



## Assessment of Challenges, Marketability, and Sustainability of Iloilo as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy

Article History:	
Initial submission:	05 February 2026
First decision:	10 February 2026
Revision received:	20 April 2026
Accepted for publication:	28 April 2026
Online release:	07 May 2026

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. A survey-correlational research design was employed, gathering data from 305 tourism stakeholders representing the accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, travel agencies, academe, and local government sectors. Respondents were selected using quota sampling. A researcher-made questionnaire served as the primary data-gathering instrument. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that stakeholders generally perceived Iloilo City's gastronomy-related dimensions, such as urban gastronomy, community involvement, indigenous ingredients, culinary practices and cooking methods, food market and industry, gastronomic festivals and activities, to be environmental sustainability, and its nutrition and biodiversity promotion, as not challenging. The marketability of Iloilo City was assessed "high" across the 7Ps of marketing, namely product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence, reflecting a strong culinary heritage, effective branding, and a vibrant festival culture. In terms of sustainability, the city was rated highly sustainable across social, economic, and environmental dimensions, with economic sustainability receiving particularly strong support. Moreover, significant relationships were found between selected challenge dimensions, particularly culinary practices, food market and industry, and biodiversity promotion, and the perceived marketability and sustainability of the city. These findings indicate that addressing specific structural and operational concerns can further enhance Iloilo City's competitiveness, strengthen its gastronomic identity, and reinforce its long-term sustainability as the Philippines' first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

**Keywords:** challenges, marketability, sustainability, Iloilo City, UNESCO creative city, gastronomy



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### INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy has become a key driver of tourism and sustainable urban development worldwide. Within this context, culinary tourism illustrates how cities utilize elements of their culinary heritage to preserve cultural identity, attract visitors, and strengthen local economies (Richards, 2021). Prominent examples of gastronomic towns include Parma, Chengdu, and Tucson, which showcase how food heritage can be strategically leveraged to enhance both tourism and urban development.

Within gastronomy tourism, a closely related term, sustainable food systems and farm-to-

table practices contribute to environmental sustainability and local economic development, particularly in the Philippine context where integrated food systems remain a key area for improvement (Goloso-Gubat et al., 2024). However, in order for these types of tourism programs to be successful, cities need to overcome three major barriers: marketability, sustainability, and stakeholder participation (Okumus et al., 2020).

The Philippines, with its rich cultural heritage, is increasingly recognized for its gastronomic potential. Within this context, Iloilo City, a town situated in the Visayas region, has emerged as a leading example. In 2023, UNESCO designated

Iloilo City as the country's first Creative City of Gastronomy (UNESCO, 2023). UNESCO's official report on Creative Cities of Gastronomy underscores that local culinary heritage and active community participation are essential pillars of sustainable gastronomy tourism (UNESCO, 2023). The report affirms UNESCO's endorsement of community-driven preservation of cooking traditions, aligning with broader claims about engagement and sustainability. Henceforth, this recognition not only affirms the depth of Iloilo's food heritage but also strengthens its position as an emerging global gastronomic destination. Scholarly discussions highlight that cities strategically incorporate gastronomy into their branding efforts, emphasizing that leveraging culinary heritage enables them to distinguish themselves and enhance their appeal as tourism destinations (Hocaoglu, 2024).

However, although Iloilo City's designation as the Philippines' first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy affirms its culinary richness, scholarship reveals insufficient empirical assessment of how such recognition translates into sustainable strategies. Richards (2021) notes that gastronomy tourism has evolved from producer-oriented approaches to co-creation and foodscapes, requiring holistic frameworks that connect heritage, tourism, and economic resilience. Similarly, Hocaoglu (2024) emphasizes that cities like Gaziantep strategically integrate gastronomy into branding to distinguish themselves globally. Yet, Iloilo's case remains underexplored in terms of how its culinary heritage is leveraged for measurable outcomes in tourism growth, identity formation, and sustainability. This gap underscores the need to examine Iloilo's strategies beyond symbolic recognition, situating them within broader theoretical models of gastronomy tourism and place branding.

