Chapter 6 Gastronomy as a factor influencing tourism in the Magical Towns. The case of Las Cholulas, Puebla

Capítulo 6 La gastronomía como factor de influencia en el turismo de los pueblos mágicos. Caso las Cholulas, Puebla

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Abstract

Gastronomy is a part of the culture and the identity of the Magical Town. Nowadays has ten denominations, two of them are the Cholulas that got this distinction in 2012, that represent benefits to proyect these places as a tourist destination. Cholula is characterised by cultural grow up that date back to prehispanic epochs and influence in its gastronomy; nevertheless, the impact that has in the election of its visitors has not been measured; this produce a pour of money for the different performers of the population, hence the importance to execute a research that allows to get direct and precise information of the influence of the gastronomy in the tourism; on this basis the objective of this research is identify which aspects, associated with the gastronomy, are important to attract visitors to the Magical Towns of the Cholulas, Puebla. Through a qualitative research, by using a questionnaire with examination closed questions of multiple choice that was applied to a random sample of 339 subjects by use of a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% by following the methodological support of the Dr. Nora Edith Alcalá Flores. This investigation gave up as a result that the gastronomy is not displayed as a determined factor of decision, however, it does influence in the permanence of the visitors, that appraise the gastronomic products as a portion of the culture and identity of these destinations: the tourists that visit the Cholulas are characterised by set above the quality and hygiene of the nourishment along with the variety of products as a priority that must have a relation with a fair price.

Magic towns, Cholula, Culture, Tourism, Gastronomy

La gastronomía es parte de la cultura y la identidad de los pueblos Mágicos. Puebla cuenta actualmente con diez denominaciones, dos de ellas son las Cholulas, que obtuvieron esta distinción en 2012, lo que les representó beneficios para proyectar estos lugares como un destino turístico. Cholula se caracteriza por los arraigos culturales que datan desde épocas prehispánicas y que influyen en su gastronomía; sin embargo, no se ha medido el impacto que tiene en la elección de sus visitantes y la prolongación de su estancia; siendo que esto genera una importante derrama económica para los distintos actores de la población, de ahí la importancia de realizar un estudio que permita obtener información directa y precisa de la influencia de la gastronomía en el turismo; por ello el objetivo de este estudio, es identificar qué aspectos, asociados a la gastronomía, son importantes para atraer visitantes a los Pueblos Mágicos de las Cholulas, Puebla, mediante un estudio cualitativo, empleando un cuestionario con preguntas cerradas de opción múltiple que se aplicó a una muestra aleatoria de 339 sujetos utilizando un nivel de confianza del 95% y un margen de error del 5% siguiendo el apoyo metodológico de la Dra. Nora Edith Alcalá Flores. Este estudio arrojó como resultado que la gastronomía no se visualiza como un factor determinante de decisión, sin embargo, sí influye en la permanencia de los visitantes, que valoran los productos gastronómicos como parte de la cultura e identidad de estos destinos; los turistas que visitan las Cholulas se caracterizan por anteponer la calidad e higiene de los alimentos junto con la variedad de productos como una prioridad que debe tener relación con un precio justo.

Pueblos mágicos, Cholula, Cultura, Turismo, Gastronomía

6.1 Introduction

Gastronomy is considered a pillar of cultural heritage and a fundamental part of the Mexican economy, contributing 2% of the country's Gross Domestic Product, generating 1.7 million direct jobs and an economic spillover of 183 billion pesos. It is estimated that tourists spend 30% of their expenditure on food consumption (SECTUR, 2022).

Salvador Sánchez Estrada, Undersecretary of Quality and Regulation of the Ministry of Tourism (2017), mentions that "gastronomy is a differentiating component that allows attracting more tourists and greater economic development for the regions of the country"; stating that it is an opportunity to nourish Mexico's tourism activity, becoming an engine for development and generating wealth.

Tourism is strengthened by the Pueblos Mágicos programme, created in 2001, which aims to revalue the cultural and historical richness of the towns. San Pedro and San Andrés Cholula, obtained this designation in 2012 and with it a series of benefits for their tourism promotion.

