

Review

Identification of the Main Lines of Research in Gastronomic Tourism: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract: This article presents a review of research trends in gastronomic tourism. The objective is to identify the main lines of research of this type of tourism based on the scientific production published in the last five years in three scientific databases. It is an exploratory, descriptive, and analytical study based on a comprehensive narrative review and content analysis methodology. The results show the evolution in the scientific research of gastronomic tourism and the current state of knowledge within each line of research identified as a basis for future research.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism; lines of research; bibliographic review



Citation: Barzallo-Neira, C.; Pulido-Fernández, J.I. Identification of the Main Lines of Research in Gastronomic Tourism: A Review of the Literature. *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 5971. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15075971>

Academic Editors: Hector Cardona-Reyes, Albert Barreda, Rosse Marie Esparza Huamanchumo and Sandra Zubieta Zamudio

Received: 10 December 2022

Revised: 23 February 2023

Accepted: 27 February 2023

Published: 30 March 2023



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1. Introduction

Gastronomic tourism stands out as a dynamic typology that has been acquiring increasing importance within the management of contemporary tourism and comprises the basis of important strategies and political agendas in the area, such as the Common Agricultural Policy, the network of European Regions of Gastronomy, and the Unesco Cities of Gastronomy program [1]. The advances and improvements in its analytical treatment have led to increasingly complex actions that identify it as an interesting field of study, in which promoting its research will be a determinant factor to improve the planning and management processes of destinations [2].

In the same manner as the development of the activity, gastronomic tourism research has garnered the attention of researchers; it has been particularly groundbreaking since 2017. The justification for this increase is the interest of academics in scientific publishing, the proliferation of journals in this field [3], and the need to attend to the changing trends of the tourism market [4,5].

For the scientific community, the lines of research represent the ordering axis of the actions around a problem, a conjecture, or an identified gap in order to guide new knowledge. As they are not necessarily permanent, the lines of research can be subdivided, modified, strengthened, or eliminated to guarantee integration and continuity in the development of knowledge in a specific field. The scientific production of gastronomic tourism, by not having studies that determine its lines of research, is limited in this regard. This study fills that gap and serves to guide expertise on the subject and consolidate scientific knowledge of gastronomic tourism and the formulation of future tourism policies.

The relationship between gastronomy and tourism has been examined from several dimensions, however, the available evaluations have tended to focus on particular thematic or disciplinary areas of interest instead of providing an overview on the research of gastronomic tourism [1]. This work specifically identifies the main lines of research on gastronomic tourism and specifies its contributions, inconsistencies and conceptual gaps in this regard. Therefore, it provides a solution to the lack of research that deeply analyzes the scientific literature on the typology as a key factor to determine the potential of its activities and the niches of its research.

Along with the objective of this research, it also seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What is the distribution of the documents analyzed in this study by the line of research? 2. What is the course taken by the scientific study of gastronomic tourism? 3. What are the research topics in gastronomy tourism that receive limited attention, and which ones need to be investigated to highlight their potential?

By systematizing the existing knowledge on a field of study and identifying the trends that have emerged and the gaps in existing knowledge, substantial contributions can be made to its advancement and an updated perspective of said field is provided. Therefore, the most important motivation of scientific research is met, expanding knowledge and projecting an internal and external understanding of the activity to improve, in this case, gastronomic tourism.

It is proposed as a hypothesis to contrast that gastronomic tourism has a high level of interest in the scientific community; therefore, it is important to define its main lines of work to guide future research, its main points of interest, and practical implications. Food tourism activities show that it is not just about drinking and eating, it is about getting to know the local culture, community, and people [6,7]. For this reason, the knowledge of gastronomic tourism needs to clarify its dynamics and its relationship with the traveler's experience and with territorial development.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology implemented in this study is based on a narrative and vanguard review of current research in gastronomic tourism and is complemented by the content analysis method to identify its main lines of research.

The selection of databases is due to considerations about the impact factor of journals and their publications [8–10], the solidity and suitability for the evaluation of research in the scientific field [11], and efficiency and practicality in the search for topics in particular [12], as the one proposed in this investigation.

