

CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF LOCAL PRODUCTS IN URBAN RESTAURANTS

MATEI ALEXIA ANAMARIA¹, ZOB TEODORA MARIA¹,
COSTINAR PAULA NICOLA¹, BACTER DENIS PAUL¹, DODU MONICA ANGELICA¹

¹University of Oradea, Faculty of Environmental Protection, Gen. Magheru street, no. 26,
Oradea, Romania

*Corresponding author's e-mail: alexiamatei885@gmail.com

***Abstract:** This paper aims to analyse how consumers perceive the use of local products in urban restaurants. The main objective is to identify the factors that influence customers' attitudes and behaviour towards local products. The study starts from the idea that, in recent years, interest in sustainable food choices and support for local producers has increased significantly, especially among the urban population. The research was based on a questionnaire applied to a sample of consumers, supplemented by discussions with representatives of restaurants that promote local products. The results show that aspects such as authenticity, perceived quality, and trust in the origin of ingredients have a strong impact on purchasing decisions. Moreover, the way restaurants communicate the origin of their products positively influences customer perceptions. The findings suggest that closer collaboration between restaurants and local producers could contribute to the development of more responsible consumption patterns and to the strengthening of the local economy.*

Key words: local products, restaurants, consumer, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of globalisation and the rapid transformations occurring in the food industry, consumers are increasingly attentive to the quality of the products they consume and to the impact of their choices on the environment and the local economy. Urban restaurants, positioned at the intersection of public demand and contemporary gastronomic trends, play an essential role in promoting a dietary model based on local resources. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in interest in locally sourced products, a phenomenon driven by concerns for sustainability, food traceability, and support for local producers [1].

This paper explores the topic "Consumer perception of local products in urban restaurants", with the main objective of identifying the factors that influence customers' attitudes and behaviour regarding the use of local ingredients in gastronomy. The analysis is based on the premise that, in urban environments, interest in responsible eating has become an increasingly visible trend, prompting both consumers and operators in the HoReCa sector to turn their attention toward local products, perceived as more authentic, healthier, and more sustainable [3].

To better capture the dimension of this phenomenon, the research relied on a questionnaire applied to a relevant sample of consumers, supplemented by discussions with representatives of restaurants that actively promote the use of local products. The results highlight the determinant role of factors such as authenticity, perceived quality and trust in the origin of ingredients in shaping purchasing decisions. Furthermore, it was observed that transparency and the way restaurants communicate the origin of their products contribute to strengthening customers' positive perceptions [28].

Based on these findings, the paper underlines the importance of extended collaboration between restaurants and local producers, a collaboration that may stimulate the development of responsible, sustainable consumption beneficial to the regional economy. Thus, the study offers a relevant perspective on how local products can become not only a gastronomic component but also a strategic element in the evolution of the urban food sector [4].

From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide valuable insights for urban restaurant managers and local producers, supporting strategic decisions related to menu design, supplier selection, and communication strategies aimed at strengthening consumer trust and promoting sustainable consumption.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of urban consumers' perceptions of local products in restaurants.

The quantitative component consisted of a structured questionnaire administered to 120 urban consumers between March and May 2025, in restaurants and public spaces located in Oradea, Romania. Respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method, with the main inclusion criteria being residence in an urban area and prior experience of dining in urban restaurants.

The questionnaire included closed-ended and Likert-scale questions addressing familiarity with local products, purchasing motivations, perceived benefits, and barriers to consumption.

The qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews with 6 restaurant managers and chefs who actively use local products in their menus. These interviews aimed to explore strategic motivations, perceived benefits, and operational challenges related to sourcing local ingredients.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods for the quantitative component, while qualitative data were processed through thematic content analysis [30].

RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire and discussions with representatives of urban restaurants made it possible to outline a broad picture of how consumers perceive local products and the role they play in the decision-making process. The results are structured according to dimensions relevant to the study's objectives: level of knowledge and use, consumption motivations, factors influencing perception, identified barriers, and the role of restaurant communication [11].