Cholulteca gastronomy is characterised by the cultural roots it has had since pre-Hispanic times and has become a gastronomic hallmark from the bartering of its ingredients to the preparation of its dishes; However, until now it has not been determined what influence gastronomy has on the choice of this destination or the prolongation of the stay, since this generates a relevant economic benefit for the different actors of the population, who intervene in the tourist activity; for this reason it is fundamental to carry out an analysis that shows the importance of traditional gastronomy as a tourist attraction in the communities called Pueblos Mágicos (Magic Towns).

This study is part of the Research Project "Dynamism of Sustainable Tourism" developed by the Business and Administration Network (RedAyN) and focuses on the Magical Towns of Cholula (San Andrés and San Pedro). It was developed as a research with a qualitative approach, through fieldwork, taking a random probability sample of tourists visiting these places, through the application of a questionnaire with closed multiple-choice questions. The process of determining the sample size is the work of Dr. Nora Edith Alcalá Flores, RedAyN's methodological advisor.

The objective of this study was to identify which aspects associated with traditional Cholulteca gastronomy are determinant in attracting and prolonging the stay of visitors to these Pueblos Mágicos. The results indicate that gastronomy is not a determining factor in attracting tourists to the destination; however, it does influence the permanence of visitors who seek high standards of hygiene and service, as well as a variety of products with a fair price-quality ratio.

6.2 Theoretical review

Tourism is defined from two points of view: The first has to do with the set of relationships and phenomena generated by the displacement and permanence of people outside their place of residence, as long as they are not related to a lucrative activity. The second refers to the supply and marketing of services that provide pleasure to travellers (Acerenza 2011).

The functions of tourism are multiple and are aimed at the sustainable use of the resources of tourist destinations, for the benefit of the actors involved in this activity. (Secretaría de Turismo CDMX, 2022).

According to Orgaz & Moral (2016), tourism is an activity that has gained great importance in the international economy, mainly impacting developing countries; through tourism, natural, cultural and intangible heritage is used to transform it into tourism products of great value and wealth, which can be marketed by the stakeholders involved in this sector.

6.2.1 Sustainability

According to Tyler (2007), it is the capacity of diverse systems to adapt to change and survive, as is the case of economies and cultural systems. This concept has transcended to other areas, and today we speak of sustainable tourism, which according to the UNWTO (2022), is that which takes into account current and future economic, social and environmental repercussions, while meeting the needs of all those involved in tourism activity, and must establish an appropriate balance in these three dimensions. Cardoso (2006) explains that sustainable tourism serves as an integral and unavoidable connection between the natural system and development, with three approaches, environmental, socio-cultural and economic, the last two being closely related to the generation of better socio-economic conditions.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) cited by Cardoso (2006) states that sustainable tourism must meet the needs of tourists and host sites, as well as protect and promote future opportunities.

6.2.2 Tourism indicators

UNWTO (2005) defines tourism indicators as the selection of formal data that emerge on a regular basis and are used to measure aspects that indicate changes in tourism management, such as tourism structures, internal factors, exogenous factors affecting tourism and impacts on tourism.

The UNWTO Tourism Data Dashboard is a tool that provides key indicators that monitor the development of tourism activity, covering the following aspects: tourist arrivals, share of tourism in exports, contribution to GDP, source markets, seasonality, accommodation (data on the number of rooms, guests and nights) and culture.

The Royal Spanish Academy (2021) defines culture as: "Set of ways of life and customs, knowledge and degree of artistic, scientific, industrial development in an era, social group, etc.", which associated with the popular conceptualises it as the set of manifestations that are expressed in the traditional life of a people.

According to Giménez (2005) culture is characterised by representing patterns of behaviour, with symbolic facts and implying patterns of meaning that must be shared and enduring, forming a close relationship with social identity. Culture can have areas of stability and persistence, as well as mobility and change.