More so, reports on UNESCO's Creative Cities of Gastronomy highlight community involvement and culinary heritage as essential pillars of sustainable tourism (UNESCO, 2023). However, Philippine studies reveal persistent constraints,

such as inadequate infrastructure, limited hospitality services, and transportation challenges restrict visitor access and diminish tourism experiences (Busalla, 2025). Gutierrez, Rivera, and Roxas (2022) further argue that Filipino cuisine lacks a cohesive global identity, limiting its marketability despite rich traditions and festivals. These findings reveal a gap between Iloilo's international recognition and its local readiness to sustain tourism growth. Addressing this requires systematic evaluation of collaborative mechanisms among government, private stakeholders, and communities to ensure that Iloilo's designation translates into inclusive development, strengthened branding, and resilient infrastructure.

The gaps identified above have led this study to investigate the challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. By examining both conceptual issues, such as the limited integration of culinary heritage, into measurable branding strategies, and practical constraints, such as infrastructure and collaborative governance, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of Iloilo's readiness and potential. More broadly, conducting this study will contribute to the growing body of literature on gastronomy tourism by offering insights into how emerging gastronomic cities in developing contexts can translate international recognition into sustainable tourism practices, strengthened cultural identity, and inclusive urban development.

**Objectives of the Study.** Below are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To profile the tourism stakeholders in terms of sex, age, educational attainment, average family monthly income, and tourism sector.
2. To assess the challenges of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy across the following dimensions: urban gastronomy, community, indigenous ingredients, culinary practices and cooking methods, food market

and industry, gastronomic festivals and activities, environment and sustainable products, and promotion of nutrition and biodiversity.

3. To evaluate the marketability of Iloilo City's gastronomy using the 7Ps marketing mix, namely: product, place, price, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence.
4. To measure the sustainability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in terms of social, environmental, and economic sustainability.
5. To determine whether significant differences in the stakeholders' assessments of challenges, marketability, and sustainability exist when respondents are grouped according to their demographic and professional profiles.
6. To determine if significant relationships exist between the perceived challenges and the marketability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

**Hypotheses.** At 0.05 level of significance, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There are no significant differences in the stakeholders' assessments of the challenge dimensions of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy when classified according to the respondents' demographic and professional profiles.
2. There are no significant differences in the stakeholders' assessments of the marketability dimensions of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy when classified according to the respondents' demographic and professional profiles.
3. There are no significant differences in the stakeholders' assessments of the sustainability dimensions of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy when classified according to the respondents' demographic and professional profiles.

4. There are no significant relationships between the perceived challenge dimensions and the marketability dimensions of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

**Theoretical Framework.** This study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical foundations: the Stakeholder Theory, the 7P's Marketing Model, and the Tripple Bottom Line Approach. Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) emphasizes inclusive decision-making and the consideration of multiple stakeholder interests in achieving sustainable development outcomes. In the context of Iloilo City, this theory supports examining how different tourism stakeholders perceive challenges and opportunities linked to its UNESCO designation. More so, Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) claims that institution initiatives are considered to be the interests of all familiar stakeholders to achieved verifiable success. Henceforth, it emphasizes the importance of inclusive decision-making, including the perspectives of various groups, including government agencies, businesses, consumers, and the local community, which effectively addressed challenges. In Iloilo's gastronomic tourism setting, stakeholder engagement is vital for addressing challenges, enhancing marketability, and overcoming sustainability barriers linked to its UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy designation.

The 7P's Marketing Model, developed by Booms and Bitner in 1981, extends the traditional marketing mix to include vital service industry components: product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence. This framework provides a systematic lens for evaluating Iloilo City's marketability as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. It allows for holistic assessment of how gastronomic identity is positioned and communicated to target markets, while also revealing essential areas for improvement and innovation. Food tourism emphasizes quality, authenticity, and diversification of local cuisine, yet ensuring consistent food quality remains challenging due to resource limitations, culinary innovation

demands, and heritage preservation concerns. Pricing strategies must likewise balance value and affordability to appeal to both niche local and international tourists. By applying the 7P's, Iloilo's gastronomic initiatives can be critically examined across multiple dimensions, ensuring that its culinary heritage is effectively marketed and sustained.

