Gastronomy Tourism Experiences: The Cooking Classes of Cinque Terre

Abstract

Gastronomy tourism is a niche area of heritage tourism and attending cooking classes to learn about and engage in food preparation is a popular form of gastronomy tourism; Many cooking schools have come up in tourist destinations all over the world in many forms such as part of homestay accommodation, home-based cooking classes, professional culinary schools, and small restaurants offering cooking lessons along with dining. This study aims to explore tourists' experiences related to cooking classes in Cinque Terre using the experiential framework proposed by Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012). A content analysis of the online reviews of the Cinque Terre Cooking Schools on TripAdvisor was carried out using the aforementioned experiential framework. Findings indicate that four of the dimensions of the tourist experience framework were considered significant by the participants of the cooking classes, namely involvement, hedonism, local culture, and knowledge and that often these dimensions overlap creating inextricable and complex bonds between them. The study contributes to the literature on third-generation gastronomy tourism experiences, focusing on tourists' participation in interactive foodscapes in cooking classes in Cinque Terre.

Keywords: Tourism experience, Culinary tourism, Cinque Terre, Cookery classes, Gastronomy tourism.

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Gastronomy Tourism Experiences: The Cooking Classes of Cinque Terre

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Introduction

Gastronomy tourism is one of the niche areas that has drawn increasing attention as a part of heritage tourism (Long, 2014; Timothy, 2016). Though frequently regarded as the art of good eating, gastronomy is about appreciating the connection between food and host culture (Everett, 2012; Okumus et al., 2018). As Everett and Aitchinson (2008) argue, food is not just for survival but is a cultural artefact. It is often considered as a lens to understand and appreciate the local culture (Cohen and Avieli 2004; Galvez et al. 2017) and to valuate a destination's cultural heritage (Bjork and Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2016). As Long (2014) notes, savouring the food of others is part of experiencing their culture. People with a strong interest in gastronomy engage not only in eating and experiencing the local food but also in its preparation and researching culinary heritage (Boesen et al. 2017).

Tourist experiences are a continuous process of events or activities at tourist destinations that allow tourists to enjoy the location (Walker and Moscardo, 2014). Memorable tourism experiences are the best possible experience at a tourist destination that is remembered and recalled long after the event has occurred (Kim, Ritchie and McCormick, 2012). Tourists travel in search of embodied holiday experiences and the local cuisines of destinations form a major ingredient of such experiences (Everett, 2008; Long 2014). The cuisine of a destination is an important determinant of the quality of the holiday experience (UNWTO, 2012). Gastronomy answers tourists' need for experiencing the authentic culture of a destination (Walter, 2017; Sims, 2009) and is a way of participating in serious leisure activities (Prayag et al., 2020).

Gastronomy tourism takes several forms, which include eating and drinking in local restaurants, food festivals and exhibitions, visits to farms and food production centres, farmers' markets, attending cooking classes and demonstrations, homestays, home cooking classes, and eating at local households (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Karim and Chi, 2010; Bell, 2015; Azavedo, 2019). Cooking classes as a form of gastronomy tourism has been gaining in popularity and attending cooking classes to learn and engage in food preparation has become an authentic way of experiencing local cuisine (Bell, 2015; Agyeiwaah, et. al., 2019; Luoh, et. al. 2020). Many cooking schools have come up in tourist destinations all over the world to

provide tourists with an opportunity to engage in gastronomic experiences. These take many forms such as part of homestay accommodation, home-based cooking classes, professional culinary schools, and small restaurants offering cooking lessons along with dining. As Everett (2012) notes the cooking schools offer tourists hands-on food experiences and represent a form of participant consumption. They represent an opportunity to engage in authentic and creative tourism experiences that allow tourists not only to connect with the local community and fellow tourists but also to gain new cooking skills from the local people (Richards, 2015; Bell, 2015; Pratt et. al., 2020). Cooking classes have been described as a form of third-generation gastronomy tourism experiences (Richards, 2015; Pratt et al., 2020).

While many studies offer examples of a relationship between the tourist experience and culinary tourism, this field of research is still underdeveloped in relation to the experiences that tourists seek and gain from attending cooking classes. Very few studies have explored the subject of culinary experiences, and fewer still have examined it in the context of cooking classes and how these classes can influence the experience of visitors at a destination. Though there have been studies on cooking classes in the tourism context (e.g. Azavedo, 2019; Richards, 2015; Pratt et. al., 2020; Everett, 2012; Bell, 2015; Luoh et. al., 2020), none has applied the experiential dimensions of Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012). There is also a lack of studies that examine cooking class experiences in the European context This study seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring tourists' experience of cooking classes in Cinque Terre in Italy as a part of its cultural heritage using the experience dimensions proposed by Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012). It seeks to understand why tourists participate in cookery classes and their perception of cooking classes as a tourist experience. Research has been carried out in Cinque Terre and the nearby town of La Spezia by analysing online reviews to understand tourists' experience of cooking classes. The study thus makes a contribution to the literature in the niche tourism area of gastronomy tourism by applying Kim, Ritchie and McCormick's (2012) experience dimensions to examine key experiences gained by the participants of cooking classes in Cinque Terre, which as a UNESCO World Heritage site is a unique cultural tourism destination.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section provides an analysis of the literature surrounding gastronomy tourism, gastronomy tourism experiences, cooking classes as a part of gastronomy tourism and an overview of the cooking classes in the Cinque Terre region. The research methods employed are described next, which is followed by the findings and

discussion. Finally, the conclusions of the research are presented with their implications for further research and practitioners.

