From Fashion to Food: Analyzing 'fashionized' Gastronomic Experiences through a Tourist Perspective. The case of the Rhinoceros Entr'acte restaurant powered by Alda Fendi

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Abstract

This article argues that fashion-branded gastronomic facilities (e.g. restaurants, cafés, etc.) can constitute a privileged viewpoint for observing the interrelation between fashion and tourism industrie(s). High fashion maisons have been investing in the restaurant and hospitality sector since the 1980s: however this trend has been systematized over the last two decades. Specialized literature is mainly focused on the marketing and management analysis of the phenomenon: this paper aims to depict the consequences of this systematization, both in terms of urban policies and narratives. Our research is based on a single, localized case study (the Rhinoceros Entr'acte restaurant powered by Alda Fendi within the city of Rome) and is underpinned by key hypotheses: through the wise use of food, the fashion designers can be vectors of heritagization both by acting as city boosters and by increasing the tourism potential. The data used are mainly qualitative: interviews, observations and media content analysis were executed between 2018 and 2021. We suggest that the process of commodification of the (touring and food) experience implemented by personalities associated to fashion brands may disguise a much more complex path of relationships and tensions between city actors, namely around how imaginaries and perceptions associated with cities are designed, iterated and perceived.

Keywords: Consumption Spaces; Experiential Tourism; Fashion; Gastronomy; Rome.

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Introduction

At a first look, luxury fashion houses and restaurants have very little in common: and yet, as early as the 1980s, those brands started venturing into the hospitality industry, diversifying their businesses into touring offers. The opening of cafes, gourmet restaurants, or even pop-up fashion-branded eateries is part of this market trend: however this tendency has been systematized over the last two decades. Specialized literature is mainly focused on the marketing and management analysis of the phenomenon: the role played by those spots within luxury retailers' strategies is generally advanced in researches. In fact, faced with online concurrent market, brands are striving to identify new ways to attract clients to physical stores or even to provide premium services to particular customers. This paper attempts to analyze the phenomenon in a more comprehensive way, focusing both on the mechanisms and the techniques used by a former fashion creator (Alda Fendi) to represent the city of Rome (through food and art), and on the tourist perceptions associated to those representations. The purpose is twofold. On one hand we try to understand if, and eventually in which way, fashion designers are gaining advantage combining gastronomy, urban heritage and culture through city-branding policies and marketing initiatives. On the other hand we aim to analyze the perception that tourists have of the fashioned gastronomic experience proposed by fashion creators and if such perceptions can somehow influence their decisions to visit a city. The study is underpinned by key hypotheses: through the wise use of food, the fashion creators can be vectors of heritagization[1] both by acting as city boosters and by increasing the tourism potential.

Methodology

The research is mainly based on qualitative sources. The case study was specifically chosen to highlight the underlying mechanisms associated with the creation of fashion-branded restaurants and the subsequent impacts on tourists perceptions. Data, refer to the information retrieved from a series of nondirective interviews realized with customers of the restaurant Entr'acte during the months of June and July 2021. The results were combined with a retrospective analysis of customer's feedbacks obtained from the Tripadvisor platform (on a sample of 91 visitors). Also of relevance were informal exchanges with restaurant waiters occurred in 2021 — during the summer period. The geographic, architectural, and logistical aspects were studied by the author through exploratory site visits conducted between 2018 and 2021. Secondary sources were also consulted — namely: press articles, interviews, scientific literature and autobiographical books as well as archival documents produced by the archi-star Jean Nouvel. Quantitative data were also used to appreciate the situation of the enogastronomic tourism in Italy (and in Rome) during the period 2018–2019. The article opens the scope for further investigations, which could also include interviews with the managers of the foundation.

1. Fashion culinary experience(s): the intersection between food & fashion tourism

We can define food tourism as the willingness of tourists to participate in food-related activities during the trip[2]: this implies a conscious effort on the part of the tourist that exceeds the physiological need for nourishment[3] and involves the intentional visit of specific food sites to consume typical local cuisine.[4]

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1.   The term 'heritagization' is used here to describe 'the process to adapt use of culture heritage to promote images favorable for the political management'; Per Åke Nilsson. "Impact of Cultural Heritage on Tourists. The Heritagization Process." *Athens Journal of Tourism* Vol. 5, Iss. 1, 2018, p. 35.

2.   C. Michael Hall and Liz Sharples, "The consumption of experiences or the experiences of consumption? An introduction to the tourism of taste," in *Food tourism around the world*, eds. C.M. Hall, E. Sharples, R. Mitchell, N. Macionis et B. Cambourne (New York: Butterworth–Heinemann, 2003), 1–24.

3.   Conrad Lashley, Paul Lynch, and Alison Morrison, *Hospitality: A Social Lens* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007).

4.   Michael Hall and Richard Mitchell, "Wine and food tourism," in *Special interest tourism*, eds. N. Douglas et R. Derrett (Australia: John Wiley, 2001), 307–325.