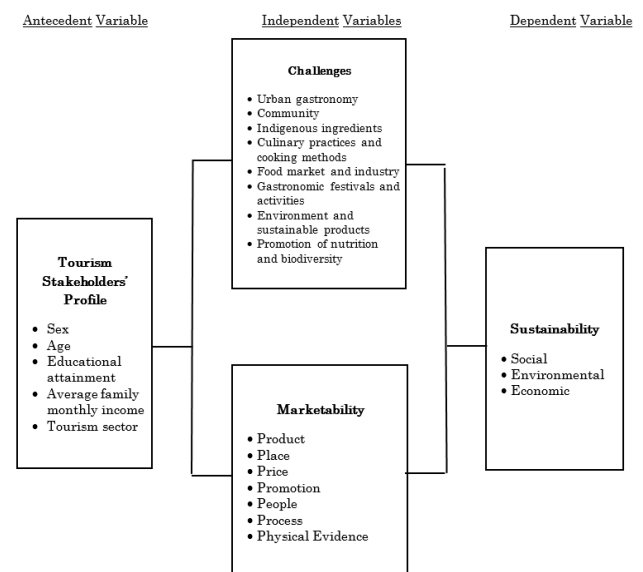
Lastly, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach, proposed by John Elkington (1997), underscores sustainability through balanced attention to economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Applied to Iloilo's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, this framework highlights the need to evaluate not only economic gains from tourism but also social inclusivity and environmental stewardship. By integrating TBL, the study situates Iloilo's gastronomic initiatives within a holistic sustainability model, ensuring that growth aligns with community well-being and ecological responsibility.

As a widely used framework in tourism studies, the TBL emphasizes long-term sustainability through the integration of economic performance, environmental stewardship, and social responsibility (UNWTO, 2018). Scholars argue that well-managed tourism provides cultural benefits by serving as a form of public education for both tourists and host communities, enhancing awareness and appreciation of culinary and natural heritage (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). This holistic approach enables a comprehensive understanding of tourism's effects on society, the economy, and the environment, guiding local tourism sectors in assessing the sustainability of Iloilo City as a Creative City of Gastronomy.

Collectively, these frameworks explain the interrelationships among the study variables. Stakeholder perceptions influence how challenges are identified and addressed; effective marketing strategies enhance destination marketability; and sustainability practices ensure long-term economic viability, cultural preservation, and environmental responsibility. By integrating these

perspectives, the study examines how challenges, marketability, and sustainability interact within Iloilo City's development as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

**Conceptual Framework.** This study is anchored on a framework that examines the interrelationship among stakeholder profiles, perceived challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. The model, as shown in Figure 1, positions the demographic and professional profiles of tourism stakeholders, namely sex, age, educational attainment, average family monthly income, and tourism sector, as antecedent variables. These variables are considered determinants that may influence how stakeholders assess the city's gastronomic development.



**Figure 1**  
*Conceptual Model of Challenges, Marketability, and Sustainability in Iloilo's UNESCO Gastronomy Designation*

Meanwhile, the study identifies three major analytical constructs: perceived challenges, marketability, and sustainability. Perceived challenges constitute a multidimensional variable encompassing urban gastronomy, community, indigenous ingredients, culinary practices and cooking methods, food market and industry, gastronomic festivals and activities, environment and sustainable

products, and promotion of nutrition and biodiversity. These dimensions collectively represent structural and operational concerns associated with Iloilo City's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

Marketability is conceptualized through the 7Ps marketing framework, including product, place, price, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence. This construct reflects how the city's gastronomic identity is positioned and delivered within the tourism market. Sustainability is examined across three dimensions: social, environmental, and economic sustainability, reflecting the long-term viability of gastronomic initiatives.