Gastronomy Tourism

Gastronomy tourism is a widely used term for food-related tourism such as culinary tourism, gastro-tourism, food tourism, wine tourism and gourmet tourism (Pavlidis and Markantonatou, 2020). It represents an experiential trip to a gastronomic region and includes visits to primary and secondary food and drink producers, gastronomic festivals, food fairs, events, farmer's markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products or any tourism activity related to food (Hall and Sharples, 2003). According to UNWTO (2012, p.7) "gastronomic tourism applies to tourists and visitors who plan their trips partially or totally in order to taste the cuisine of the place or to carry out activities related to gastronomy". Gastronomy tourism thus covers a wide range of holiday products and services, which include restaurants, bars, cooking schools, special interest culinary travel packages, food guides, cookbooks, cooking magazines, vineyards, wineries, breweries, distilleries, farms, farmers' markets, TV programmes, blogs, vlogs, digital simulations, food trails, food-related seminars, nutrition tours, foody tours as well as elements of wellness tourism that involves detox diets and healthy eating.

As Timothy and Ron (2013) note cuisine and gastronomy are elements of the broader system of cultural heritage, and local food forms one of the most salient and defining markers of a destination's culture and heritage. The food habits of communities are formed by the natural environment and traditions, which are integral to forming cultural and culinary heritage. Local cuisines mirror the culture and lifestyle of a destination (Du Rand and Heath, 2006) and are a fundamental element of a destination's cultural practices (Minihan, 2014; Richards, 2015). As Timothy (2016) notes, they are closely linked to the history, cultural norms, values, relationships with the nature of a community. Methods of preparing and preserving food and ingredients used are unique to the natural resources available, climate and lifestyle of a community. The cuisine has been looked upon as an expression of the way of life of a society (Everett and Aitchison, 2008). The uniqueness of cuisines is thus a function of the cultural and natural heritage. The cultural heritage of a community could also be attributed to its eating habits, especially in communities such as the Mongolian nomads whose settlement patterns, attires, celebrations are all determined by the availability of food both for themselves and their herds. Many traditional cultural festivals (e.g. Onam, Pongal, etc. in

India) are related to harvest and involve preparing traditional meals. Typical, local, and traditional food and its preparations are entrusted from generation to generation through time, creating an invaluable intangible heritage (Molina *et al.,* 2016). Food is thus a cultural reference point, which is linked to identity, consumption, production, commerce, history, geography, sustainability and globalisation (Hall and Mitchell, 2000; Montanari, 2009). As an important component of the local culture and a powerful marker of cultural identity, the cuisine is part of cultural tourism and represent a gateway to understand the local culture of a destination (Dos Santos and Antonini, 2004; Hillel, et. al., 2013). Acquiring knowledge of the local gastronomy is an important part of understanding and appreciating the culture of a tourist destination (Anton, et. al. 2019).

According to Ellis et. al. (2018), three main factors link food to tourism: first, different cuisines are distinctive of different areas or regions, earning them wide popularity among tourists; secondly, it has been observed that tourists like to learn about a region's culture through food; finally, the diversity and number of locations where cuisine and foodstuff can be tasted is considered very important by tourists. Destinations that offer culinary delicacies, typical recipes and a certain culinary baggage develop an interdependent cultural relationship between the destination itself and its local cuisine, adding to the appeal of its offerings (Sànchez-Canizares and Lòpez-Guzmàan, 2012) , and are increasingly being employed as an attraction by tourist destinations (Mason and O'Mahony, 2007).

Gastronomy could represent an important tourism product for destinations that are not endowed with natural and cultural resources. Local cuisine is one of the main considerations in tourists choice of a destination and constitutes a major motivation to travel to particular destinations (Agyeiwaah, et. al., 2019), especially for visitors searching for new and original experiences in the form of both food and tourism (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). Gastronomy tourism is thus a way of marketing and branding tourist destinations, and a way to leverage the culinary heritage of destination for tourism development (Ellis et. al., 2018)

Gastronomy tourism experiences

Experiences are intangible, internal, individual and interactive processes that lead to sensorial engagement, and are characterised by a heightened concentration and focus and are influenced by an individual's senses, emotions, values, background, attitudes and beliefs and contexts (Boswijk, et al. 2005; Knutson et. al., 2009). It is a takeaway impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses and involves the consolidation of

sensory values in the four realms of entertainment, education, escape, and esthetics (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Zhang, et; al., 2008). Experiences are complex in nature and a single experience comprise many sub-experiences that can take place at various levels and contexts (Youngman and Hadzikadic, 2014). As a social and human phenomenon that facilitates experiences, tourism represents an example of complex systems (Baggio, 2008, Zehra and Ryan, 2007). In an era of experiential and transformative travel, there has been a growing demand for immersive, embodied, emotionally rich and authentic experiences that involve greater interactions and human connections with the local community (Everett, 2008; Sheldon, 2020; Seeler and Schanzel, 2019). Gastronomy tourists are looked at as explorers in search of original experiences of local food and culinary heritage (Wolf, 2006; Mak et. al. 2012), and food tourism is increasingly seen as a way of experiencing real representations of a place (Taheri et. al., 2018; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Culinary experiences enhance the value of a place, providing tourists, even those who are not strictly interested in culture, with a more authentic experience, something that creates an atmosphere that helps tourists enjoy a memorable tourist experience (Hjalager and Richards, 2002). Gastronomy tourism experiences involve tourists' participation in and interaction with communal production and consumption of food, which could be indicative of their prior knowledge of the destination's food culture and keenness to engage with local chefs, food producers, and the community in general for an immersive and creative experience of the destination and its culture (Rachao, et. al., 2021; Su et al., 2018).