Given the abundance of studies and approaches surrounding gastronomic tourism, this research uses tertiary sources from publications indexed in three databases of peer-reviewed literature: Dialnet, Scopus, and Web of Science, specifically with the following search criteria: gastronomy tourism, gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, and gastrotourism in the title, summary, and/or keywords, published between 2017 and 2021.

The first results obtained yielded 729 documents: 109 on Dialnet, 318 on Scopus, and 302 on Web of Science. The types of documents are consistent with scientific articles, books, book chapters, doctoral theses, and conference proceedings. To ensure the rigor of the search for information, this exercise was independently doubled. Documents that appeared duplicated between the databases were eliminated, and those that did not explicitly refer to the treatment of gastronomic tourism were eliminated through a narrative review. The total number of documents identified for this study is 365.

The fulfillment of the objective of this study required an in-depth analysis of the documents identified, therefore, the narrative review, which allowed a reflexive study of the main lines of work of gastronomic tourism and a deepening of the understanding of the study topics within it. It was complemented with the content analysis method. This, in turn, prevented publication selection and evaluation bias.

For the classification of these publications in lines of research, the subject of study was reviewed with the content analysis method [13], which consists of systematically evaluating the theoretical content of the selected contributions [14]. With them, a large amount of material is identified, selected, and classified into a few categories [15,16]. This method requires research backed by a theoretical foundation and allows a look beyond the words contained in the text [17,18].

The information was grouped into seven main lines, taking into consideration that they enclose a field of knowledge related to gastronomic tourism and that there is productivity, continuity, breadth, and ability to articulate with other areas. The need for this reflective

analysis caused the use of bibliometric analysis methods to be discarded in the methodology because its results are limited to quantifying scientific activity and its typical behaviors.

The quantitative analysis of the publications considered the following variables: the authorship, topic and approach treated, number of publications in the period of this study, the language of publication, number of contributions per author, and keywords. This information was structured for the lifting of tables and graphs.

3. Results

3.1. Systematization and Content of the Identified Lines of Research

The growth of studies on gastronomic tourism establishes the need to review the ways in which it has been investigated, not only from the thematic point of view but also from its evolution. The following are the seven branches of research on gastronomic tourism, their contributions, and the progression of their publications.

3.1.1. Gastronomic Tourism as an Instrument for the Development of Touristic Destinations

The authors attached to this line of research identify gastronomic tourism as a key element for the economy of destinations, in which the touristic value of gastronomy is recognized [19,20] and the importance of analyzing the factors that influence each territory [21].

The publications of the first years of this line of research are aligned with five topics: authenticity, culture, management and marketing, motivation, and destination orientation [22,23]. In these publications, they highlight the need to project competitiveness, the intrinsic value of local products and traditions, consumer trends [24], and the fact that customers are becoming more knowledgeable.

The studies of the following years analyze the impacts of gastronomic tourism [25–30], the recovery and maintenance of identity elements [31], and, in general, the stimulation for the creation of experiences associated with the endogenous potential of the destination.

Among the most recent publications, case studies of gastronomic tourism are identified as a component of development in certain destinations [32–35] as well as certain elements considered effective in the activity such as restaurants [36], and in them, the Michelin stars [37], the environments close to the source markets, and the importance of quality over quantity [38] as a key to the relationship between gastronomy-tourism and development.

3.1.2. Productive Links between Actors in the Value Chain

The publications classified within this line of research highlight the importance of interconnecting the elements of the gastronomic tourism value chain that are in a territory and adapting them to the characteristics of the environment. It is clear that gastronomic tourism is one of the most interesting typologies to which a territory could aspire for equitable development along its value chain. In this typology, the interrelationship of links is decisive for the connection between the agri-food, Horeca, and tourism sectors.

The authors see it as key to identify the factors that drive or condition the generation of value and the design of policies aimed at enhancing this capacity along the chain [39], as well as stimulating joint work for the care and protection of products and their quality labels [40].

On the other hand, they consider that the link between actors contributes to the social and economic integration of the territory [41] and, in turn, stimulates sustainable growth, regional cohesion, innovation, sustainability throughout the value chain [42], and the identification of the competitive advantages essential for the positioning of gastronomic tourism in the market.