Within the above stated model, stakeholder profiles are proposed to influence perceptions of challenges, marketability, and sustainability. Perceived challenges are further examined in relation to marketability and sustainability, recognizing their potential role in shaping how the city's gastronomic initiatives are positioned and sustained. Thus, stakeholder profiles function as independent variables, perceived challenges operate both as dependent variables (in relation to stakeholder profiles) and as explanatory variables (in relation to marketability and sustainability), while marketability and sustainability serve as outcome variables within the framework.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study.** This study examined challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy from the perspective of 305 tourism stakeholders selected through quota sampling. The stakeholders represented the accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, travel agencies, local government, and academe sectors within Iloilo City.

The study covered three major variables: (1) the challenges associated with Iloilo City's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, including dimensions related to urban gastronomy, community, indigenous ingredients, culinary practices and cooking

methods, food market and industry, gastronomic festivals and activities, environmental sustainability, and promotion of nutrition and biodiversity; (2) the marketability of the city's gastronomy using the 7Ps marketing dimensions which are product, place, price, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence; and (3) the sustainability of the city's gastronomic initiatives in terms of social, environmental, and economic aspects.

The research was geographically confined to Iloilo City. It included only tourism stakeholders aged 18–59 years who belonged to the identified tourism sectors. Stakeholders outside Iloilo City and individuals not affiliated with the specified tourism sectors were excluded from the study. The study also did not include tourists, residents who are not part of the tourism industry, policymakers at the national level, or international comparative cases.

Conceptually, the study focused on stakeholder perceptions rather than objective performance indicators, financial records, or longitudinal data. Methodologically, the one-shot survey design limited the findings to a single period of assessment and did not examine changes over time or establish causal relationships. Despite these limitations, the study provides baseline insights into the interconnected dimensions of gastronomy, tourism, and sustainability within Iloilo City's evolving creative economy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization introduced the Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in 2004 as a strategic initiative to promote international collaboration among cities that position creativity as a key driver of sustainable urban development. The network supports the advancement of cultural industries and encourages the integration of creative sectors into economic, social, and environmental policies. Within this framework, gastronomy is recognized as a vital thematic field, highlighting cities that harness culinary heritage to stimulate tourism, preserve cultural

identity, and promote inclusive local economic growth (UNESCO, 2021).

UNESCO Creative Cities designation allows cities to position gastronomy as an important cultural and economic asset. Gastronomic cities such as Parma (Italy), Chengdu (China), and Tucson (USA) have successfully used their culinary heritage to promote tourism development and strengthen their global identity. Research suggests that membership in the network enhances international visibility, fosters cultural exchange, and supports local food systems through collaborative initiatives among cities (Zhu, 2021; Richards, 2021).

Studies on UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy further emphasize the importance of integrating cultural heritage, food systems, and tourism planning. Gastronomy is increasingly recognized as a tool for sustainable urban development because it connects cultural identity, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability. According to Hall (2003), food tourism not only enhances destination attractiveness but also strengthens regional development by supporting local producers, culinary traditions, and community participation.

Food heritage plays a central role in shaping the cultural identity of destinations. Gastronomy reflects a community's history, traditions, and social practices, making it a valuable cultural resource for tourism development. Culinary tourism allows visitors to experience local culture through traditional dishes, indigenous ingredients, and authentic cooking practices. Long (2004) conceptualized culinary tourism as the intentional exploration of foodways, positioning food as a cultural artifact that embodies the identity, traditions, and heritage of a place and its people.

Research also highlights that gastronomy contributes significantly to destination branding. Food experiences enhance tourists' emotional connection with destinations and influence their perceptions of authenticity. Ellis et al. (2018) explained that food tourism has

become a major component of destination competitiveness because it provides unique and memorable experiences that distinguish destinations from others in the tourism market.

Within the context of urban tourism development, gastronomy serves as both a cultural expression and an economic resource. Cities that successfully integrate food heritage into tourism strategies are able to create distinctive identities and attract both domestic and international visitors. As a result, gastronomy has become an important element in destination marketing and urban cultural development (Richards, 2021).