The literature underlines the progressive adaptation of supply to demand: e.g. tourist entrepreneurs invested in the development of food-centred holidays packages or culinary tours;[5] on food-oriented destinations[6] as well as on food-related activities.[7] Regarding the target audience, empirical studies reveal that generally the food-tourist is 'modern,'[8] in search of authentic[9] and unique experiences.[10] Due to its multifactorial nature, the definition of fashion tourism is complex and non-consensual as it is directly linked to other types of tourism (cultural, creative, market or heritage).[11] Traditionally associated with shopping tourism,[12] the term is today intended to describe the tourist movement towards fashion destinations in order to benefit from fashion experiences independently of the nature of the latter (cf. commerce, leisure, etc.).[13] This type of tourism is essentially developed in fashion cities — such as: London, Milan, New York, Paris, Copenhagen, Tokyo, etc. — however literature has revealed the emergence of new fashion destinations for tourists.[14] Researchers have investigated not only how fashion can influence behavior by determining destination choice[15] but also the strategies adopted by fashion destination marketers to stimulate fashion tourism. Among these: the creation of fashion museums or exhibitions ;[16] the holding of fashion events (fashions weeks, shows, etc.);[17] or the creation of major architectural projects — "Star Architecture."[18]

Both of these types of tourism are associated with niche and segmented markets:[19] since they respond to the necessities of a limited number of customers who haven't been satisfied by the existing market.[20] This particular market represents a relevant investment opportunity for luxury companies wanting not only expand their customer base but also strengthen the relationship with them. In either case, the heritage aspect — especially if viewed from an experiential perspective — is crucial: through food and fashion, tourists seek a privileged contact, a situation of familiarity with the history, the culture and the traditions of the visited places.[21] This article intends to demonstrate how fashion designers can be

5.   Priscilla Boniface, *Tasting Tourism: Travelling for Food and Drink* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

6.   Bendegul Okumus, Fevzi Okumus, and Bob McKercher, "Incorporating Local and International Cuisines in the Marketing of Tourism Destinations: The Cases of Hong Kong and Turkey," *Tourism Management*, 28(1), 2007: 253–61.

7.   Elena Ignatov and Stephen Smith, "Segmenting Canadian culinary tourists," *Current Issues in tourism*, 9(3), 2006: 235–255.

8.   Jeou-Shyan Horng and C.T.S. Tsai, "Culinary tourism strategic development: An Asia-Pacific perspective," *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2012: 40–55.

9.   Rebecca Sims, "Food, place and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable tourism experience," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17(3), 2009: 321–336.

10. Richard Benson, "From Cockles to Custard Tarts," *The Guardian*, 28 October 2006: 2–3.

11. Jennifer Craik, "Fashion, tourism and global culture," in *The Handbook of fashion studies*, eds. S. Black, A. d. l. Haye, J. Entwistle, R. Root, H. Thomas et A. Rocamora (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 364–380.

12. Brian Moeran, "The language of Japanese tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10(1), 1983: 93–108.

13. Yazmina Cabrera, "An introduction to fashion tourism," *girlwithabanjo.com*, 1 october 2012, http://www.girlwithabanjo.com/blog/2012/10/01/an-introduction-to-fashion-tourism/.

14. Olubukola Bada, "*The emerging role of fashion tourism and the need for a development strategy in Lagos. Nigeria*" (Thesis — Degree Programme in Tourism, Kokkola, Finland: Centria University of Applied Sciences, 2013).

15. Clifford Lewis, Gregory M. Kerr, Lois Burgess, "A critical assessment of the role of fashion in influencing the travel decision and destination choice," *International Journal of Tourism Policy*, 5 (1/2), 2013: 4–18.

16. Dan Jason Calinao and Hui Wen Lin, "The cultural tourism potential of a fashion-related exhibition — the case of Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty at the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 12:2, 2017: 204–217.

17. Waldemar Cudny and Rafal Rouba, "Lodz fashion week as an example of a business event," *Acta Geographica Universitatis Comenianae*, 56(1), 2012: 45–58.

18. Alaily-Mattar Nadia, Davide Ponzini, Alain Thierstein, *About Star Architecture: Reflecting on Cities in Europe* (New York: Springer, 2020).

19. Richard Sharpley, *Tourism, Tourists and Society* (Huntington: ELM Publications, 1994).

20. Vasco Tamagnini and Angela Tregear, "An assessment of niche marketing opportunities in the delicatessen meat sector," *British Food Journal*, 100(5), 1998: 228–235.

21. Chiara Rabbiosi, Gianluigi Di Giangirolamo and Renato Medei, "Fashion as Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Place: a Dialogue Still to Be Built," *Economia della Cultura, Società editrice il Mulino*, issue 1–2, 2018: 49–60.

vectors of heritagization both by acting as city boosters and by increasing the tourism potential. We suggest that the process of commodification of the (touring and food) experience(s) implemented by fashion creators may disguise a much more complex path of relationships and tensions between city actors: in fact, these forms of tourism require a wide network of stakeholders in order to be deployed — i.e. Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), trade associations, tourism suppliers as well as local decision makers.

1.1 Place branding and the construction of destination image(s): performance as a marketing tool

Both food and fashion, have progressively acquired a leading role in place branding processes — i.e. marketing strategies and policies within tourist-oriented[22] urban frameworks.[23] The purpose of those policies is to build/reinforce a city's image[24] which is namely "the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination."[25] More recently, the image has also been applied to food, cuisine, fashion and craftmanship which are considered as the litmus test of the success of destination branding since they contribute to enhancing the city's reputation.[26] The context is highly competitive: in order to differentiate themselves from other cities and be more attractive to tourists, public authorities focus on building recognizable fashion and/or gastronomic images[27] in order to include their cities within the international ranking of fashion cities.[28] As noted by Kavaratzis and Ashworth, literature on city branding mainly refers to top-down policies which are framed and implemented from an insitutional level.[29] However, more recently the literature has equally studied the processes of corporate branding.[30] The latter are not properly 'bottom-up' processes like those generated by civil society[31] — but they still relevant, at least for two reasons: they allow both to study the ways in which private actors produce narratives that give meaning and differentiate one place from others, and also to understand from the inside the dynamics and mechanisms of the experience economy.[32] The purpose of this article is to analyze the place branding processes produced by fashion designers and the related commodification practices of tourist experiences associated with fashion and gastronomy. We will focus on how fashion interacts with branding through the culinary industry. Within this context, fashion is particularly important as it act as a 'stylistic marker': it contributes to shaping place's identities by adding it a symbolic value.[33] Literature has shown the importance of fashion industry in city branding and its relevance in