As Prayag et. al., (2020) note, gastronomy experiences can be considered as a form of serious leisure as gastronomy tourists seek out activities and experiences that involve skill development, education, fulfilment, socialising, interaction as well as recreation. Gastronomy tourism experiences have been categorised into three stages of their evolution (Richard, 2015; Pratt et. al., 2020). The first-generation gastronomy experience involved producers engaging consumers by providing them with themed experiences that stimulate different sensory elements. The increasing involvement of food tourists in the co-creation of gastronomic experiences embarked on the era of second-generation gastronomic experiences. Third-generation gastronomic experiences involve communities and networks around food, based on the sharing of knowledge and skills between residents and visitors, and a holistic linkage of food, landscapes, cultures, producers and consumers.

Gastronomy tourists who seek unique cultural tourism experiences could be considered as authenticity seekers, for whom local cuisine is an important part of the authentic tourism experience (Ozdemir and Seyitglu, 2017; Anton *et al.* 2019).The authenticity of the food experience makes tourists feel the lifestyle and traditions of a place and improves their experience perception (Du Rand and Heath, 2006; Anton et. al. 2019). Tourists consciously choose to consume local food, which tells the history of the destination and its people, and hence satisfy their quest for existential, experiential and staged authenticity (Sims, 2009; Bell, 2015; Ozdemir and Seyitglu, 2017; Walter, 2017; Anton, 2019).

Studies on gastronomic experiences suggest that it is positively associated with tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty and repeat visitations (Wolf, 2006; Agyeiwaah et. al., 2019). The cuisine is thus one of the main determinants of memorable tourism experiences, which are selectively constructed by tourists on the basis of their positive and fulfilling experiences and memories (Tsai, 2016; Robinson and Getz, 2016; Quan and Wang, 2004). Kim et. al. (2012) developed an experience scale that comprises seven domains, vis., hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty. Hedonism is the search for pleasure and represents the enjoyment and playfulness gained during a holiday (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). Novelty indicates the extent of new experiences that a tourist acquires while on vacation in comparison with previous experiences (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). The social and cultural interactions during a holiday characterise the local culture (Kim et. al., 2012). Refreshment relates to the state of mind in which a sense of freedom and revitalisation occurs (Kim et. al. 2012; Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018).Meaningfulness is the learning about the self and personal development resulting from an experience (Kim et al., 2012). Involvement highlights the engagement in interesting and enjoyable activities that engenders an emotional reaction (Kim et. al., 2012). Finally, knowledge implies the exploratory and learning aspects of an experience such as the acquisition of practical skills, wisdom and self-awareness (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018; Kim et. al. 2012). These seven dimensions were sub-divided into 24 indicators or scales (see Table 1). This study employs the experience scale of Kim et al. (2012) to analyse tourist experience of the cooking classes in Cinque Terre.

Please insert Table 1 here

Cooking Classes and Gastronomy Tourism

As discussed earlier, cooking classes represent a form of gastronomy tourism experience and take many forms such as part of homestay accommodation, home-based cooking classes, professional culinary schools, and small restaurants offering cooking lessons along with dining. In cooking classes, tourists typically learn the history of local dishes, how to identify local ingredients and cooking practices, before cooking and consuming local food (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Cookery schools provide a hands-on lived experience for tourists seeking novel, interactive, participative destination experiences (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Prayag et. al. 2020). Driven by a desire to experience the real representations of a place, cooking schools have become a popular form of gastronomy tourism (Taheri et. al. 2018; Bell, 2015). Tourists are not only consumers and producers of food but are actors and performers alongside their instructors and fellow participants (Walters, 2017). With their participative design and nature, cooking classes are ideal spaces for the co-creation of experiences (Richards, 2015). Exemplifying constructivist and existential authenticity, cooking classes provide tourists with opportunities for intimate and sincere relationships with hosts, playful and fun activities that could be both staged and real (Watlers, 2017).

According to Pratt et. al. (2020), cooking classes are a form of third-generation gastronomic tourism experience as they provide tourists with opportunities to actively engage in the production and consumption of food. As a third-generation experience, cooking classes link tourists with the local people, place, identity and culture in a way that transcend the producer-consumer relationships (Richard, 2015; Pratt et. al., 2020). As Walters (2017) notes, tourists in cooking schools resemble learners engaged in hands-on activities similar to the second-person interpretation seen in living history museums. Prayag et. al., (2020) argue that participating in cooking classes represent a good example of a serious leisure activity that involves education, personal enrichment and self-gratification, in other words, reflection and recreation. Walters (2017) suggests that the temporal and spatial staging of cooking schools was similar to that of a living history museum and represent an intersection of staged authenticity, culinary tourism and heritage tourism.