Sustainability has become an essential principle in the development of gastronomic tourism. Sustainable gastronomy promotes responsible food production, environmental stewardship, and the preservation of cultural traditions. The concept aligns with the broader framework of sustainable tourism, which aims to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being. Elkington (1997) introduced the Triple Bottom Line approach, emphasizing the importance of achieving economic, social, and environmental sustainability in development initiatives.

In the context of tourism, sustainable gastronomic practices encourage the use of locally sourced ingredients, support small food enterprises, and promote community participation in tourism development. Hall and Mitchell (2005) emphasized that culinary tourism contributes to regional development by strengthening local food systems and supporting the preservation of culinary heritage.

Furthermore, sustainable food tourism initiatives can reduce environmental impacts by promoting responsible consumption and sustainable agricultural practices. Gosling et al. (2011) highlighted that sustainable food systems within tourism destinations can contribute to environmental conservation while supporting local economies and cultural traditions.

Iloilo City's designation as the first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in the Philippines highlights the significance of its culinary heritage and food culture in tourism development. The city is known for traditional dishes such as La Paz batchoy, pancit molo, and fresh seafood specialties, which represent the unique culinary traditions of Western Visayas. The recognition by UNESCO reflects the city's commitment to promoting gastronomy as a cultural asset and a driver of economic growth. The UNESCO recognition also encourages the development of policies and programs that support sustainable food systems, local culinary industries, and tourism promotion. However, despite the recognition, limited empirical studies have examined the challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo's gastronomic tourism from the perspective of tourism stakeholders. Understanding stakeholder perceptions is therefore essential in assessing how the city can strengthen its gastronomic identity and sustain its position as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. (UNESCO, 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design.** This study employed a quantitative, survey-correlational research design to examine the relationships among challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. Quantitative research enables the systematic collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and statistically significant relationships among variables. Consistent with the framework of Creswell (2023), this design is appropriate for describing variables and determining their interrelationships within a structured approach.

**Population and Sampling.** The study population consisted of tourism stakeholders in Iloilo City, representing key sectors such as accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, travel agencies, local government, and academe. A total of 305 tourism stakeholders from all sectors in Iloilo City have been included in the study.

According to Goeldner and Ritchie (2005), there are six groups of tourism stakeholders which came from the different sectors: (a) accommodation; (b) food and beverage; (c) transportation; (d) travel agencies; (e) local government; and (f) academe. Following the above grouping, quota sampling was used to allocate 50 respondents per local tourism stakeholder group, hence, a total of 300 participants. This ensured proportionate representation of each group in the sample (Bala, 2017) thus allowing the researcher to allocate respondents per sector, thereby achieving balanced sectoral representation and enhancing the generalizability of findings within the defined population. However, the final distribution varied slightly based on respondents' availability and participation, resulting in a total sample of 305 tourism stakeholders.

**Instrumentation.** Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire designed to measure the study variables: challenges, marketability, and sustainability. The instrument was constructed based on an extensive review of related literature and contextualized to the local setting.

Content validity was established through expert evaluation involving at least three subject matter specialists, utilizing the Goods and Scates validation framework to assess relevance, clarity, and alignment with research objectives. Revisions were made based on expert feedback to refine the instrument.

A pilot test was conducted with a minimum of 30 respondents who shared characteristics similar to the target population. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicated excellent reliability for the challenges scale ( $\alpha = 0.925$ ), good reliability for the marketability scale ( $\alpha = 0.890$ ), and acceptable reliability for the sustainability scale ( $\alpha = 0.729$ ). According to George and Mallery (2003), coefficients of 0.70 and above indicate acceptable internal consistency, confirming the reliability of the instrument.

**Data Gathering.** Data collection was undertaken through both face-to-face administration and the distribution of Google Forms. Prior to participation, informed consent was secured from all respondents in accordance with ethical research standards. Upon retrieval, the completed questionnaires were carefully examined to verify the completeness and integrity of responses. The dataset was subsequently processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21, which enabled systematic data cleaning, coding, and organization. This procedure ensured the accuracy, consistency, and preparedness of the dataset for rigorous statistical analysis.