22. Bodil-S. Blichfeldt and Henrik Halkier, "Mussels, Tourism and Community Development: A Case Study of Place Branding Through Food Festivals in Rural North Jutland, Denmark," *European Planning Studies*, 22(8), 2014: 1587–1603.

23. Bill Merrilees, Dale Miller and Carmel Herington, "Multiple stakeholders and multiple city brand meanings," *European Journal of Marketing*, 2012: 1032–1047.

24. Philip Kotler, Donald-H. Haider and Irving Rein, *Marketing places* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

25. Jhon-L. Crompton, "An assessment of the image of Mexico as a vacation destination and the influence of geographical location upon that image," *Journal of Travel Research*, 17(4), 1979: 18–23.

26. Per Olof Berg and Guje Sevo, "Food-branding places — A sensory perspective," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 10(S4), 2014: 289–304.

27. Yi-Chin Lin, Thomas Pearson and L.A. Cai, "Food as a form of destination identity: A tourism destination brand perspective," *Tourism and hospitality research*, 2011: 30–48.

28. Christopher Breward and David Gilbert, "*Fashion's world cities*" (New York: Berg, 2006).

29. Mihalis Kavaratzis, M and Ashworth Gregory, "City branding: An effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick?," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 96, 2005: 506–514.

30. John, M.T Balmer, "Corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate marketing: Seeing through the Fog," *European Journal of Marketing*, 35, 2001: 248–291.

31. Anoush Rima Tatevossian, "Domestic society's (often-neglected) role in nation branding," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(2), 2008: 182–190.

32. Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The experience economy* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019).

33. Louis Crewe and Jonathan Beaverstock, "Fashioning the city: Culture of consumption in the contemporary," *Geoforum*, 29, 1998: 287–308.

enhancing local competitive advantage by fostering tourist's attraction.[34]

Two out of three constituent concepts of place branding identified by Kavaratzis[35] are examined in the following sections — namely: the brand identity (how the fashion designer creates and narrates the brand of the city) and the brand image (how the 'fashion-branded city brand' is perceived by tourists). The third distinctive element — namely the brand positioning (how the fashion house — or in this case the fashion creator — capitalizes on the city branding policies) will not be addressed in this study. The associated value creation in tourism-system would also require further examination in future research work. The purpose of this preliminary analysis is twofold: advancing knowledge regarding the process of destination's image construction that is framed by fashion designer-related stimuli and evaluate the influence of fashion in tourist's perceptions.

The performance, understood in this case as a tourist experience, turns into a real marketing tool: we will see how the Fendi foundation develop 'packages of activities' in a holistic approach aimed at promoting a glamorous lifestyle more than a simple meal. The article focuses in the way these processes are concretely staged by fashion creators through narratives, performances, and locations. The tourists' viewpoint will also be investigated in more detail.

1.2 The entry of fashion houses into the gastronomic market: from the wardrobe to the customer's stomach

Since the 1980s, luxury fashion brands have diversified their business portfolios by investing in market segments specifically oriented towards the restaurant and hospitality sector. Among the first, Giorgio Armani inaugurated this trend by opening the first of a long series of restaurants in 1989. Nowadays, the creation of cafes or restaurants associated with a fashion label has been systemized and is perceived as a 'natural' progression of the brand's activity. The launch of these locations is generally accompanied by a storytelling that invites the customer to consume the brand's universe rather than its products: as a result, the stores become 'places to live' rather than 'places to buy.'[36] Through these places, brands define their own 'daily lifestyle mantra.'[37] We assume that these spaces have been conceived as 'performative spaces'[38] and are therefore used by fashion houses to reaffirm their identity, to perpetuate as much as possible their presence from a spatial and temporal point of view, and to show their image as a powerful conglomerate. These spaces become means of communication for fashion, embodying the universe of luxury brands and thus contributing to the implementation of heritagization processes. These concepts are explicitly formulated by some designers. The statement of Giorgio Armani is particularly emblematic: "I've always wanted to create a complete Armani lifestyle that reflects my ideas and can be applied to different areas, not just fashion. Restaurants and cafés seemed a logical expansion."[39] The opening of these fashion-branded restaurants is also aimed at responding to the needs of contemporary customers who are increasingly looking for more engaging experiences that resemble memorable tourism — namely "a tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred."[40] Gastronomy is thus conceived as a continuum of the customer experience: it allows the customer to spend more time in the boutique, thus increasing the opportunities for consumption

34. Francesco Capone, and Luciana Lazzaretti, "Fashion and city branding: An analysis of the perception of Florence as a fashion city," *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 7:3, 2016: 166–180.

35. Mihalis Kavaratzis, "Place branding: A review of trends and conceptual models," *The marketing review*, 5, 2005: 329–342.