In this line of research, great importance is given to the recognition that more than a third of a tourist's spending is dedicated to food; therefore, the development of gastronomic experiences during travel is especially memorable [43], it entails great opportunities and challenges for the actors involved in the processes of food production, distribution, and even ingestion [44].

3.1.3. Development of Experiences and Their Profiles

The authors of this line of research highlight that the act of eating is perceived as an extremely stimulating recreational experience and, as a consequence, a powerful motivation to travel [45–48].

Gastronomy is listed as a key element in tourist experiences [43,49,50]. It allows for the conservation, innovation, and recognition of the heritage of the place [51]. It also gives value to the products, the attributes of culture, and the environment to sustain the gastronomic offerings [52,53] while reducing seasonality [37].

It is recognized that an attractive gastronomic proposal has an enhancing effect capable of impacting activities other than tourism [46–54] and influencing satisfaction with the destination and the recommendation [47]. It also establishes the need to take a turn to the design of experiences [55–59] and connects the tourist with the whole process to praise the identity of the territory and uniqueness [60,61].

Among the publications, the lack of identification of tourist profiles and official figures is notable, which hinders planning and innovation according to the flows and new needs of the market [62–65] as well as the emergence of new tourist typologies as a result of the change in tourist motivations [66] and environmental awareness that guides to more sustainable activities [67].

3.1.4. Gastronomic Tourism as an Instrument for the Development of Touristic Destinations

The authors who formulate this line of research—who recognize strategic planning as an instrument to achieve objectives—identify challenges and propose solutions in the changing tourism market [68,69]. They see it as a guarantee for the organization of the destination and the good use of resources [70], and at the same time, to promote the integration of the activity into a culture, economy, environment, and society.

Among the needs identified in the publications are the need to ensure consistency between tourism trends, their real possibilities of implementation [71], planning and management processes [72], and the role of management entities [73–75]. As well as identifying the determining factors in visitor satisfaction [76], the relationships between the motivational factors of demand and their profiles [77] and recognizing the resources that bring added value to destinations and increase competitiveness in markets are also important [78,79]. All these needs are used to define synergies in the value chain and increase the effectiveness of efforts.

Among the factors implicit in the publications of this line of research are sustainability [80,81], good governance between tourism actors [75,76], the stimulation of the development of the receiving society [82–85], and the preservation and safeguarding of the heritage that enclose the practices of this typology.

3.1.5. Recognition and Promotion of Local Gastronomy

The authors who articulate this line of research focus on recognizing the potential of certain regions regarding the facility of connecting the visitor with the essence of the destination through local products and their gastronomy, traditions, and the historical component that it brings within itself. They emphasize that beyond touristic activities, the consumption of local products and quality brands is a growing trend thanks to the idea of responsible and environmentally friendly consumption [86,87], which translates into an opportunity for development [88–90].

Among the constants found in the publications is the consumer as the axis of the food value chain, the interest in sustainability, the importance of the interrelationship with other sectors, the creation of an exceptional value proposition [91,92], as well as the brand image as a boost to local gastronomy [45,93,94].

Amid the needs identified are the promotion and development of gastronomic tourism activities [95–97] to contribute to the valuation and preservation of culture, intangible heritage, memory, and identity of a territory [98].

The greatest contribution of this line refers to the fact that gastronomic tourism energizes gastronomy and the local economy in various contexts. Therefore, culinary production is an asset of high tourist value thanks to its implications of transversality. It brings distinctive experiences and approaches to the inhabitants and the environment.

3.1.6. Innovation, Technology, and Market Intelligence

The authors attached to this line of research recognize gastronomic tourism as a complex, dynamic, and competitive activity, especially susceptible to technological, social, economic, and political phenomena. The publications cover three main aspects.

The changing market for gastronomic tourism requires intelligence [99] that provides reliable information based on local reality, the evolution of markets, global trends, their segmentation, demand profiles, and competitive and reference destinations [100,101] in the same way that it requires the human factor to transform this data into knowledge.

The implementation of technology is a major challenge [102], its proper use provides a competitive advantage when accessing various information sources [103–105]. This facilitates decision making, planning, and innovation, as well as establishing strategies to correct impacts and improve competitiveness [106]. It is recognized that gastronomic tourism has been visualized thanks to technology.

