initiatives.

## 6. Final remarks

The main purpose of this paper has been to highlight the potential of gastronomic tourism as a mechanism for promoting local development. At the same time, it has sought to identify, first, the role being played by actors in both the public and private sectors and, second, the strategies they employ to promote and disseminate gastronomic tourism throughout in a region. This latter task, however, can be far from straightforward given the proliferation of stakeholders involved in the tourism sector making it especially challenging to find common ground among their respective agendas (Bornhorst *et al.*, 2012).

The case study reported here has aimed to identify, first and foremost, the relevance of the perceptions held and the views expressed by those involved in gastronomic activities in Catalonia. It has been my objective to visualize the opportunities afforded by these activities for local development by emphasizing the links established between a range of different actors and by understanding their respective interests and motivations. Secondly, this report has included a review of studies in the literature focused particularly on the nature of the relationship between gastronomic tourism and local development. And, thirdly, this study has sought to provide both qualitative and empirical research findings that might further understanding of a phenomenon that is gaining in importance around the world.

All in all, the study seems to confirm Hardy's (2005) claim regarding the value of stakeholder analysis as a tool for tracking the range of perceptions held within a particular tourist sector. Based on the responses recorded in the interviews and surveys, as well as on observations recorded by more direct means, gastronomic tourism in Catalonia is undoubtedly an expanding phenomenon and one which requires the coordinated efforts of all those involved in it. Among its strengths are the fact that it does indeed serve to stimulate the region's economy, providing opportunities to create and organize tourism products and to reinvent and lengthen Butler's (1999)

lifecycle of tourism products, traditionally dedicated, in the case of Spain, to sun and beach tourism.

From a methodological point of view, the paper has illustrated how the use of the SWOT analysis can contribute to providing insights into stakeholders' perceptions of, and their attitudes to, gastronomic tourism at a range of scales, while at the same time it provides useful information about the internal and external factors that affect this phenomenon.

The results reported here emphasize the importance of the information made available by those involved in devising tourism strategies and in identifying the opportunities to change the prevailing circumstances to a destination's advantage. These data are of obvious importance to planners and decision makers, who might additionally be interested in implementing "gastronomic tourism strategies" in other territories. Incorporating stakeholder views into tourism planning projects is further justified on the grounds of the added value afforded by drawing on the knowledge and insights they can provide. This, in turn, can reduce the costs of conflict resolution in the longer term, and may be considered politically desirable (Healey, 1998).

## **7. Implications for future research**

The triangulation and analysis of information linked not only to stakeholder theory but also to the SWOT methodology representing an opportunity for undertaking further research in these aspects of tourism. Furthermore, such methods offer considerable potential to planners and decision makers who might seek to employ gastronomic tourism strategies as a means of local development. However, quantitative research techniques also need to be applied here so as to provide further insights into how gastronomic tourism can become a consolidated activity for local development.

This present study has likewise highlighted the possibility of analyzing the perceptions held by those stakeholders who are not normally included in such research, such as university academics. It would also be beneficial to extend the study to incorporate the perceptions of other stakeholder groups, especially those of the tourists themselves and of the residents of the destination that are likely to be affected (either positively or negatively) as a result of gastronomic tourism strategies. Thus, future lines of research could usefully be directed at investigating other stakeholder groups and other strategies designed around gastronomic tourism, and their impact in both the long- and short-term.

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<sup>1</sup> Gastronomic tourism is used to describe the activity in which good food and drink can be enjoyed while on holiday. However, the term also falls under the more general heading of “food tourism”, which, in turn, can be divided into “culinary tourism” (visits to restaurants, taking cooking classes) and “wine tourism”. These are small niche markets that are currently classified by most of the travel industry as “cultural tourism” (World Tourism Organization, 2000). For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to use the term gastronomic tourism, primarily because in Catalonia all promotion and marketing strategies favor this term.