**Data Analysis.** Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts and percentages were utilized to describe respondent profiles, while mean scores were computed to assess the levels of the study variables. To determine differences between groups, the Mann-Whitney *U* test and Kruskal-Wallis *H* test were applied. Additionally, Spearman Rank Correlation was used to examine relationships among variables. These non-parametric tests were deemed appropriate given the nature of the data and measurement scales employed in the study.

**Ethical Considerations.** The study obtained ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Review Board prior to data collection. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by omitting personally identifiable information and securely storing all data. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. These measures ensured the protection of participants and upheld the integrity and ethical rigor of the research.

## RESULTS

**Profile of the Tourism Stakeholders.** Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were male (57%), aged 31–40 years (45%), and college graduates (69%). In terms of average family monthly income, most respondents earned between P10,958–P21,914 (50%). They were also proportionally distributed across the six tourism sectors: accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, travel agencies, local government, and academe with approximately 16–17% representation per sector. These descriptive statistics indicate a balanced and representative sample of stakeholders.

**Table 1**  
*Tourism Stakeholders' Profile*

Categories ( <i>n</i> =305)	<i>f</i>	%
Entire group	305	100
Sex		
Male	174	57
Female	131	43
Age		
30 years and below	74	24
31 to 40	138	45
41 and above	93	31
Educational Attainment		
Highschool Graduate	51	17
College Graduate	210	69
Masters and Doctorate Graduate	44	14
Average Gross Monthly Income		
Php10,957 and below	43	14
Php10,958 to Php21,914	151	50
Php21,914 to Php43,828	63	28
Php43,829 to Php76,669	34	11
Php76,670 to Php131,484	14	5
Tourism Stakeholder		
Accommodation	50	16
Food and Beverage	50	16
Transportation	51	17
Travel Agency	50	16
Local Government Agency	52	17
Academe	52	17

Table 2 presents the yielded data in the assessment of challenges, marketability, and sustainability of Iloilo as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

**Assessment of Challenges.** The stakeholders assessed the challenges across the eight dimensions: urban gastronomy, community, indigenous ingredients, culinary practices and cooking methods, food market and industry, gastronomic festivals and activities, environment and sustainable products, and promotion of nutrition and biodiversity. All dimensions yielded mean scores interpreted as “Not Challenging,” indicating that, overall, stakeholders perceive minimal barriers to the development of Iloilo City’s gastronomy sector.

**Table 2**  
*Summary of Stakeholders’ Assessment of Challenges, Marketability, and Sustainability of Iloilo as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy*

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
<b>Challenges</b>			
Urban Gastronomy	1.33	0.30	Not Challenging
Community Involvement	1.41	0.38	Not Challenging
Indigenous Ingredients	1.37	0.40	Not Challenging
Culinary Practices and Cooking Methods	1.40	0.44	Not Challenging
Food Market and Industry	1.36	0.38	Not Challenging
Gastronomic Festivals and Activities	1.36	0.38	Not Challenging
Environment and Sustainable Products	1.30	0.33	Not Challenging
Promotion of Nutrition and Biodiversity	1.31	0.34	Not Challenging
<b>Marketability</b>			
Product	4.59	0.36	Highly Marketable
Place	4.65	0.35	Highly Marketable
Price	4.60	0.33	Highly Marketable
Promotion	4.54	0.40	Highly Marketable
People	4.50	0.45	Highly Marketable
Process	4.66	0.37	Highly Marketable
Physical Evidence	4.54	0.40	Highly Marketable
<b>Sustainability</b>			
Social Sustainability	4.60	0.33	Highly Sustainable
Environmental Sustainability	4.70	0.34	Highly Sustainable
Economic Sustainability	4.70	0.34	Highly Sustainable

**Assessment of Marketability.** Iloilo City was rated as “Highly Marketable” across the seven marketing mix dimensions: product, place, price, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence. High mean scores across all dimensions reflect strong stakeholder agreement regarding the city’s competitiveness, driven by its culinary heritage, effective promotion, and stakeholder engagement. Statistical analysis indicated no significant differences in marketability assessments when respondents were grouped according to demographic and professional profiles ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted,

suggesting consistent perceptions of marketability among stakeholders.