Regarding familiarity with and interest in local products, most respondents reported being familiar with the concept of local products, associating them with freshness, superior quality and controlled origin. A significant percentage also stated that they prefer restaurants that use local ingredients, even if this sometimes implies slightly higher costs. This trend highlights the increased interest of the urban population in responsible eating and in supporting the regional economy [10].

It was also observed that individuals with higher levels of education and income tend to consume local products more frequently, being better informed about their advantages and more willing to invest in quality [12].

According to the data, 45% of respondents declared themselves very familiar with local products, while 35% stated that they are familiar to a moderate extent. Only 15% reported being slightly familiar, and 5% not familiar at all. This outcome indicates a high level of consumer awareness, which facilitates the acceptance and consumption of products originating from short supply chains [15].

The fact that most respondents recognise and understand the concept of local product represents an important starting point for developing promotional strategies based on transparency, origin and ingredient quality within urban restaurant menus [14].

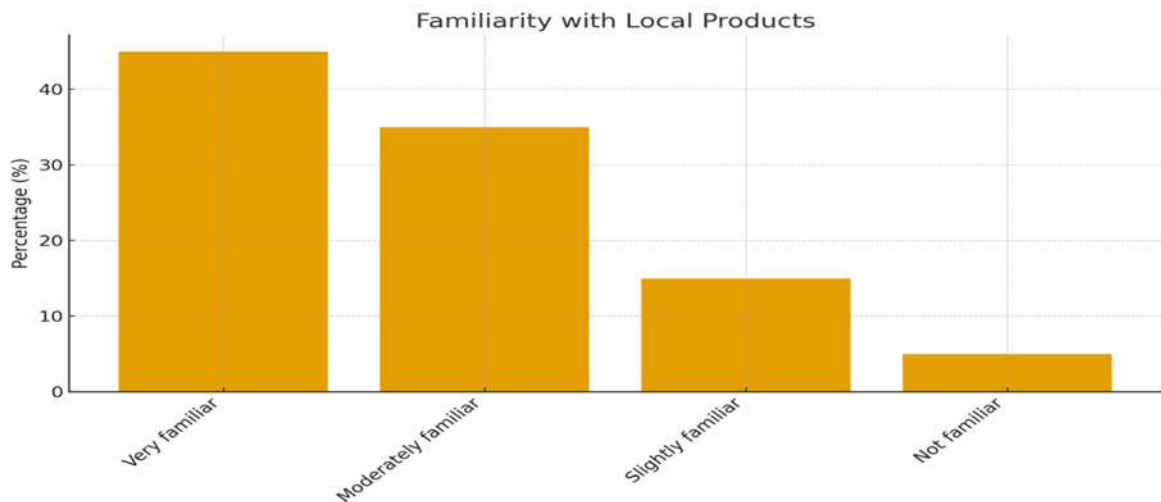


Figure 1. Level of consumer familiarity with local products

Source: authors' own research based on questionnaire data (2025)

Motivations Behind Consumer Choices

According to the research findings, three main motivations underpin respondents' preference for local products:

- o Perceived quality and freshness of ingredients

Consumers state that local products are healthier, have a more natural taste, and are less processed. [10]

- o Authenticity and cultural identity [16]
- o Support for local producers and the economy