Cooking schools of the Cinque Terre

Cinque Terre (five towns) is a group of five fishing villages spread along the Ligurian Riviera in the north-western part of Italy. Overlooked by mountains, the landscape of Cinque Terre

contains a 20 km long rocky coastline with cliffs and small beaches. The five villages, Riomaggiore, Manarola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso al Mare, were recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997 and are part of a National Park and Natural Protected Marine Area (Vegnuti, 2020). The area is known for its local character and heritage which include architecture, beaches, mountains, ancient footpaths, and food and wine. Known as a gastronomic paradise and for its culinary heritage, the area attracts 2.5 million tourists every year (The Local, 2019). With ancient recipes passed down from generation to generation, the local cuisine remains unchanged and reflects a blend of mountain, rural and fishing traditions (Vegnuti, 2020). A large number of tourists visit Cinque Terre to experience its culinary heritage and cooking classes have emerged as a major component of the region's culinary tourism product. The six cooking schools in the area not only teach visitors how to prepare a dish but the whole lifestyle that lies behind it.

The six cooking schools analysed in this study were: two in La Spezia, two in Manarola (Cinque Terre), one in Monterosso al Mare (Cinque Terre), and one in Levanto.
In La Spezia, the two cooking schools are "Antica Hostaria Secondini" and "Osteria della Corte", which not only hold cooking classes but are full-time restaurants too. Antica Hostaria Secondini is on the hills and serves more home style dishes, focusing on pasta- (and pesto-) making. Osteria della Corte is in the city centre and offers a more polished cuisine, and teach visitors how to cook fish as well as some local dishes. Customers are offered a visit to the local farmer's market and help with shopping for the cooking lessons... The two cooking classes in Manarola are "A Casa" and "Nessun Dorma".Both these schools mainly teach people how to make homemade pesto. In Monterosso, there is "Cinque Terre Cooking School, part of "Il Ciliegio" restaurant, which is located in the hills behind the village. Here they teach some of the most famous recipes of the area, mainly pesto and fish-based recipes. Finally, there is the "Pesto Course in Levanto", which offers classes in pesto-making.

As discussed earlier, these cooking schools help tourists enjoy authentic experiences by teaching how to make local cuisines and facilitating close interaction with local people and culture. While there have been many studies related to food and culinary tourism, the extant literature on cooking classes is relatively limited, especially that related to the experiential aspects of participation in cooking classes in the European context. The following section describes the research methods employed.

Research methods

Adopting a qualitative approach, content analysis of online reviews of the cooking schools in Cinque Terre was carried out to gain an insight into the experiences of gastronomy tourists, who participated in cooking classes. Qualitative approaches help understand a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it and are appropriate for the present study (Vaismoradi, et. al., 2013).

The seven dimensions of tourism experiences proposed by Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012) - hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement, and novelty - were applied as the framework for the content analysis. Content analysis is the systematic and objective approach employed to explore large amounts of textual information to determine trends, categories and patterns of words used, their frequency, relationships, structures, characteristics and discourses of communication (Gbrich, 2007; Vasimoradi, et. al., 2013). It helps in examining reflections of people about an event, product or service (Bloor and Wood, 2006; Ye et al., 2011). More specifically, a conceptual content analysis was carried out, in which the text was scrutinized to find the existence and frequency of a concept to gain a better understanding of the respondents' views on a particular product or experience (Colorado State University, 2006; Beaney, 2007). The method involves identifying the occurrence of terms associated with the themes and concepts being examined (Colorado State University, 2006). In the current study, the online review of the cooking schools in Cinque Terre and La Spezia area were analysed using Kim et al's (2012) experiential dimensions. The online reviews were coded by looking for specific words and statements that identified with the seven experiential dimensions of Kim et al. (2012) to understand the dimensions that were most relevant to respondents' gastronomic experiences of the cooking classes.

Posting online reviews is a popular method for consumers to provide feedback and reflect on their consumption experience. With the ubiquitous information and communication technology and digital empowerment, online reviews represent one of the easiest ways for consumers to share their experiences of and satisfaction with products and services (Bilgihan et. al.,2017; Filieri and McLeay, 2014). Online reviews assist consumers in decision-making, and firms better understand customer satisfaction and predict sales (Rouliez, et. al., 2019). Online reviews are consulted by tourists to learn about their holiday destinations and other tourism products as these are not accessible until the moment of consumption (Abubaker, 2016). Successful consumer opinion portals (COP) such as Tripadvisor enable tourists to

write reviews on accommodations, destinations and other components of a holiday (Sigala et. al., 2012). Online reviews are considered as the electronic version of word of mouth (eWOM), which is the positive or negative comments made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or service that are available on the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et. al., 2004). Online reviews are increasingly influencing people's choices, and it is becoming customary for travellers to check online reviews before making their travel decisions (Zhu and Zhang, 2010).

- As previously mentioned, the COP that was used for this study was TripAdvisor, which is one of the most popular websites for online review of holidays. Other websites such as Yelp, Airbnb, Expedia, Four Square, Google etc. were considered inadequate in terms of the volume of reviews compared to TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor was set up to give travellers to comment on their holiday experiences, which include reviews of anything going from restaurants, to experiences and activities, to hotels. Moreover, the other COPs did not have any relevance to this study, since none of the cooking classes and experiences are taken into consideration was found there at the time of carrying out this research. Reviews on TripAdvisors' subsidiary, Viator, was also used as it contained some reviews of the Cinque Terre cooking schools..