In the specific case of innovation, disruptive initiatives that surprise the customer or solve a common problem improve the experience [107] without necessarily using technology. However, in certain areas of gastronomic tourism, it could be counterproductive due to the high implementation and maintenance costs it generates, and above all, because of the cultural change that digital transformation brings. In this regard, the importance of sensations and emotions for the overall customer experience are mentioned [98], as well as the value of the recommendations [108,109], the management of activities, and the distribution of consumers [110].

3.1.7. Image and Positioning

In this line of research, the link between gastronomy and tourism is highlighted as the basis of the image of a territory. The potential of gastronomic tourism to increase the attractiveness of a destination is analyzed [111,112], in which the gastronomic image has become an axis of tourism promotion [113] thanks to the emotions it generates, and to its importance in the creation of the image of a destination [114] and the value of its brand [115–117].

Among the publications of this line of research, it is highlighted that the activities of gastronomic tourism are key to the identity of a destination [118,119], so it will be necessary to pay special attention to whether the communication objective is to promote the destination, the gastronomic tourism products, or only catering services without a link to the identity of the region [120].

Several authors highlight the value of consumer perceptions, their patterns of behavior, spending, expectations, motivations, and overall travel satisfaction [121,122]. Gastronomic tourism is capable of promoting local cultural values [123,124]. Here, products with appellations of origin or geographical indications are identified because they directly link to the projected image of the destination to highlight their identity [125]. In this sense, brand quality can influence loyalty through perceived quality and brand image [126].

In addition to the interrelation that the seven lines of research identified in this study show with each other, joint challenges for future research on gastronomic tourism stand out among them, which are indicated below.

The research lines “Gastronomic tourism as an instrument for the development of tourist destinations,” and “Innovation, technology, and market intelligence” have as a key challenge in research to identify trends and patterns in the demand for gastronomic tourism, jointly and permanently. This is in consideration of the increasingly informed clients of the tourism sector.

The “Strategic and Sustainable Planning and Management” and “Recognition and Promotion of Local Gastronomy” lines require joint work to seek strategies that ensure that gastronomic tourism practices promote local production and consumption in order to contribute to improving the quality of life of the population through the strengthening of its economy and the preservation of biodiversity.

The “Innovation, technology and market intelligence” line shows the facilities to study the evolution of markets, global trends, demand profiles, competitive destinations, and reference destinations for gastronomic tourism, but requires the trained human factor indicated in the “Productive Links line between actors in the value chain” to transform this data into knowledge.

The great motivation that the gastronomic offerings have in choosing a tourist destination determines the relationship between the lines “Recognition and promotion of local gastronomy” and “Image and positioning”. They are a joint challenge in research, because the image of a territory can improve by the local gastronomy, and this in turn, can contribute to the creation of a positive image of a territory.

There is a close relationship between the lines “Development of experiences”, “their profiles, Innovation, technology and market intelligence”, and “Image and positioning”, because together they have the latent need to create new products and services, improve existing ones, offer new ways of enjoy them, and at the same time, meet the characteristics of the customer experience, satisfaction, and reputation of the territory.

In the same way, the lines “Development of experiences and their profiles” and “Planning and strategic and sustainable management” are closely related because, without adequate planning, the creation of experiences in gastronomic tourism can generate negative impacts on the territory and its communities, in addition to not being sustainable in the long term.

3.2. Analysis by Variable of the Publications Selected for This Study

This study compiled 365 documents. Its distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of publications analyzed by database and year of publication.

Year	Dialnet		Scopus		Web of Science		Total Annual
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	%
2017	29	7.95	14	3.84	20	5.48	17.26
2018	30	8.22	21	5.75	29	7.95	21.92
2019	20	5.48	36	9.86	23	6.30	21.64
2020	21	5.75	44	12.05	6	1.64	19.45
2021	17	4.66	34	9.32	21	5.75	19.73
Total	117	32.05	149	40.82	99	27.12	100

Source: authors' own.

The number of publications with content focused on gastronomic tourism is significant. Scopus and the year 2018 cover most publications. The most significant growth in the percentage of publications is between 2017 and 2018.