**Assessment of Sustainability.** Iloilo City was assessed as “Highly Sustainable” across social, environmental, and economic dimensions. Among these, economic sustainability obtained the highest mean score.

Table 3 reveals the inferential results for both differences and relationship, with anchor presentation from the tested hypotheses.

**Table 3**  
*Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results on Stakeholder Assessments of Challenges, Marketability, and Sustainability*

Hypothesis	Statistical Test Used	p-value	Decision
H1: There is no significant difference in the stakeholders’ assessment of the challenges of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy when grouped according to demographic and professional profiles.	Mann–Whitney U Test / Kruskal–Wallis H Test	$p > 0.05$	Accepted
H2: There is no significant difference in the stakeholders’ assessment of the marketability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy when grouped according to demographic and professional profiles.	Mann–Whitney U Test / Kruskal–Wallis H Test	$p > 0.05$	Accepted
H3: There is no significant difference in the stakeholders’ assessment of the sustainability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy when grouped according to demographic and professional profiles.	Mann–Whitney U Test / Kruskal–Wallis H Test	$p > 0.05$	Accepted
H4: There is no significant relationship between the perceived challenges and the marketability of Iloilo City as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.	Spearman Rank Correlation	$p < 0.05$	Rejected

**Differences among Stakeholders.** As reflected in Table 3, no statistically significant differences were found in the assessments of challenges, marketability, and sustainability when grouped according to sex, age, educational attainment, income, and tourism sector ( $p > 0.05$ ). These results support the acceptance of the null hypotheses, indicating that stakeholder perceptions are consistent across demographic and professional characteristics. These findings also indicate strong stakeholder confidence in the long-term viability of Iloilo City’s

gastronomy sector. Inferential tests revealed no statistically significant differences in sustainability assessments across stakeholder profiles ( $p > 0.05$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating uniform perceptions of sustainability.

**Relationship Between Challenges and Marketability.** Significant relationships were identified between selected challenge dimensions, specifically on culinary practices and cooking methods, food market and industry, and promotion of nutrition and biodiversity, and the marketability of Iloilo City ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that variations in these aspects of the gastronomy sector are associated with changes in perceived marketability. Accordingly, the null hypothesis stating that no significant relationship exists between challenges and marketability is rejected.

Taken together, these results suggest that Iloilo City's gastronomy sector enjoys broad stakeholder support, with consistent perceptions of its strengths and sustainability. However, the significant relationship between challenges and marketability points to areas where targeted interventions, such as strengthening culinary practices, enhancing food market structures, and promoting nutrition and biodiversity, could further bolster the city's positioning as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy.

## DISCUSSION

The profile of stakeholders, who came from the different tourism sectors, is predominantly composed of male, college-educated individuals belonging to middle- to upper-middle income groups. This demographic pattern reflects broader trends in tourism governance and destination development, wherein decision-making authority and industry participation are often associated with higher levels of education and economic capacity (Bramwell & Lane, 2014). The inclusion of stakeholders from accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, travel

agencies, local government units, and academic institutions provides a multi-sectoral perspective essential for evaluating a destination's gastronomic identity. Consistent with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), such diversity enhances the analytical robustness of destination assessments, particularly for culturally embedded tourism products such as gastronomy.

The assessment of challenges indicates that Iloilo City's gastronomy sector was not perceived as highly challenging across multiple dimensions, including urban gastronomy, indigenous ingredients, culinary practices and cooking methods, food markets and industry, gastronomic festivals and activities, environmental sustainability, and promotion of nutrition and biodiversity. This finding suggests the presence of a relatively mature and stable gastronomic system. Richards (2021) argued that destinations with well-established culinary heritage and institutional support are better positioned to integrate gastronomy into urban and tourism development with fewer structural constraints. Similarly, Okumus et al. (2020) emphasized that destinations characterized by strong food cultures and coordinated stakeholder engagement tend to experience lower levels of operational and developmental challenges in gastronomy-led tourism initiatives.