Medina (2017) states that cultural heritage implies cultural traits of a society that represent its identity, such as gastronomy, customs, ideologies, etc. and that can be bequeathed to future generations. He also shows that cultural heritage, especially gastronomic heritage, is a valuable resource to encourage tourism and attract visitors.

6.2.3 Gastronomy

Brillant Savarin (1775-1826), quoted by Mejía et al. (2013), author of the first treatise on gastronomy, defines it as the knowledge of human nutrition, whose purpose is to use the best ingredients in order to preserve them.

Gastronomy represents the study of the relationship between food and the culture of a place, which represents a small part of what this discipline entails. In a broad sense, gastronomy addresses the cultural aspects that have food as a focal point (Mendoza, 2013).

The cuisine of Puebla is considered cultural heritage of the people of Puebla, it gives a sign of identity, characteristic of their living conditions, their history, successes and mixtures of various worlds that provides a style of eating. (Hernández, 2017).

Acle-Mena, Santos-Díaz & Herrera-López (2019) state that traditional gastronomy is a detonating factor as a tourist attraction in the city of Puebla. In a study conducted with visiting tourists in typical food consumption centres, it was found that the variables of quality and promotion were highly correlated, while the variables of restaurant infrastructure and significance showed a moderate correlation, concluding that traditional gastronomy is a determining factor for tourism activity.

6.2.4 Magical town designation

The "Magical Towns" designation began in 2001 as a strategy of the Federal Government to encourage tourism, structuring a complementary and diversified offer, aimed at highlighting those towns in the interior of the country that have always been in the minds of the population; mainly based on the historical, symbolic, natural, cultural and social aspects of sites recognised as special to offer new alternatives for visitors, both national and international.(SECTUR, 2018).

According to SECTUR (2020), the main requirement to be recognised as a Pueblo Mágico is that it is: "a locality that over time has preserved its value and cultural historical heritage". Currently there are 132 localities with the designation of "Pueblo Mágico". In Puebla, ten towns are registered in this programme.

Pérez and Antolín (2015) believe that although it is true that the Pueblos Mágicos programme represents important benefits for the communities, on the other hand it also has repercussions on the social and environmental aspects, generating damage that is transferred to those involved in this sector and to the destination itself; however, the Secretary of Tourism Miguel Torruco Márquez, quoted by Méndez (2020) in an interview, points out that this programme seeks to be a pillar of the regional and national economy by acting as the engine for the recovery of domestic tourism in the current context.

It is important to identify the role played by gastronomy in the promotion of localities that have obtained this designation, in this sense, Castillo, Santoyo, Muñoz & Rodríguez (2018) through a documentary study analyse this concept as a tourism driver in the Magical Towns of Tepoztlán and Tlayacapan belonging to the State of Morelos, based on direct observations and interviews with key figures, they concluded that despite having quality inputs that strengthen gastronomy, it is not an attractive factor for tourism, given that it is considered a service linked to this activity.

Cholula is located in the State of Puebla, divided into two municipalities: San Pedro and San Andrés. Its name derives from the Nahuatl "chololoa" which translates into "to fall into the water"; it has existed since the Preclassic period, with an antiquity of more than 3000 years. "Chollollan", as it was known, was recognised as a ceremonial centre of great relevance that was maintained until October 1519 when Hernán Cortés carried out what is known as the great Cholultec slaughter. (Gobierno de San Pedro Cholula, n.d.).

The archaeological remains, as well as its great architectural and cultural richness, allowed Cholulas to achieve the Magical Towns designation in 2012 and since then, a great transformation was generated that has put it in the sights of the most attractive tourist destinations, even at an international level.

6.3 Methodology

The present work was developed through an applied research with a qualitative approach, regarding this Sampieri (2014), mentions that the qualitative approach is based on the collection and analysis of data and based on the results, the research questions are refined.

The research technique was based on a survey, where the collection of information was carried out through fieldwork in the tourist area of the pyramid that corresponds to San Andrés Cholula and the Plaza de la Concordia located in San Pedro Cholula.