The fall in publications between 2019 and 2020 is expected, considering that the COVID-19 pandemic initially limited academic and research activities and then enhanced them. The period analyzed shows a growth in the percentage of publications and demonstrates the current situation in gastronomic tourism research.

This growth can be attributed, among other factors, to the rapid increase of initiatives focused on territorial economic development, to the interest of travelers in connecting directly with the environment, or, following the criteria of [1], to the growth of academic production in general and attention to experiences in tourism. Added to this is the recogni-

tion of gastronomy as a distinctive feature of destinations and the appearance of specialized magazines in the area.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the documents analyzed by type. About 90% of the publications correspond to scientific articles. This shows the scientific interest in gastronomic tourism as a field of study. This result is particularly interesting if you consider that academia focuses its research on phenomena that are trending or cause a great impact on a sector.

Table 2. Documents distribution per type.

Year	Scientific Articles		Conference Proceedings		Books and Book Chapters		Doctoral Theses		Total
	Num.	%	Num.	%	Num.	%	Num.	%	Num.
2017	54	14.79	4	1.10	2	0.55	3	0.82	63
2018	69	18.90	6	1.64	5	1.37	0	0.00	80
2019	69	18.90	6	1.64	4	1.10	0	0.00	79
2020	64	17.53	2	0.55	3	0.82	2	0.55	71
2021	71	19.45	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.27	72
Total	327	89.59	18	4.93	14	3.84	6	1.64	365

Source: authors' own.

For its part, Table 3 allows us to know the distribution of the documents analyzed by a line of research. "Gastronomic tourism as an instrument of development" is the line with the most contributions, it is attributed to the fact that it is an attractive practice for destination planning and the revitalization of the economy. Its scientific production shows significant growth since 2017, which could be related to its acceptance in demand.

Table 3. Documents analyzed by line of research.

Year	Lines of Research														
	Gastronomic Tourism as an Instrument of Development		Productive Links between Actors in the Value Chain		Development of Experiences and Their Profiles		Strategic and Sustainable Planning and Management		Recognition and Promotion of Local Gastronomy		Innovation, Technology and Market Intelligence		Image and Positioning		Publications Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
2017	14	3.84	3	0.82	15	4.11	7	1.92	8	2.19	8	2.19	8	2.19	63
2018	23	6.30	4	1.10	13	3.56	16	4.38	14	3.84	2	0.55	8	2.19	80
2019	24	6.58	3	0.82	14	3.84	13	3.56	9	2.47	6	1.64	10	2.74	79
2020	24	6.58	2	0.55	16	4.38	7	1.92	11	3.01	3	0.82	8	2.19	71
2021	19	5.21	7	1.92	21	5.75	6	1.64	4	1.10	10	2.74	5	1.37	72
Total	104	28.49	19	5.21	79	21.64	49	13.42	46	12.60	29	7.95	39	10.68	365

Source: authors' own.

The "Development of Experiences and their profiles" line has the second-most contributions. It is logical that it has great attention in scientific production, considering that the emotional components of the experience represent an attraction for current tourism demand.

- The line of research that registers the least publications is “*Productive links between actors in the value chain*”. Half of the publications correspond to the last two years of the study period, so the attention of researchers is limited and recent.

The search criteria for this research did not discriminate against contributions by language. Publications in English constitute the most important percentage among the lines of research. (Table 4).

Table 4. Languages used in the publications identified by lines of research.

Language	Development Tool	Productive Links between Actors in the Value Chain	Development of Experiences and Their Profiles	Strategic and Sustainable Planning and Management	Recognition and Promotion of Local Gastronomy	Innovation, Technology, and Market Intelligence	Image and Positioning	Total	%
English	77	13	73	41	31	19	37	291	79.73
Spanish	22	6	6	7	11	10	2	64	17.53
Portuguese	5	0	0	1	3	0	0	9	2.47
Catalan	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.27
Total	104	19	79	49	46	29	39	365	

Source: authors' own.

The analysis of the publications selected for this study by variables shows that there is much interest in gastronomic tourism among the scientific community. Its distribution by database, type, year, and language of publication shows that the term gastronomic tourism is being highly discussed in academia, especially because it is a differentiator of destinations, and because of its potential to influence the travel decision of tourists.