36. Silvain Mendes, "De l'Armani Caffè à l'Oursin, les restaurants de créateur comme fabrique de l'héritage," *Global Fashion Conference 2020 : L'Héritage de la mode — passé, présent et futur* (Booklet of abstracts), 21–23 octobre 2020. (Lyon : Université de la mode de Lyon, 2020), p. 39.

37. Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

38. John Potvin, *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800–2007* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

39. Suzanne Bearne. "Why Fashion Retailers Are Staging Food Experiences?," *businessoffashion.com*, 5 August 2015, https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/retail/why-fashion-retailers-are-staging-food-experiences.

40. Jong-Hyeong Kim, J. Ritchie Brent and Bryan McCormick, "Development of a scale to measure memorable tourism experiences," *Journal of Travel Research*, 51(1), 2012: 12–25, p. 13.

within a physical space.[41] The strategic shift is clear: as product is not enough, retailers investements shift from the wardrobe to the customer's stomach, proposing a unique (and generally less expensive) experience with the aim of fiedelize the customer to the brand. The purpose is to encourage the creation of positive associations between the experience with the brand, the retailer and its merchandise.[42] In this second part of the subsection, we will analyze the explanatory factors of the phenomenon and its operational implementation by convening concrete examples.

Why are luxury fashion brands concretely boosting their in-store branded experience with food? First of all, the gastronomic sector is a fast-growing market both from an international and national (Italian) point of view. According to Mintel, in the US, the restaurant sector has not stopped expanding, with an increase of the sales of $87 billion between 2009 and 2014.[43] The roman case is particularly relevant: the economic-financial crisis of 2008–2009 and its consequences induced a significant evolution of the local commercial offer — namely: a dramatic decrease in small craft activities and a drastic increase in the gastronomic sector characterized by a strong turnover.[44] The offer has developed particularly in the central area of the city of Rome, which is expensive, lacking in services and most of all 'touristified.'[45] It should also be pointed out that there are several types of fashion-branded restaurants: in fact, when investing in the gastronomic sector, fashion houses adopt various forms of operational implementation. Within this context the author traced a typology of gastronomic places divided into 4 main types of commercial offers. The first type consists of the integration of a café or restaurant within an existing retail location (usually flagship stores) with the goal of keeping customers in the store as long as possible both to maximize shopping opportunities and/or to foster goodwill with VIP clients.[46] Examples include: the Thomas's Burberry café opened in 2015 and located in London; or the Sugalabo V: Louis Vuitton's first branded restaurant opened in 2020 in Osaka, Japan. The second type refers to ephemeral pop-up spaces set up for important events (e.g. fashion weeks) and closed a few weeks later. Those fleeting spaces are perfect showrooms for brands and they are often located in luxury department stores (e.g. Harrods in London). Among the most recent examples: the monochrome Fendi Caffe and the Tiffany's Blue Box Cafe launched respectively in 2019 and in 2020. The third type concerns restaurants that are not owned by the fashion brand but which are hosted within a part of the retail-space that has been specifically privatized to this purpose. Oftentimes in such cases it is the union of two major signatures: the fashion brand and a starred chef (see: Gucci Osteria da Massimo Bottura in Florence opened in 2018) or a well-known and luxurious restaurant chain (see: Zuma restaurant inside the Fendi palace in Rome launched in 2015). The fourth type relates to fashion-branded gastronomic locations located within foundations or cultural entities owned by fashion designers (not related to fashion houses).

These are spaces where the cultural aspect is at the forefront since they are conceived as repositories of artistic cumulative stratifications (fashion, architecture, design and gastronomy, etc.). Among the most famous ones: the Entr'acte Restaurant — designed by the French architect Jean Nouvel in 2018 at Rhinoceros gallery powered by Alda Fendi. It's all about artistic places rather than 'consuming' ones. In the framework of this article we will focus more deeply on the latter type of restaurant. In particular we will show how — despite the creative and artistic dimension — they are conceived as performative places.[47] Fashion creators enact 'branding' (and 'place branding') strategies to foster their customer/tourist-oriented brand image.

41.   Joseph B. Pine and James Gilmore, *The experience economy* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019).

42.   Ibid.

43.   Suzanne Bearne, "Why Fashion Retailers Are Staging Food Experiences?," *businessoffashion.com*, 5 August 2015, https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/retail/why-fashion-retailers-are-staging-food-experiences.

44.   Censis, *Rapporto sulla situazione sociale del Paese 2015* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2015).

45.   Stefano Sampaolo, "Tra rendita e nuove logiche di sviluppo: adattamenti e reazioni di una città alle prese con uno strisciante (e non compreso) declino economico," in *Roma in transizione*, eds. A. Coppola et Punziano G. (Roma: Planum Publisher, 2018), 161.

46.   Melanie Abrams, "Why luxury fashion houses still open restaurants," *voguebusiness.com*, 2020 March 2020, https://www.voguebusiness.com/consumers/luxury-fashion-houses-restaurants-louis-vuitton-tiffany-bergdorf-goodman-browns.