The information was collected through a questionnaire of closed multiple-choice questions, divided into four blocks: tourism promotion, factors influencing the consumption of traditional foods, quality of service and product and identity.

6.3.1 Sample and sample size

Sampieri (2014) describes the sample as those elements of a subset that belong to the population. The selection of the sample size should be made in terms of representing the universe, with a certain possibility of error, level of confidence and probability.

In this study, the sample was considered to be national and international tourists aged 18 years or older and making use of tourism services at the study site. The sample design was random probability, where all tourists would have the same probability of being selected.

The sample size was 339, calculated based on the considerations of Dr. Nora Edith Alcalá Flores, with an error of 5% and a Confidence Level of 95%. The annual average number of tourists was calculated based on data obtained from INEGI, México en Cifras, Tabulados de Integración, Turismo, 2021, consolidated with other sources such as INAH and DATATUR; subsequently a monthly average was calculated and finally a daily average, for which the average base of 15 days of main affluence was established.

6.4 Results

The main findings obtained in the fieldwork were as follows:

The first questions of the instrument are aimed at determining the profile of the visitor who frequents Cholulas (San Pedro or San Andrés). In order to identify the age of the visitors, ranges by five-year age brackets were used, starting from 18 years old and ending with the category of +75 years old. The results showed that 65% of the visitors to these Pueblos Mágicos are in the 18-34 age range, and of those aged 55 and over, only 8% visit this destination. 54% are male and 54% are female.

Fifty-four percent are male and 46% female. 48% of the visitors had a professional degree and 36% had a high school education. Regarding the place of origin of the visitors who come to Cholulas, it was determined that 59% come from the different municipalities of the state, 39% from other states of the country and only 2% are foreigners. The states of the Republic from which most visit these destinations are: Tlaxcala, CDMX, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Morelos and Tabasco; while from abroad the countries identified in this sample were: Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, United States and Canada.

In the section "Tourism promotion", the results of the first question referring to the factors that influence the decision to visit a tourist destination were analyzed; the aspects that were evaluated were: activity, tourist attractions and infrastructure, food services and accommodation services.

Each of these aspects was evaluated through a rating scale from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to the highest value. Figure 1 shows the results corresponding to the highest ratings of 1 and 2 for each element. As can be seen, the tourist activities and attractions of Cholulas are the aspects that visitors take most into account when choosing these destinations, followed by accommodation services and food services; tourist infrastructure is the last aspect to be considered.

Figure 6.1 Aspects influencing the decision to visit Cholula
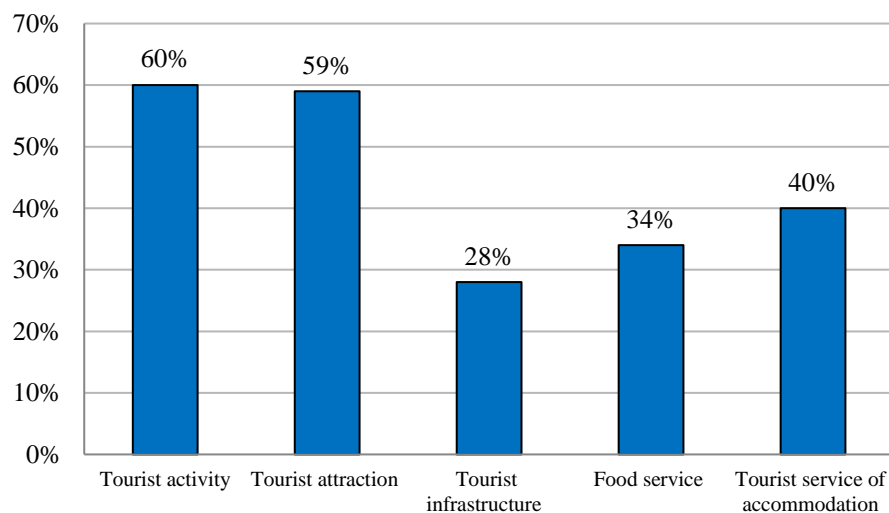

Source: Own elaboration based on the data obtained in the questionnaire

In the second section, entitled "factors influencing the consumption of traditional foods", ten questions were asked. In question 1, the aim was to find out how important food is in the selection of these tourist destinations. Food was identified as a decisive factor in the choice of the place to visit, since 79% of respondents rated it as important and very important, while only 7% answered that it was not important or not very important.