In turn, the systematization and analysis of the seven lines of research identified allow us to understand the course of the study of gastronomic tourism and open an opportunity to improve the analysis and the formation of a solid conceptual framework, in addition to guiding future research, including its main points of interest and practical suggestions. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in this study is verified.

In general, when relating the complexity between the lines of research identified, it is confirmed that the knowledge of gastronomic tourism needs to clarify its dynamics and its relationship with the traveler's experience, and with territorial development. In the analysis within the lines of research, the relationship shows that gastronomic tourism is a complex activity that requires permanent attention in research.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This study demonstrates the significant growth and relevance of scientific contributions focused on gastronomic tourism. It complements other literature reviews that analyze bibliometric results, data, and sources of unique publications, or that focus on specific topics of gastronomic tourism.

The seven lines of research identified reveal that gastronomic tourism is a complex activity that requires permanent attention in research. They allow one to understand the course its study has taken and open the opportunity to improve its analysis and the formation of a solid conceptual framework.

The lines identified as “Gastronomic tourism as an instrument for the development of touristic destinations” and “Development of experiences and their profiles” are the most recognized by researchers, which can be attributed to the need to analyze the ability of this typology to adapt to various geographical spaces, and to the simplicity of combining its activities with different tourism products.

A total of 75.6% of the publications considered in this study are of multiple authorship, which shows that scientific collaboration of gastronomic tourism comes from working groups and it tunes to the multidisciplinary approach required by the activity.

Among the authors, there are those who register more than one annual publication during the years considered in this study, so they could be considered researchers of gastronomic tourism.

An important part of the work was published in tourism content magazines, mainly from universities in Australia, China, Spain, and the United States.

Unlike other types of tourism, gastronomic tourism research pays limited attention to topics that can highlight its potential, such as strategies to improve supply and incidence in demand, its involvement in tourism employment, the contribution to the valorization of the cultural heritage and identity of peoples, as well as the little-studied manifestations of certain territories.

In relation to technological initiatives, they have limited attention to tourism research and alternatives to integrate technology into gastronomic tourism experiences. In the same way, the measurement of the cultural and social impacts generated by gastronomic tourism in a territory.

In the gastronomic tourism value chain, there are limited studies that analyze the collaboration between actors and the opportunities and challenges in different phases of the process.

Likewise, little attention is paid to the study of the subtypologies of gastronomic tourism, taking into account that only wine tourism is recognized by UNWTO as such. In the narrative review and content analysis of this study, agrotourism [127], beer tourism [128], cheese tourism [102], coffee tourism [129], cooking learning tourism [130], wine tourism [131], oil tourism [25,132–134], and slow food tourism [135] were identified.

It is likely that, in the coming years, gastronomic tourism research will have the recovery and reinvention of the sector as the fundamental activity in scientific publications. If so, all the lines of research identified in this study would benefit from the analysis of their impacts and the establishment of new challenges.

For tourism policy, the results of this study are particularly useful because they allow us to understand the reality of a tourism typology with great growth and facilitate decision making in this regard.

Finally, some limitations of this study must be recognized. First of all, carrying out an analysis that covers all studies related to gastronomic tourism is outside the spatial capacity of a scientific article. Therefore, this study excludes publications from other databases, even if they explicitly refer to the treatment of gastronomic tourism. Secondly, with regard to the criterion used for searching for publications in the databases, two aspects are recognized: (i) The polysemy surrounding gastronomic tourism, even though no term is exempt from limitations; (ii) When using English terminology for searches, bias and limitation of results are recognized.

The results are useful to show the evolution of the scientific production of gastronomic tourism and the current state of knowledge of each of the lines of research identified. This allows for directing future research, which favors expertise and the consolidation of scientific knowledge of gastronomic tourism in the future. At the same time, they establish a concrete base of study for the generation of tourist policies around the contribution of gastronomic tourism to local development, the recognition and conservation of cultural practices, and the planning, management, promotion, and communication of the tourist offerings of a territory.

Author Contributions: C.B.-N.: investigation, methodology, conceptualization, writing—original draft. J.I.P.-F.: conceptualization; formal analysis; supervision; validation; visualization; writing—review & editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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