A total of 320 online reviews on the six cooking schools from the period of January 2011 to November 2020 were retrieved for the content analysis, using Kim et. al.'s (2012) experience framework (please see Table 1). This theoretical framework was chosen as the seven dimensions represent important components of tourism experience that are considered effective to understand the tourist experience of cooking classes (Kim et. al. (2012). These dimensions were used to categorise online reviews and measure the tourist experience. Each of the dimensions was colour coded and matching statements and words were counted and highlighted to identify experiential patterns and trends recorded in the online reviews and draw relevant conclusions.

Findings

This study seeks to understand tourist's perception of cooking classes as a tourist experience using the seven experience dimensions - Involvement, Hedonism, Local culture, Knowledge, Meaningfulness, Novelty, and Refreshment- proposed by Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012). This section provides the findings for each of these dimensions from the content analysis of the online reviews of the cooking schools of Cinque Terre. Table 2 below

provides a summary of the number of times keywords related to each of these dimensions were found in the online reviews. As the table indicates, the experiential dimensions that the visitors identified with the cooking classes mostly were involvement, hedonism, local culture and knowledge. While meaningfulness, novelty and refreshment scored considerably lower, which could indicate that the visitors associated cooking classes less with these dimensions. It was observed at the outset that the reviews contained keywords related to multiple dimensions and tend to overlap, indicating the multiplicity and holistic nature of customer experience and servicescape (Pareigis, et. al., 2012).

Please insert table 2 here

Involvement

According to Manfredo (1989), involvement can be defined as the extent to which tourists are interested in an activity and the affective responses aroused from the activity. Involvement reflects the degree to which an individual is devoted to an activity, product, or experience (Prayag and Ryan, 2012). As an attitude, involvement can be learnt during interaction with the environment and shaped by individual characteristics (Prayag and Ryan, 2012). It indicates the importance attached and enduring nature of interest in or motivation towards an activity (Kyle and Chick, 2004). Involvement is positively related to overall tourist satisfaction (Hwang, et. al. 2005) and is an antecedent to place attachment (Prayag and Ryan, 2012). Therefore, it can be a useful measurement of the tourist experience of the cooking classes. Kim et al. (2012) employed three scales to measure involvement (Table 1):

- *I visited a place where I really wanted to go*
- *I enjoyed the activities which I really wanted to do*
- *I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience*

As table 2 indicate involvement is decidedly the most occurring experience dimension, which was noted in all of the reviews. It highlights the high level of enjoyment, interest and engagement of the participants of the cooking classes. Tourists participate in cooking classes because they enjoy it:

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"This was a highlight of my two weeks in Italy! My niece and I had the best time learning to make pesto, gnocchi, sea bass, stuffed vegetables and sweet bread. I would recommend this to everyone"

In a sense, involvement seems to overlap all other dimensions:

"We had so much fun at Simone's pesto making class. Definitely worth the €50 which includes the class itself and all ingredients, local wine tasting and a generous serving of cheese and cold cuts per person. Not to mention the breath-taking view!"

Hedonism

Hedonism is the pursuit and prioritisation of pleasure over other life values (Ksendzova, et. al. 2015). It is characterised by openness to pleasurable experiences (Veenhoven, 2003). It reflects the emotional value attached to an experience and represents the returns in terms of enjoyment and playfulness (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). Hedonism is an essential aspect of any leisure experience and a vital variable in tourist satisfaction. determine the satisfaction of tourists at a destination and their behaviour in the future. As a pleasure-seeking activity, tourism is a form of hedonic consumption (Otto and Ritchie, 1996). Kim et. al. (2012) suggest the following scales to measure hedonistic experiences (Table 1):

- *Thrilled about having a new experience*
- *Indulged in the activities*
- *Really enjoyed this tourism experience*
- *Exciting*

It is a key element of the tourist experience, and tourists attending cooking classes do seek hedonistic experiences. The content analysis of the online reviews revealed hedonism as a key feature of the cooking class experience.

> *"We had a very enjoyable day cooking with Rusty at the Cinque*
> *Terre Cooking School. A great way to spend the day up in the mountains making*
> *delicious Italian food […]"*

The participants in cooking classes seem to have found a really great way to spend their time enjoying themselves:

> "*Wonderful day and a great experience! This was such a wonderful experience!*
> *We made delicious pesto, mussels, fresh anchovies and pan dolce. It was a hands-*
> *on experience, and I learned a ton about the cuisine of the region. Everyone was*
> *friendly and accommodating"*

Local Culture

Food is a gateway to the local culture and a major attraction of culinary experiences lie in its connection with the local people (Richards, 2012). Local culture forms an important component of the situational factors of a tourist destination (Cohen, et. al., 2014). An important element of local culture is the local population, who mediate all social interactions at a destination. Social interaction between locals and tourists is one of the determinants of a holiday experience at the destination, both positive and negative (Lu et. al., 2015). As a third-generation experience, gastronomy tourism involves a convergence of tourists as consumers and local community members as producers and representatives of the living culture and participants in the co-creation of cultural experiences (Richard, 2015). Kim et. al. (2012) proposed the following scales to consider local culture as a part of the tourism experience (Table 1):

- *Good impression about the local people*
- *Closely experienced the local culture*
- *Local people in a destination were friendly*

Cooking classes involve extensive interaction between tourists and the service providers in the co-creation of culinary experiences that are gateways to authentic cultural experiences.