The second question sought to identify what type of gastronomic products influence the choice of a tourist destination. The options were sweets and desserts, traditional dishes, beverages, breads, antojitos and all of the above. The results indicated that half of the respondents consider all the gastronomic variety, 21% are only attracted by traditional dishes and 17% by representative sweets and desserts.

Figure 6.2 shows the results of question 3, which aimed to identify what type of food tourists consume during their visit, with traditional food being the most popular, followed by street food, which is usually typical antojitos.

Figure 6.2 Type of food consumed by visitors to Las Cholulas

- Fast food ▪ Tradicional ▪ Specialism ▪ Street food ▪ Carry around their own food
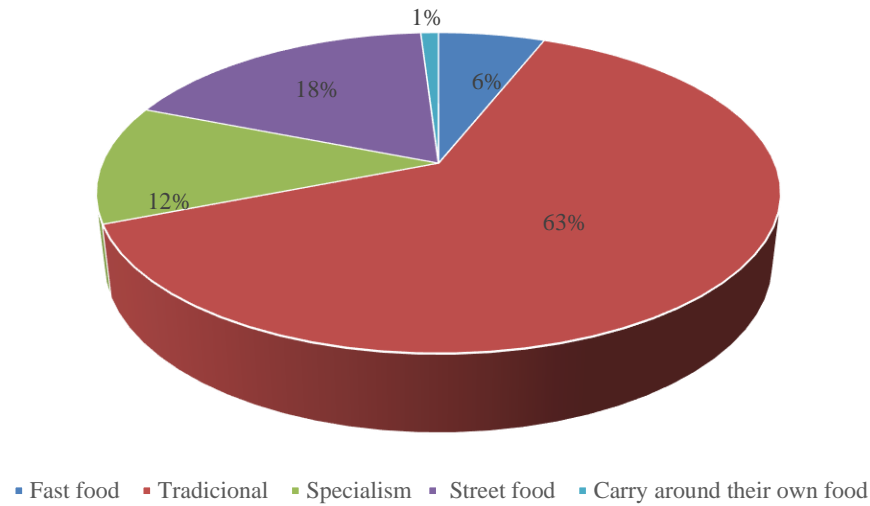
Note: This figure shows the preferences of tourists in Cholula.

The purpose of question 4 was to determine how important traditional gastronomic experiences are for tourists. It was found that for 85% it is important and very important, while for the remaining 25% it is indifferent or not important, as can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 6.3 Importance of gastronomic experiences in a tourist destination

- Not significant ▪ Less important ▪ Indifferent ▪ Important ▪ Very important
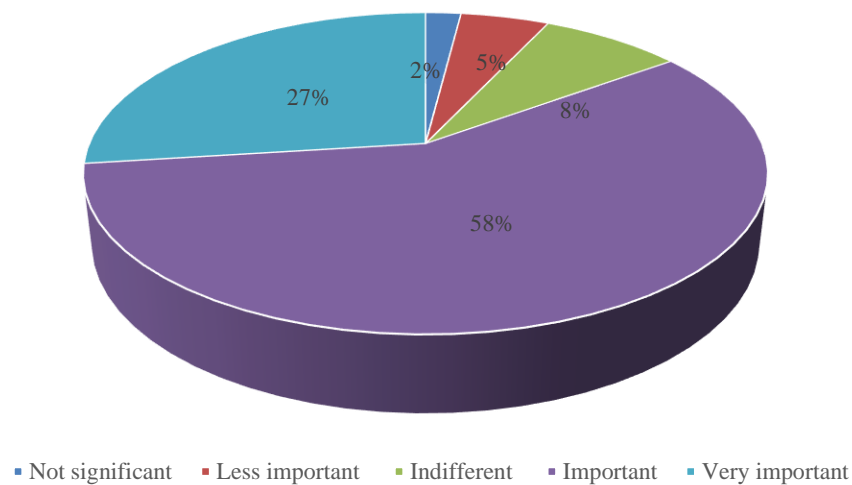
Note: The perception of tourists visiting Cholulas is shown