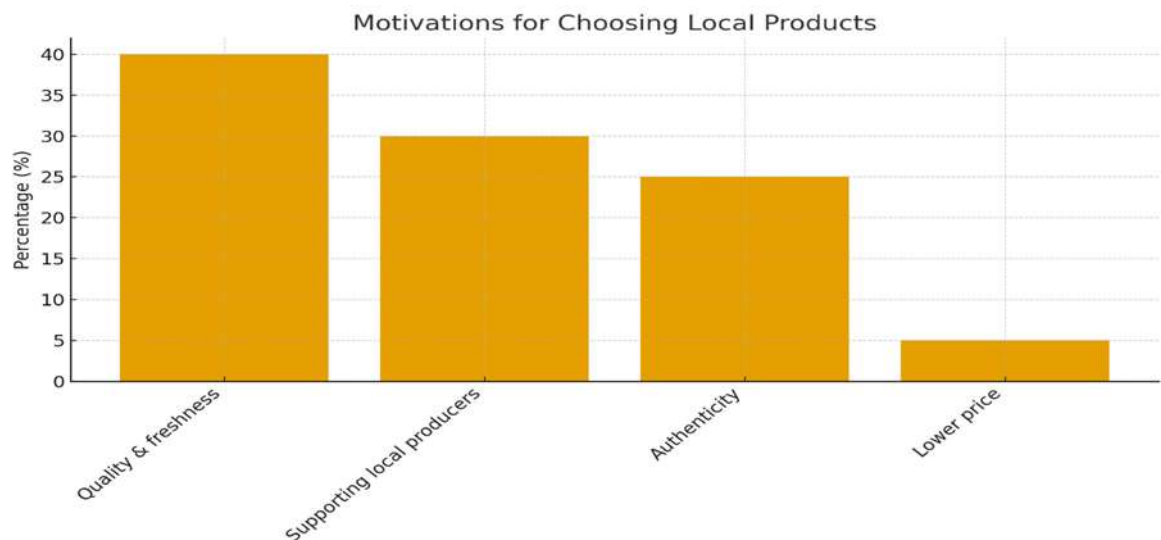


Figure 2. Motivations influencing consumers' preference for local products in urban restaurants

Source: authors' own research based on questionnaire data (2025)

Ethical reasoning plays an important role: respondents report feeling a social responsibility when choosing domestic products. [17, 18].

Many respondents appreciate the connection with traditional gastronomy and view local products as an expression of regional culture and identity. [8]

These motivations confirm that the preference for local products is not purely food-related, but also emotional and cultural.

The strongest reason that drives consumers to choose local products is quality and freshness, representing 40% of responses. This is followed by support for local producers (30%), which demonstrates that the urban public is willing to contribute to the local economy through their culinary decisions. [13]

Authenticity is mentioned by 25% of respondents, suggesting that the gastronomic experience is perceived as more valuable when ingredients come from local sources. Only 5% choose local products because they are cheaper, indicating that motivations are primarily ethical and quality-driven rather than financial. [28]

Factors influencing perception and purchase decisions:

When choosing dishes prepared with local ingredients, consumers are particularly influenced by:

- o Transparency regarding the origin of ingredients [19, 21]
- o Certifications and authenticity guarantees [15]
- o Restaurant reputation and recommendations from other consumers [1]
- o Product presentation in the menu and detailed descriptions [1]

Clearly, trust is the central element in decision-making, and it is built through communication, transparency and repeated positive gastronomic experiences. [16]

The data shows that the origin of ingredients (50%) is the main factor consumers consider when ordering a dish prepared with local products. Quality certifications (20%) and the restaurant's reputation (15%) follow, indicating that trust is built both through official validation and the establishment's public recognition. [10]

The presentation of products on the menu (15%) has a similar impact, suggesting that the way ingredient information is communicated is essential. Menus that highlight local sourcing through labels, visual markers, or stories about producers significantly increase the likelihood of purchase.

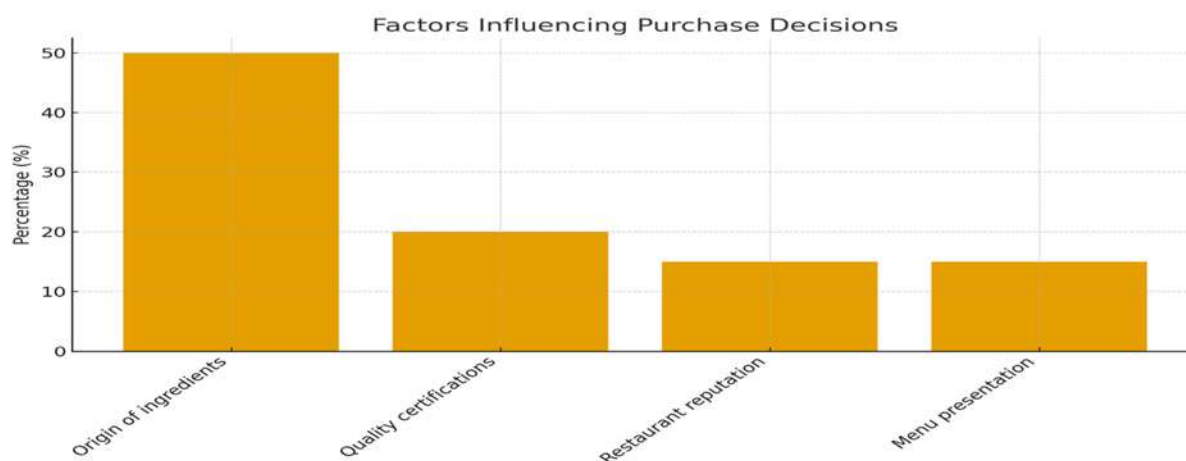


Figure 3. Key factors influencing consumer perception and purchase decisions regarding local products