47.   John Potvin, *The Places and Spaces of Fashion, 1800–2007* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

2. The case of the Rhinoceros Entr'acte restaurant powered by Alda Fendi

Founded in 1925 by Adele and Edoardo Fendi, the brand — originally a family-run Roman fur atelier — is nowadays internationally acclaimed owing in part to the long-standing collaboration with the creative director Karl Lagerfeld. Managed since 1946 by the five daughters of the founders, 'the five fingers of the hand,'[48] the fashion house was merged in 2002 to the LVMH group which became the principal shareholder. Fendi Roma has become rapidly relevant in the Italian capital thanks to several patronage initiatives and artistic investments. From renovating the Trevi Fountain and the complex of the Four Fountains in 2013 and rehabilitating the fascist-era building Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana located in the EUR district the same year to implementing a partnership with Villa Borghese, Fendi's investments in urban cultural heritage have progressively widened. The fashion house has been operating for more than twenty years on a solid public-private partnership with the municipality of Rome. Following the annexation to the LVMH group, two of the five Fendi sisters — Carla and Alda — decided to open specific foundations within the city. Both structures are financially dissociated and independent from the Fendi Roma brand. Respectively: Carla inaugurated in 2007 the homonymous foundation aimed at the conservation and restoration of the Roman (more extensively the Italian) cultural heritage. Alda launched in 2001 the Alda Fendi Esperimenti Foundation: a venue dedicated to the celebration and development of art in all its manifestations.

The paper aims to analyze the Palazzo Rhinoceros, a seventeenth-century building owned by Roma Capitale and located in the historic center — between the Bocca della verità and the Foro Boario — with a frontal view of Mount Palatine and a panoramic view over the entire capital. It is specifically a complex of 3 buildings of 3500 m2 originally intended to accommodate social housing. Alda Fendi started the first requalification works of the urban area at the edge of the Imperial Forums in 2001 with the recovery and excavations that brought to light the remains of the ancient Basilica Ulpia as well as the regeneration of the opposite area that later became a food market. In 2012, the former fashion creator purchased the building in its entirety and started the renovation works directed by the French archi-star Jean Nouvel "to turn it into a space where contemporary art and ancient history collide — and where innovative cultural experiments can take place."[49] The architectural intervention was also accompanied by urbanistic actions as it also involved the surrounding street that was renovated, and the adjacent Arch of Janus, dating back to the fourth century, rehabilitated and permanently illuminated. The project, developed by Alda Fendi — the youngest of the five Fendi's sisters — involved the creation of a multifunctional space, an artistic and cultural hub dedicated to the promotion of culture intended to become a major tourist destination. The restaurant Rhinoceros Entr'acte therefore represents only a fraction of a complex project articulated on several levels (the six floors of the building) and on multiple dimensions (artistic, gastronomic, creative, etc.). The gastronomic part is intended as a sequel to the proposed artistic experience. The restaurant is located on the two terraces of the building. The initially advertised culinary offerings evolved between the opening year (2018) and 2020–21. The reasons for this transition won't be discussed here, however it is important to point out that Alda Fendi had initially decided to collaborate with the luxury Parisian brand 'Caviar Kaspia', renowned for its gastronomic offer centered on fine caviar and crudités. This is an internationally known label that has experienced a strong international expansion (cf. Montecarlo, London, New York, etc.). The two brands had agreed on a " 'domestication' of the gastronomic formula to the Roman market"[50] readjusting the menus to the tastes and habits and spending of the city's inhabitants and visitors. The aim: enhancing this luxury concept in the name of Italian style with a full-scale offering (from the cafeteria, to the cocktail bar, to

48.　Franca Fendi, *Sei con me* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2018).

49.　Livia Hengel, "Introducing Palazzo Rhinoceros, Alda Fendi's New Arts Foundation," *forbes.com*, 13 December 2013, https://www.forbes.com/sites/liviahengel/2018/12/13/why-alda-fendi-is-giving-back-to-rome-with-new-arts-foundation/?sh=71dc122074d2.

50.　Livia Montagnoli, "Caviar Kaspia a Roma al Palazzo Rhinoceros di Alda Fendi. Terrazze mozzafiato, caviale e respiro internazionale," *gamberorosso.it*, 21 September 2018, https://www.gamberorosso.it/notizie/caviar-kaspia-a-roma-al-palazzo-rhinoceros-di-alda-fendi-terrazze-mozzafiato-caviale-e-respiro-internazionale/.

the gourmet restaurant). In 2020, however, the gastronomic offer was renewed with the arrival of the hyper-mediatized Chef Alessandro Circiello. His philisophy is consistent: creatively innovate traditional Italian recipes while respecting the gastronomic heritage associated with them. In section 2.1 we will investigate the methods and the techniques used by the former creator to represent the city through food and art and to enhance fashion-branded gastronomic experience(s).

In section 2.2 we will focus on the perceptions and feedback that tourists produce in reference to fashion-branded restaurants. With this purpose, we propose to take a look at the figures of enogastronomical tourism in Italy and in Rome. According to the literature, enogastronomical tourism is one of the most impactful factors on the local economy: in 2018, the average number of visitors related to food and wine tourism in Italy was more than 110 million and their spending exceeds over 12 billion (namely the 15.1% of the overall tourism). 43% of the visits/stays were intranational (approximately 47 million of tourists) while the international one were around 57% (cf. about 63 million of tourists).[51] Moreover, data from 2018 suggest a +48% increase in interest compared to 2017 for italian experiences related to food, wine and 'food heritage' in the country.[52] The relevance of these data, together with the recommendations of the reports produced by the competent institutions, suggest that enogastronomical tourism may act as an important driver for the italian territorial development.[53] As for the Roman context, the computation of enogastronomic tourists is complex since usually it is a multi-layered industry (mixed with culture, leisure, etc.). However, a particularly revealing figure is that relating to the length of time a tourist stays in the city, which is about 2.4 nights.[54] Tourism in Rome is essentially cultural: stays are short and heritage-oriented. In this context, the gastronomic dimension does not seem to be an indispensable input for tourists neither a driving factor in either the choice of destination or the choice of the length of stay.[55]