Question 5 was asked with the intention of finding out if the traditional seasonal dishes influence the influx of tourists to these Magical Towns, the result was that for 80% of those surveyed, they considered it important and very important and only for 2% it is definitely not relevant.

Question 6 identified the importance of the price factor in the consumption of traditional dishes, and Figure 6.4 shows that for 73% of respondents it is important or very important. Question 8 identified how high tourists consider the prices of traditional dishes to be; 69% consider what they pay for them to be fair, while 23% consider them to be excessive.

Figure 6.4 Importance of the price of traditional dishes
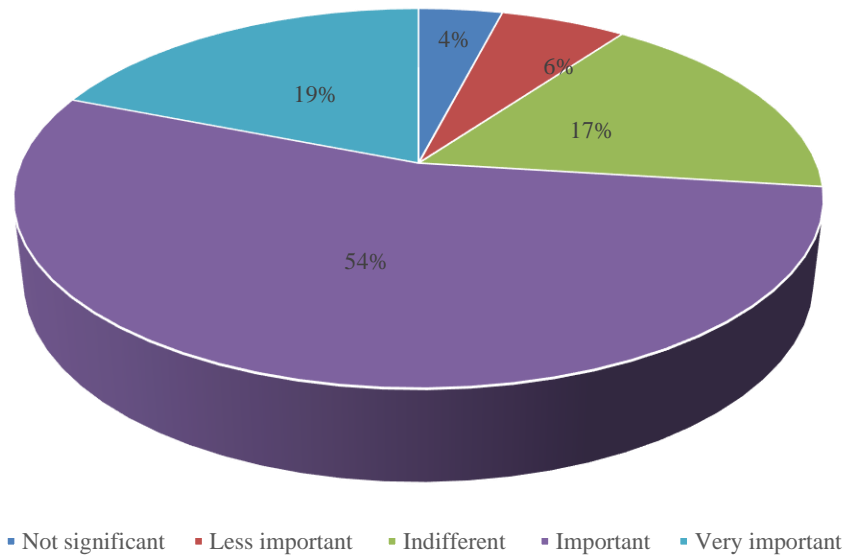
Note: This is the opinion of the sampled tourists, who were asked randomly. were asked randomly.

Question 7 identified the preference of the place of consumption of traditional dishes, the response was that most tourists prefer casual restaurants and a significant percentage consume them in markets, as can be seen in Figure 6.5.

**Figure 6.5** Places of consumption of traditional dishes
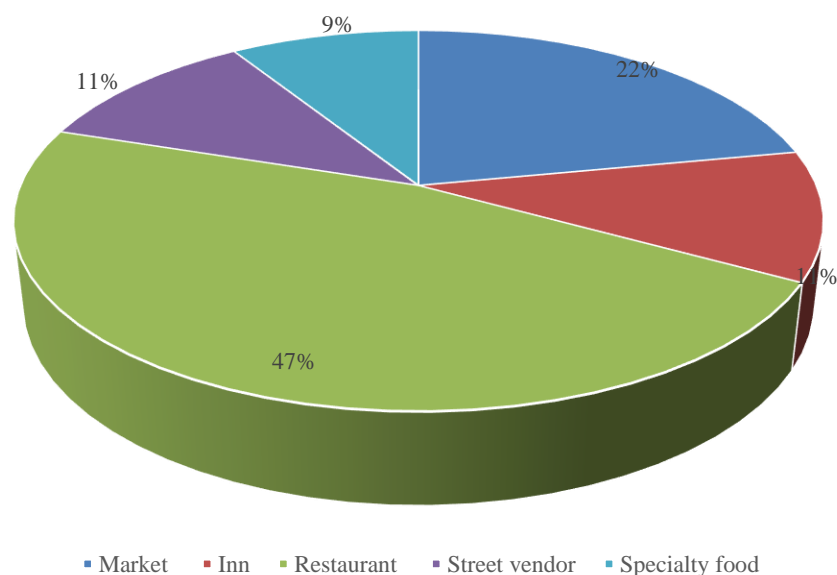
Note. Visitor preferences are shown without considering social status