A majority of reviews indicated interaction with the local people as part of the local culture as an important part of the cooking class experience (Table 2) as the following statements reveal:

"The staff was so friendly and made this a wonderful experience for us. "We prepared anchovies in lemon, pasta with pesto, Seabass with potatoes and Tiramisu. We really enjoyed the day; it was far better than we had expected. This lesson is a great way to learn about cooking and also about the culture. It was also a great social event, and we did not want the day to end! Lovely people and experience."

"We laughed and cooked and ate and laughed some more...in all languages! The hosts were welcoming, kind, and extremely genuine. You got a real sense of family and what it would be like to live there and be a part of this culture. A fun way to learn about the culture and get a great view from up high!"

Knowledge

Knowledge is a cognitive aspect of the tourist experience that involves learning and education (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). The historical origins of travel were associated with a quest for learning and knowledge development during the Grand Tour era (Towner, 1985). Travel represents an opportunity to learn about places, people and self, in the form of newly acquired practical skills, knowledge, practical wisdom and self-consciousness (McKercher and du Cros, 2002). The desire to learn influences the choice of places and activities during a holiday. Knowledge development is implicit in motives such as self-development through involvement with hosts or the site, personal self-development and self-actualisation (Pearce and Lee, 2005). In fact, developing new skills and knowledge and their application to their creative endeavours is an integral part of creative and experiential tourism (Duxbury and Richards, 2019). Guest-host encounters which are crucial to tourism experience are a major source of knowledge and value creation (Barnes, et. al. 2019; Wall and Matheson, 2006). Kim et. al. (2012) suggests the following scales to evaluate the experiential dimension of knowledge:

- *Exploratory*

- *Knowledge*
- *New culture*

Cooking classes represent an educational experience, where tourists learn about the local cuisine, culture, ingredients, diet and develop skills in making food. A large number of reviews did mention knowledge and learning as an important part of the cooking class experience (Table 2). Tourist not only was involved in learning how to cook but also in the grocery shopping at a typical Italian farmer' market and had an immersive experience of the local culture:

> *"Juan and Mary were helpful and kind and they were both excellent teachers. All of the food was delicious and we just loved being immersed in the culture as we learned about Ligurian cuisine. Rosanna and Gianni were just the sweetest! We are so grateful to have been welcomed into their restaurant to learn from their team!"*

> *"We went to a local farmer's market to gather ingredients for our meal & then back to the restaurant to prepare our meal. Loved the combination of hands-on and observation (now I know how to clean mussels)"*

> *"We learned a lot about the ingredients we were using and the dishes we were going to prepare. We were also provided with the recipes to take home. We made delicious pesto, swordfish cakes, swordfish Ligurian style, and tiramisu. Very much enjoyed our class ... Not only for the cooking lessons but understanding the "why" of many things. We walked away with not only an excellent meal but an education".*

Meaningfulness

Participating in tourism activities is one of the ways by which individuals seek meaning about life and experiences that give them a sense of physical, emotional or spiritual fulfilment (Yu, et. al., 2019). Meaningful experiences are sought by tourists as an inner journey of personal growth and development, self-discovery and inner transformation (Wang et. al. 2019;

Sheldon, 2020). They last longer in memory and give a new perspective to one's everyday life after the holiday (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). Kim et. al., (2012) proposed followed scales to measure meaningfulness of an experience:

- *I did something meaningful*
- *I did something important*
- *Learned about myself*

As a form of serious leisure, cooking classes provide opportunities to not only understand the regional cooking practices but functions as a means for learning and engagement (Prayag et. al. (2020). Meaningfulness was mentioned in 80 online reviews, indicating a relatively lower occurrence compared to the previous four dimensions (Table 2). This could be attributed to the nature of cooking classes as experiences that neither life-changing nor involving self-discovery. However, the cooking class experiences were memorable and involved learning:

> *"The cooking experience was suburb and was even further enhanced by the flowing wine, prosecco, limoncello and grappa. A memory for a lifetime."*

> *"We attended the 11:00 am pesto making class and had an awesome experience. We had a long afternoon lunch and ultimately, a beautiful and memorable experience. If you enjoy exploring, learning and having fun experiencing the culture through food and great people this tour is not to be missed."*

Novelty

The pursuit of new experiences has always been a major tourist motivation. It is the extent of new experiences (in amount and manner) that a tourist acquires while on vacation (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). Novelty indicates unique, never-before, once lifetime and new experiences (Kim et. al. 2012). Such experiences are remembered and recalled more than ordinary familiar experience (Yu et al., 2019). The opportunity to sample novel foods is a major reason why tourists engage in gastronomy tourism (Adongo, et. al., 2015). Following variables indicate novel experiences (Kim et. al. 2012):

- *Once-in-a-lifetime experience*
- *Unique*
- *Different from previous experiences*
- *Experienced something new*

As one of the most sought-after activities in gastronomy tourism, cooking classes could help address tourists' quest for novel experiences. The novelty-related experiences appeared 50 times in the reviews (Table 2). The surprisingly lower mention of novelty as part of cooking school experience might indicate tourist's previous experience of cooking classes as part of their previous culinary tourism experiences and may not be a once-in-lifetime experience. The experience articulated in the online reviews clearly note the uniqueness and novelty of their cooking class experience:

> *"It was one of the highlights of our trip to Italy. Will remember this experience for many years to come. If you are looking for a fun, relaxing and unique cooking experience, this is the place to come! Overall a top choice to have a unique experience!"*

> *"From start to finish it was a wonderful experience. Cooking new dishes and of course eating them! We're all good cooks but learned surprising new things. Everyone enjoyed this so much."*

Refreshment

Refreshment means a break from everyday mundane activities and is one of the key motivations in tourism (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018). A refreshing holiday trip helps the individual feel relaxed, recharged and escape from the boredom of daily life (Yu et. al. 2019). As Kim et. al. (2012) note, it is an enduring aspect of a holiday that makes the experience unforgettable. Refreshing holidays are engaging as well as emotionally intense (Sthapi and Coudounaris, 2018). The following indicators have been proposed by Kim et al. (2012) to measure refreshment:

- *Liberating*

- *Enjoyed sense of freedom*
- *Refreshing*

Refreshment as holiday experience was the least mentioned dimension in the online reviews. Measures of refreshment found only in 10 out of the 320 reviews analysed (Table 2). These reviews indicated a thorough sense of enjoyment, which can be a refreshing and rejuvenating experience.

> *"We laughed, drank great wine, ate wonderful dishes that we had made and made memories to last a lifetime. Take the time to enjoy this cooking experience. You will never regret it."*

> *"We have now been to this amazing Cooking School 2 years running and both times have been a most enjoyable and memorable experience. Overall, we very much enjoyed the class. What a wonderful day!"*

Conclusion

Experiences involve sensorial engagement, and create takeaway impression formed by people's encounters with products, services, and businesses and involve the consolidation of sensory values in the four realms of entertainment, education, escape, and esthetics (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Zhang, et; al., 2008). The growing demand for immersive, embodied, emotionally rich and authentic experiences that involve greater human interactions and connections with the local culture have seen a growing interest in experiencing local cuisines (Everett, 2008; Sheldon, 2020; Seeler and Schanzel, 2019). Gastronomy tourism has emerged as a niche area of cultural heritage tourism. The local cuisine is an important consideration in tourists' choice of a destination and a major travel motivation (Su et. al., 2020). Food-related tourism is increasingly seen as an authentic way of a place (Taheri et. al., 2018; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Gastronomy tourism facilitates tourists' participation in the communal production and consumption of food and provide an immersive and creative experience of the destination and its culture (Rachao, et. al., 2021; Su et al., 2018).

As a tourist product, gastronomy tourism provides tourist destinations with opportunities to offer a wide range of activities such as eating and drinking in local restaurants, food festivals,

visits to farms and food production centres, farmers' markets, cooking classes, homestays, wellness holidays, and meals at local households (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Karim and Chi, 2010; Bell, 2015; Azavedo, 2019). It helps in destination branding and many tourist destinations consider food-related tourism as a strategic resource that helps differentiate their product offerings (Lai et. al., 2019; Seitoglu and Ivanov, 2020; Aydin, 2020). Gastronomy also have a strategic role in tourist destinations, especially in establishing a gastronomic image, a sense of place and as a key part of the differentiation strategy (Seyitoglu and Ivanov, 2020).

Cooking classes are a form of participative gastronomic tourism, which are popular for their experiential and authentic value (Walter, 2017; Agyeiwaah et. al. 2019). Tourists perceive gastronomic experiences such as cooking classes as a cultural activity. They are examples of serious leisure and third-generation tourism experiences (Richards, 2015; Prayag, et. al. 2020; Pratt, et. al., 2020). As a form of experiential and creative tourism, they help provide immersive and authentic experiences that involve interactions and human connections with the local community (Folmer, et. al., 2019; Seeler and Schanzel, 2019; Richards, 2015). As Kim et. al. (2010) note, individuals who closely experience local culture are more likely to have memorable tourism experiences. Cooking classes in a country such as Italy are so closely connected to its regional and local identities and cuisines play a very importance role in their retention and making the cultural heritage accessible to visitors.

This study analysed experiential dimensions of cooking classes in Cinque Terre using the experiential framework proposed by Kim et. al. (2012), which contain seven dimensions, vis. Involvement, hedonism, local culture, knowledge, meaningfulness, novelty and refreshment, were employed to analyse online reviews of the cooking classes in Cinque Terre retrieved from TripAdvisor from the period of January 2011 to November 2020. The findings reveal that out of the seven experiential dimensions, involvement, hedonism, local culture and knowledge found more mentions in the online reviews, which reflects their importance to the cooking class experience. A large majority of the reviews identified these four experiential dimensions with their cooking class experiences. The remaining three dimensions, vis., meaningfulness, novelty and refreshment, scored considerably less in the reviews, which suggest that they were associated less with cooking class experiences. It was also evident

from the reviews that the participants of cooking classes experienced multiple dimensions of the experience framework proposed by Kim et. al. (2012).