2.1 The staging of creative-led gastronomic experience(s): methods and techniques to represent the city through food and art

This section focuses on the way place branding processes are concretely staged by Alda Fendi through narratives, performances and spots. We will see how the 'Romanity' is performatively staged by the former fashion creator and how the enactment of place branding relies on recurring leitmotifs which are based on a creative-led strategy. The methodology — based on participant observation(s) — has allowed us to identify three physical and one virtual performative space — namely: the external space and the square adjacent to the building (at the crossroads between the Fori Imperiali and the Foro Boario), the interior of the building and the Rhinoceros foundation and the Entr'acte restaurant located in the terrace of the building. Concerning the virtual dimension, it refers to the institutional website and the official Instagram page (rhinoceros_entracte): this space will not be treated within this paper. We decided to focus on Palazzo Rhinoceros, the materialisation of the 'Alda Fendi Foundation — Experiments' that since 2001 promotes artistic-cultural expérimentations — a pole of attraction "where research and creativity find their ideal home."[56] This microscale analysis has been framed relationally,

51. Isnart-Unioncamere, "Rapporto sul Turismo Enogastronomico in Italia nel 2018," *federturismo.it*, 2018, https://www.federturismo.it/it/i-servizi/559-news/news-2018/15258-isnart-unioncamere-raddoppia-il-turismo-enogastronomico.html.

52. Roberta Garibaldi, "Rapporto sul turismo enogastronomico italiano 2019," *World Food Travel* (Università degli studi di Bergamo; Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari, forestali e del turismo; ENIT; ISMEA; Fondazione Qualivita; Touring Club Italiano, 2019): ISBN: 979–12–200–4410–3.

53. Ibid.

54. RomaCapitale — Dipartimento Trasformazione Digitale, "Rapporto sul turismo a Roma nel 2019," *U.O. Statistica — Open Data*, 2020: 7.

55. GamberoRosso, "Cresce il turismo enogastronomico in Italia. Dove, come, perché: dati e numeri," *gamberorosso.it*, 30 January 2019, https://www.gamberorosso.it/notizie/notizie-vino/cresce-il-turismo-enogastronomico-in-italia-dove-come-perche-dati-e-numeri/.

56. RomaCapitale — Dipartimento Turismo, Formazione Professionale e Lavoro, "Palazzo Rhinoceros." *turismoroma.it*, 2018, https://turismoroma.it/it/luoghi/palazzo-rhinoceros.

ascribing processes occurring and involving broader scales.[57] The microgeographical study of the phenomenon, carried out in an emblematic area of the city (a highly touristic zone located in the core of 'centro storico'), allows an in-depth empirical analysis of the city-branding processes initiated by Alda Fendi and staged for tourists.

Pseudo-privatization of public spaces — the arc of Janus and the rhinoceros statue: Alda Fendi wants to be seen as an active participant in the city — in a platonic sense — contributing to the proper functioning of the latter through patronage initiatives. Indeed, her foundation has progressively occupied the public space adjacent to the Palazzo, implementing a form of 'social marking' of the space.[58] In particular, the access area appears to be intended as an artistic installation: the Arch of Janus (a historical monument dating back to the Constantinian era, 4th century) is flanked by an imposing statute in the shape of a life-size fiberglass rhinoceros, created by the Fendi foundation's artistic director Raffaele Curi. The monument as well as the sculpture, are delimited by gates and therefore not accessible to the public. On the sides of the fence are placed signs posted by the municipality of Rome in reference to the patronage action carried out by Alda Fendi in 2018 to restore, rehabilitate and illuminate the entire area. The rhinoceros, the signs, the gates, become stalls for appropriation of public space[59]: the former creator enacts a 'system of signs'[60] that evoke both the Roman identity of the Fendi family and its commitment to the heritage' preservation. Tourists, fascinated by the monument, participate in urban performances (taking photos, reading signs, etc.), thus approaching the space of the foundation — which is actually not advertised or visibly marked — except for a small plaque on the main door. An authentication process[61] is then implemented: both the designer and the tourists gather around a core value, that of the importance of cultural heritage. As we will see in section 2.2, this value constitutes a factor of attraction even for tourists who discover the existence of the restaurant for the first time.

Commodification and aestheticization of historic urban heritage — the foundation and the residences: The 'Alda Fendi Esperimenti Foundation' is the result of a project for the recovery and renovation of a complex of three buildings of 3500 m2 previously intended to accommodate social housing and owned by the municipality of Rome. The interior design is discreet: the architect Jean Nouvel has implemented a recovery intervention of the urban artifact by preserving the original shape and materials of the building: all the modernization interventions are deliberately visible.[62] The Foundation is conceived as a place 'to live and visit': the exhibition spaces are designed to accommodate exhibitions, multimedia creations and international performances, with a totally free use.[63] The exhibition spaces, however, occupy only a small part of the total area of the building, namely two floors out of six. The remaining four are reserved for the 'Rooms of Rome': a complex of twenty-four 'haut de gamme' apartments available for rent. However, the overlapping between urban heritage signs and retail signs generates 'consumption spaces' featured with a precise aesthetic that refer to an idea of exclusivity, cultural greatness and excellence of the products and services provided in continuity with the past.[64] The purpose of Alda Fendi was to offer a 360 degrees experience acting as a lifestyle brand rather than a simple fashion house, reaching — as a consequence — wider target. De facto, both the Gallery visitors and the restaurant consumers become agents of the 'consumption spaces': The spaces of the building — partly dedicated to exhibitions and partly to sales — are revealed to the public by following particular 'footprints' along the six floors of the

57. Doreen Massey, *For space* (London: Sage Pub., 2005).

58. Thierry Bulot and Vincent Veschambre, *Mots traces et marques: dimensions spatiale et linguistique de la mémoire urbaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan (coll. "Espaces discursifs"), 2006).