The purpose of question 9 was to determine which factors are relevant for tourists to return to eat traditional dishes in the same place, revealing that taste and hygiene are the most important aspects for returning to the same food and beverage establishment, with a result of 67% overall, followed by price and service with 14% and 13% respectively.

Finally, question 10 identified which means influence the choice of an establishment for the consumption of traditional dishes. Figure 6 shows that slightly more than 50% of respondents choose an establishment based on recommendations and almost 20% on the number of people in the place.

Figure 6.6 Means influencing the choice of a traditional food establishment
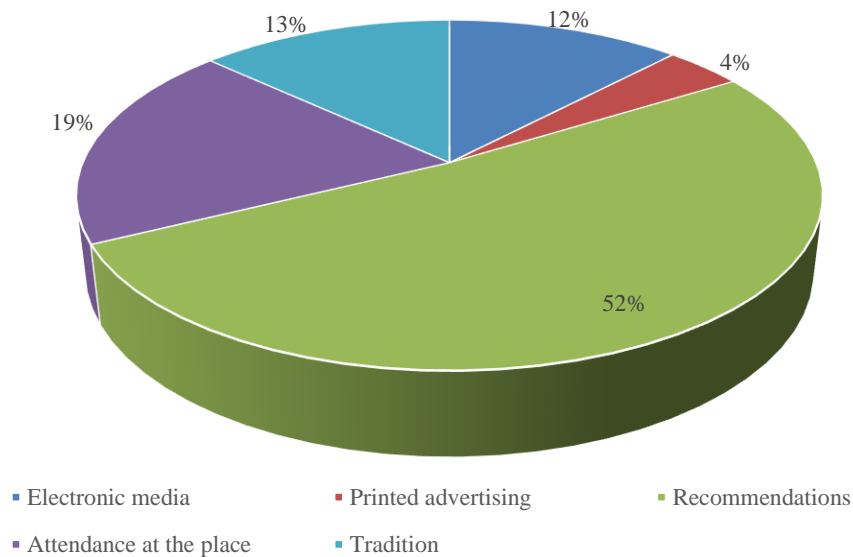
Note: The mechanisms were selected in an attempt to eliminate response bias.

From section three called "quality of service and product", only question 2 was considered, which refers to the evaluation of the quality aspects of the food consumption establishment. Figure 6.7 shows the level of satisfaction perceived by diners with regard to the quality of the food consumed, the location of the establishments, the variety of the food, compliance with cleanliness standards and the price-quality ratio. In this item, 5 corresponded to the highest value and only the averages of the highest ratings (4 and 5) were taken. The best evaluated aspects were food quality and compliance with cleanliness standards, while the location of the establishments was the worst evaluated concept.