The fact that involvement scored the highest number of mentions and was mentioned in all 320 reviews analysed would suggest the extent to which participants experienced a heightened state of motivation, arousal and devotion to the cooking classes. Hedonism, which is characterised by the pursuit of pleasure, was identified with the cooking classes in all reviews, revealing the playfulness, fun and pleasure that the participants experienced. Local culture was mentioned in a large number of reviews (280), which highlight the role of cooking classes in facilitating social interactions and cultural exchanges, and the value attached to these by the participants. A significant number of reviews contained knowledge (230) as an experience, suggesting how the cooking classes helped participants gain learn something new about the food and local way of life. While being important dimensions of tourist experience and motivation, meaningfulness, novelty and refreshment were not identified with the cooking class experience as much as the other four experiential dimensions (Table 2). The lower score for meaningfulness could be an indication of the fact that cooking classes may not have been found to offer intensive life-changing experiences of self-discovery. Participants' previous experience of culinary tourism and cooking classes could be attributed to lower mention of novelty as a dimension of the cooking class experience. Refreshment, which involves experiencing a sense of freedom, enjoyment and revitalisation, was the lowest scored experiential dimension in the reviews. This was a surprising revelation, and it could be attributed to the potential overlap between its variables and hedonism, which is associated with enjoyment and pleasure.

The online reviews analysed contained responses that could be associated with multiple dimensions of the experiential framework. This can be attributed to the complex nature of experiences, which contain a number of sub-experiences that happen at several levels, involving various human faculties. The complexity of human experiences reflects the complex nature of human beings, their social systems and the wide range of interactions that are normally seen in every experience. As explained earlier, the potential overlap between the experiential dimensions (e.g. hedonism and refreshment) and the overlapping experiences of the respondents point to the complexity of human experiences that the current study clearly demonstrates in the context of gastronomy tourism. Complexity would thus appear fundamental to a dynamic industry such as tourism, which is characterised by frequent

changes, crises and chaos (Zahra and Ryan, 2007) and the notions of complexity may help better understand the social and cultural elements of gastronomic experiences.

Implications of the study

This paper contributes to the literature surrounding cultural tourism, gastronomy tourism, tourist experience, serious leisure, and cooking classes as a form of authentic, creative and experiential tourism, and represents an expansion of the relatively limited research on cooking classes in the European context.

Management implications

The conclusions of the study highlight the importance of cooking classes for destination development, destination branding and as a strategic destination resource. The findings are of value to tourism policymakers and destination managers in formulating their tourist product and experience-development strategies. The managers of cooking classes and culinary tourism businesses will find the putative hierarchy of experiential dimensions revealed in the study useful in designing their culinary products, services and experiences.

Research Implications

The study suggests a number of areas for further research to develop greater insight and knowledge related to experiential aspects of culinary tourism. To begin with, further investigations are necessary to understand the factors behind the lower level of association of meaningfulness, novelty and refreshment dimensions of tourism experience with cooking classes. Detailed studies focusing on each of the seven experiential dimensions within the context of cooking classes and culinary tourism will help appreciate their implications to product, service and experience development in gastronomy tourism. The study could be replicated in gastronomic tourism and cooking classes in other cultural and geographical contexts. As a study that applies Kim et. al's (2012) experiential dimensions, it shows the way to apply these dimensions to various other forms of experiential and creative tourism products and services; e.g. health tourism, wellness tourism, adventure tourism, literary tourism, etc. This study involved the analysis of online reviews by the participants of cooking classes in Cinque Terre. From a methodological perspective, there is immense scope for investigating cookery class experiences using survey, interview and case study methods. The

current study did indicate the complex nature of experiences and further research is required to understand the complexity of tourism experiences in general and within the gastronomy tourism context. As the scope of the present study is limited to the experiential dimensions of Kim et. al. (2012), further research can be carried out using other experiential frameworks such as the ones proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999), Schmitt (1999), as well as from the perspectives of authenticity (Wang, 2009), experience design (Tussyadiah, 2014), experience encounters (Sørensen and Jensen (2015), customer journey (Yachin, 2018) and the tourism experience creation framework (Stienmetz. et. al. 2021)

This study highlights the distinctive place that gastronomy tourism and cooking classes have as a form of creative and experiential tourism, and their experiential dimensions deemed important by participants. They represent a key strategic resource for tourist destinations and can be an important variable in designing immersive, experiential and creative holiday experiences. The findings of the study clearly indicates that the experiencescape of cooking classes represent multiple experiences proposed by Kim et. al. (2012) and point to the complex nature of tourism experiences.

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Appendice I

Hedonism	*Refreshment*
- Thrilled about having a new experience - Indulged in the activities - Really enjoyed this tourism experience - Exciting	- Liberating - Enjoyed the sense of freedom - Refreshing - Revitalised
Novelty	*Meaningfulness*
- Once-in-a-lifetime experience - Unique - Different from previous experiences - Experienced something new	- I did something meaningful - I did something important - Learned about myself
Local culture	*Involvement*
- A good impression of the local people - Closely experienced the local culture - Local people in a destination were friendly	- I visited a place where I really wanted to go - I enjoyed the activities which I really wanted to do - I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience
Knowledge	
- Exploratory - Knowledge - New culture	

(Table 1. Dimensions and Indicators of Tourism Experiences, Kim et. al. 2012)

Dimensions	Occurrences
Involvement	320
Hedonism	320
Local Culture	260
Knowledge	230
Meaningfulness	80
Novelty	51
Refreshment	10

(Table 2: Occurrences of Experiential Dimension