59. Erving Goffman, *Relations in public: microstudies of the public order* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

60. Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

61. Erik Cohen, and Scott A. Cohen, "Authentication: Hot and cool," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(3), 2012: 1295–1314.

62. Jean Nouvel (Ateliers), *RNCRS INTERIOR*. E22-05/18: études (r) — Archives Fendi Roma, 2018.

63. Ibid.

64. Anne-Cécile Mermet, "Le patrimoine au service du commerce? Une lecture sémiologique des rues commerçantes du Marais et du Vieux Lille," *Revue Géographique de l'Est* 53(3–4), 2013: https://journals.openedition.org/rge/5087#quotation.

building. Those 'footprints' are the key medium through which branding policies are staged:[65] in fact, the admission to the restaurant is bound to the visit of the gallery.

The staging of the city-brand through gastronomy — a terrace over the Rome's rooftops: At the top of the building there is the panoramic restaurant 'Entr'acte': an open space terrace overlooking the city: 'a cyclorama', according to the architect's definition.[66] In order to access it, the visitor must pass (via elevator or stairs) through a canopy on which art videos are permanently projected. The artistic experience continues in the kitchen (directed by Chef Alessandro Circiello). The ethos is consistent: the search for a balance between tradition (heritage preservation) and innovation (new gastronomic/artistic concepts). On the menu: Italian cuisine (not necessarily the Roman one) creatively reinterpreted. The wine list includes labels coming from different Italian regions and even from the Fendi's wineries. Prices are high but not inaccessible (between 18 and 25 euros per course). The design is sober: there is no trace of the Fendi monogram, which is flaunted in the brand's pop-up cafés (see par. 1.2) — also because the designer wanted to distance herself from the style of the fashion brand.

White sofas welcome visitors to a panoramic terrace. The city acts as the protagonist. The aesthetics of the place and the foods served is crucial since it legitimizes the artistic component of the culinary experience. With reference to the works of Mathwick et al. (2001) we can decompose the aesthetics inherent in the gastronomic experience proposed by Alda Fendi into two dimensions: that inherent in the 'visual elements placed in a given physical space' (in this specific case: the arrangement of the plate, the combination of ingredients, the tableware, the colors, etc.) and the 'entertainment framework of a service performance' (e.g. the way the dishes are served, the behavior of other customers, etc.).[67] The restaurant's service meets both aesthetic canons: the dishes are not only appetizing but aesthetically pleasing. The decor is willfully accurate but discreet as well as waiters dressed in plain dark clothes. The 'tempo' is relaxed: the customer is given time to enjoy the whole experience and not just the meal. As will be discussed in the next paragraph, attention to aesthetics is functional to customer loyalty, since a positive experience constitues an incentive to (re)use the service.[68]

2.2 Assessing the tourist perception: fashioned cuisine as tourist attractor to specific market segments

In this section we will try to understand the effects of the city' representation that the fashion designer conveys through the staging of performative actions within the fashion-branded restaurant. We are less interested in studying the actual incidence of the launch of Entr'acte restaurant in the roman tourist market than in analyzing the perception that tourists have of the fashioned gastronomic experience proposed by Alda Fendi and if such perceptions can somehow influence their decisions to visit Rome. Data were gathered from a hybrid methodology combing 'off the record' interactions[69] with tourists and waiters — which were carried out during the months of June and July 2021[70] — as well as qualitative and quantitative information taken from the Tripadvisor platform on a sample of 91 visitors. The results were combined with participant observations conducted by the author in the summer of 2021 who also acted as a customer of the restaurant. In order not to interfere with the business activity within the restaurant area, it was decided to carry out the interviews at the exit of the foundation in the adjacent

65.   Carina Ren, "Non-human agency, radical ontology and tourism realities," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(3), 2011: 858–881.

66.   Adriano Alimonti, "Roma, una cena in galleria," *lacucinaitaliana.it*, 6 August 2021, https://www.lacucinaitaliana.it/storie/luoghi/ristorante-entracte-rhinoceros-arte-roma-fendi/?refresh_ce=.

67.   Charla Mathwick, Naresh Malhotra and Edward Rigdon, "Experiential value: Conceptualization, measurement and application in the catalog and Internet shopping environment," *Journal of Retailing*, 77(1), 2001: 39–56.

68.   Vilnai-Yavetz, Iris and Anat Rafaeli, "Aesthetics and professionalism of virtual servicescapes," *Journal of Service Research*, 8(3), 2006: 245–259.

69.   Jamie Gillen, "Segmenting informal discussions into viable methodological categories," in *Fieldwork in tourism: methods, issues and reflections* eds. C. M. Hall (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 199–208.