Figure 6.7 Evaluation of quality aspects of A and B establishments
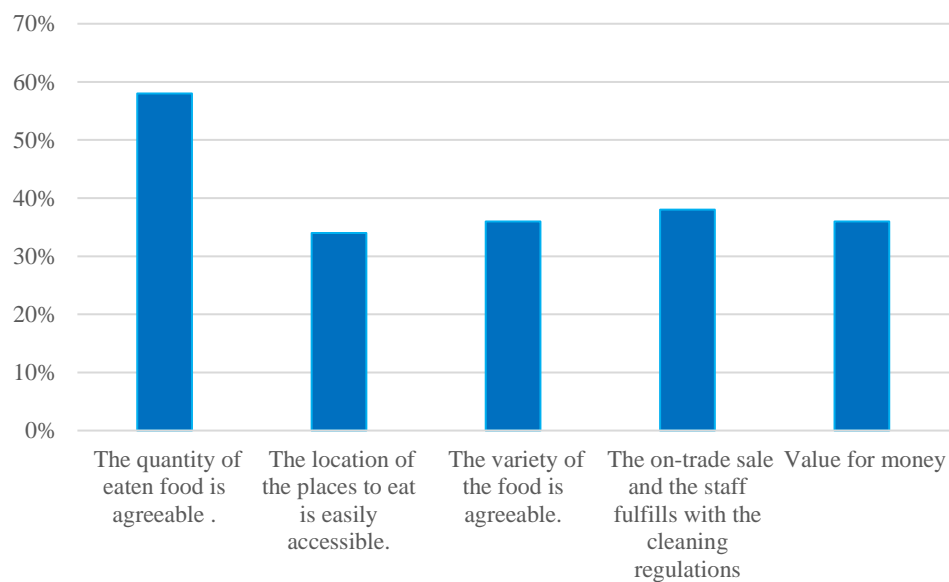
Note: This shows the importance of different quality aspects of food consumption centres for tourists. of food consumption centres to tourists are important.

With respect to the last section of the questionnaire, called "identity", the results of question 1 were taken, which refers to whether the visitor considers the local gastronomy to be an important part of the identity of the locality. The answer was that more than 90% recognise it as a factor of identity.

6.5 Discussion

The results presented show that the tourists who visit Cholulas are mainly young men and women between 18 and 34 years of age, with a high school education and a professional degree; the sex of the visitors is not a determining factor. Most of the visitors come from the different municipalities of the state of Puebla or from the surrounding states. The low number of foreign tourists is striking, which suggests that this is due to the season in which the research was carried out.

Food is very important in most of the magical towns, however, in Cholulas, gastronomy was not a determining factor in the visitor's decision making, but it does represent an element of identity of the locality. Once tourists are in Cholulas, they consume the variety of typical and seasonal foods, looking for gastronomic experiences typical of the locality, although price is a determining factor. For this reason, visitors look for generic restaurants rather than speciality restaurants, as well as local markets for the consumption of traditional dishes.

There are some diners who pay for the overall experience and not just the ambience, which is why prices vary from place to place. Customers are fully satisfied if what they pay seems fair for what they are getting.

The opinion of friends or gastronomic experts is a key factor in choosing a traditional food establishment; as well as the visitor's own observed attendance at a place. It is observed that tourists visiting Cholulas are demanding customers, as the quality and hygiene factors of the food, together with the variety of products, are a priority that must be related to a fair price.

6.6 Conclusions

In this study we were able to identify aspects that are important for tourists who visit the Magical Towns of Cholulas, contrary to what Acle Mena et al., in their study of Puebla's gastronomy, in Cholulas, traditional gastronomy does not represent a determining element in the choice of the destination, but it does contribute to lengthening the stay of tourists in the place, by having the opportunity to live unique gastronomic experiences that enrich the visitor's stay.

This destination is mainly visited by tourists from the interior of the State, which implies that they are not willing to spend a large amount of money on their stay, which is why the price factor plays an important role in the choice of gastronomic products or food establishments.

As mentioned by Castillo et al., gastronomy is not an attractive tourist factor in the Pueblos Mágicos, despite having quality inputs, given that visitors consider it an inherent part of the activity; however, it does contribute to prolonging the stay of tourists, a situation that was confirmed in our study. Consequently, we conclude that gastronomy will influence tourism as long as the place is recognised as a gastronomic icon.

According to the results analysed, the objective of this study was fulfilled, since it was possible to identify the aspects associated with gastronomy that are important for attracting visitors to the Magical Towns of Cholulas Puebla, some of which are: quality, hygiene, taste, price, variety, seasonality and, as a whole, the pleasure of living a gastronomic experience. In this sense, we agree with Castillo et al. in recommending the establishment of strategic alliances between the public and private sectors to identify the gastronomic wealth and disseminate it through tourism products.

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