Despite the generally favorable assessment, variations across demographic groups highlight important structural and perceptual differences among stakeholders. Middle-income stakeholders perceived innovation-related costs as more challenging, which is consistent with the Diffusion of Innovations theory proposed by Everett M. Rogers, which posits that financial constraints can hinder the adoption of new practices, particularly among individuals or groups with moderate economic capacity (Rogers, 2003). Within gastronomy tourism, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often managed by middle-income stakeholders, may encounter constraints in implementing innovative menus, sustainable sourcing systems, and quality assurance

mechanisms due to limited financial and operational resources (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011). These findings suggest that innovation capacity within gastronomy tourism may be unevenly distributed across stakeholder groups.

More critical assessments of community engagement among highly educated stakeholders further underscore the role of education in shaping governance awareness. Studies suggest that higher educational attainment is associated with greater sensitivity toward participatory planning, inclusiveness, and social equity in tourism development (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). This perspective may reflect a heightened awareness of the gaps between policy intentions and actual community participation practices, aligning with sustainable gastronomy tourism frameworks that emphasize authenticity, equitable benefit-sharing, and community empowerment (UNWTO, 2019).

The consistently high marketability ratings of Iloilo City across the seven elements of the tourism marketing mix indicate a strong competitive position as a gastronomic destination. Bowen et al. (2017) emphasized that an integrated marketing mix is essential for experiential tourism products, where perceived value is closely linked to authenticity and service quality. Iloilo City's strong culinary traditions, vibrant festival culture, and coherent destination branding contribute significantly to destination brand equity, reinforcing its attractiveness to both domestic and international markets (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2015).

This competitive positioning is further strengthened by Iloilo City's gastronomic festivals and culinary heritage, which function as symbolic and experiential assets that enhance destination image and memorability (Getz, 2010). Age-based differences in perceptions of indigenous ingredients and Culinary practices also reveal generational shifts in attitudes toward food heritage. Younger stakeholders demonstrate greater openness to

culinary innovation and the reinterpretation of traditional foodways, supporting findings that younger cohorts are more receptive to fusion cuisine and evolving gastronomic experiences (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2016). While such openness promotes creativity and market differentiation, it also underscores the need for governance mechanisms that balance innovation with heritage preservation—a common challenge among successful gastronomic destinations (Ellis et al., 2018).

From a governance and policy perspective, the findings suggest that institutional support plays a critical role in sustaining gastronomy-led tourism development. Integrating food heritage into urban planning, tourism strategies, and cultural protection frameworks strengthens long-term competitiveness while safeguarding cultural integrity. At the national level, targeted policy alignment and monitoring mechanisms incorporating sustainability indicators are necessary to ensure that gastronomy tourism contributes to balanced economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Overall, the results provide empirical support for gastronomy as a viable development pathway for Iloilo City, offering strategic insights for policymakers, investors, and tourism practitioners. Future comparative studies involving other UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy may further deepen understanding of how stakeholder perceptions, governance systems, and cultural contexts influence gastronomy-driven tourism sustainability.

**Author contributions.** Matthew Raul C. Quidato Jr.: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Resources; Software; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing | Rodalyn E. Daylo: Supervision; Validation.

**Conflict of interest.** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Funding source.** This research received no external funding.

**Artificial intelligence use.** AI-assisted language editing was performed using ChatGPT; authors reviewed and approved all contents.

**Ethics approval statement.** This study was approved by the University Research Ethics Review Board of the Central Philippine University, with approval number 2025-155-MS-QUIDATO.

**Data availability statement.** All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript and its supplementary materials.

**Acknowledgment.** The researcher would like to express his gratefulness and significant appreciation to all whose help and guidance contributed to the completion of this study. To his beloved late mother, Mrs. Mildred C. Quidato and father, Mr. Raul S. Quidato whose memory continues to inspire and motivate, this work is humbly and lovingly dedicated to her, with deepest love and remembrance.

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