70.   A period of increased tourism associated with summer vacation and softening of sanitary measures imposed by the covid-19 health crisis.

street (at Via dei Cerchi): the entirety of the respondents were therefore customers of the restaurant. Tourists interviewed were mostly Italians coming from other regions (73%) followed by British (4.5%) and French (3.6%). The residual part of respondents were distributed among the USA, China and Russia. These figures are dissimilar to those of the literature that locates the majority of luxury fashion buyers in Italy in the USA.[71] Among the possible explanatory factors: a decorrelation between luxury fashion buyers and customers of fashion-branded restaurants as it is a form of 'accessible opulence' or a sample biased by the health situation due to the crisis of covid-19 that has led to a hyper-presence of Italian tourists. From a demographic perspective, the majority of people surveyed were between 20 and 40 y.o. (68%) with a high preponderance of females (57%). This last data corroborate the literature from tourism studies that indicates a gender imbalance in fashion tourism. The questions were aimed at understanding whether the restaurant was a driving factor in the choice of destination. The results demonstrate that fashion-branded restaurants play a relevant (but not essential) role in the tourist attractiveness of Rome. These locations do not constitute an exclusive reason for tourists to travel, but act as city boosters, amplifying city's potential and acting as tourist attractors to some market segments. In particular, almost half of the respondents labelled the dinner at the Rhinoceros Foundation as one of the most memorable experiences of the vacation: rather than the food, the exclusivity of the place, the breathtaking view, and the epitomized design by archi-star Jean Nouvel all came forward. It is also important to underline the correlation that emerged from the interviews between several dimensions (i.e. urban heritage, culture and arts, fashion gastronomy, etc.). The intersection between those dimensions seems to constitute an important stimulus for 80% of tourists surveyed. None of the respondents were aware of the difference in the economic model between the Alda Fendi foundation and the Fendi Roma brand.

From a qualitative point of view, the interviews revealed the tourist's desire to live an authentic experience: a key reason why customers are drawn to this type of market is that fashion-food-related activities are considered important for understanding Rome's local lifestyle. Moreover, the attendance of the branded place seems to be a real 'statement' for visitors: it is expected from the place a proper outfit, formal and elegant. Other types of outfits (e.g. tracksuit, sneakers) are considered inappropriate and can be a source of complaint from customers. Many respondents emphasised the importance of mingling several factors (food, cultural heritage, architecture, wine, fashion) to be able to live a comprehensive experience. In addition, the interviews enhanced the effectiveness of 'consumption space': "I love the fact that you can buy piece of the collection, it's as if I could take a piece of Roman art at home". Interestingly, the fact that the product is purchased in that particular place automatically gives it a geographical place-based identity that is infused with the 'feel of a city.'[72]

Finally, the Fendi brand is perceived by tourists as very 'committed' to the city reinforcing then its brand reputation (although in fact the foundation is unrelated to the brand). The data also reveal the staging of an authentication process:[73] both the foundation and the tourists gather around a core value, that of the importance of cultural heritage. Occasionally this value constitutes a factor of attraction even for tourists who discover the existence of the palazzo for the first time :

> "While visiting the arc of Janus, we ended up in the foundation where we saw an exhibition and were allowed to have an aperitif at sunset with breathtaking views in the terrace. We had such a good time that we decided to stay for dinner"[74].

In conclusion, the investigation results suggest that fashion gastronomic locations has relevance to tourism. Although these places are not directly affecting the destination selection process, they have

71. Francesco Capone and Luciana Lazzaretti, "Fashion and city branding: An analysis of the perception of Florence as a fashion city," *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 7:3, 2016: 166–180.

72. Gaetano Aiello, Raffaele Donvito, Lara Grazzini, Chris Halliburton, Beverly Wagner, Juliette Wilson, "An international comparison of 'Made in Italy' in the fashion, furniture and food sectors: An observational research study in France, Russia and The United Kingdom," *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 6, 2015: 136–149.

73. Cohen, Erik and Scott A. Cohen, "Authentication: Hot and cool," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(3), 2012: 1295–1314.

74. Interview conducted and translated by the author, June 2021.

the potential to affect the behavior of tourists once on site contributing to the design of the geography of urban tourism.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that fashion-branded gastronomic facilities can constitute a privileged view-point for observing the interrelation between fashion and tourism industrie(s). They are respectively highlighted the mechanisms and techniques used by Alda Fendi to represent the city through food and art as well as the tourist perceptions associated to fashion-branded luxury restaurants. It was depicted the way in which former fashion creators may gain advantage combining gastronomy, urban heritage, culture and fashion through city-branding policies and marketing initiatives. Commodification and aestheticization practices are also on the agenda. The conclusions are ambivalent: fashioned restaurants play a relevant but not essential role in the tourist attractiveness of the city. These locations do not constitute an exclusive reason for tourists to travel, but can amplify city's potential while acting as tourist attractors to some market segments. Through their representations of food and heritage, designers reaffirm their identity and taste. Moreover, fashion culinary experiences constitue an asset for the Foundation to convey a tourist-friendly message and to attract more customers through the development of an experiential market. Comparative studies with other fashion creators would be necessary in order to generalize the results of this case study, however it is already possible to indicate that in the case of Alda Fendi, the restaurant Rhinoceros Entr'acte represents only a fraction of a complex project mixing multiple dimensions (artistic, gastronomic, creative, etc.). As a consequence, the gastronomic part is intended as a non-exclusive sequel to the offered artistic experience.

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