Source: authors' own research based on questionnaire data (2025)

Identified Barriers and Limitations

Although the overall perception is favourable, the research revealed several obstacles that may restrict the consumption of local products: [18]

- o Higher prices compared to industrial or imported alternatives
- o Seasonal availability, making it difficult to maintain a constant menu
- o Lack of awareness regarding the benefits of local consumption among part of the public

These limitations do not reduce consumer interest, but they emphasize the need for education and the development of stronger local distribution networks.

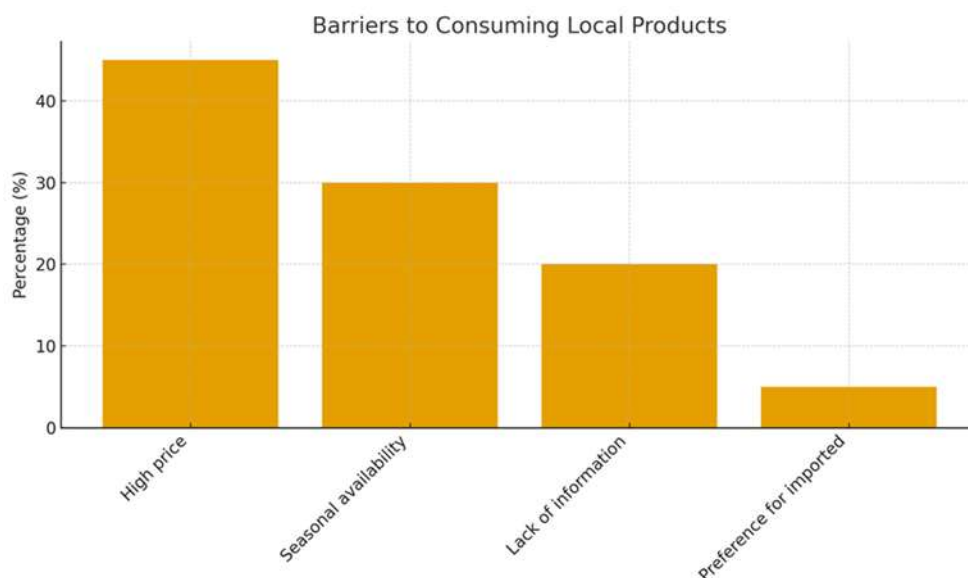


Figure 4. Main barriers limiting the consumption of local products in urban restaurants

Source: authors' own research based on questionnaire data (2025)

For 45% of respondents, the high price represents the main barrier to the constant consumption of local products. This can be explained by higher production costs, smaller batches, and seasonality. For 30% of participants, seasonality and limited availability themselves are a major impediment. [26]

Lack of information (20%) is also an important issue, as many consumers do not know how to recognise or differentiate local products within the available offer. Only 5% prefer imported products, indicating a receptive market with strong development potential, provided that existing barriers are reduced.

Interviews conducted with managers and chefs confirmed the conclusions derived from the survey. Restaurants report that including local products on the menu increases customer interest and differentiates their gastronomic offer. Owners believe that transparency displaying the supplying farm, describing production methods has a direct impact on sales. [23]

However, restaurants also highlight challenges, such as:

- o Limited availability of certain products during off-season periods [25]
- o Price fluctuations
- o Lack of an efficient distribution infrastructure

Even so, most of the restaurants interviewed plan to expand collaboration with local suppliers, viewing this as a strategic direction for development

CONCLUSIONS

The results clearly demonstrate that urban consumers perception of local products is predominantly positive, grounded in values such as quality, authenticity and social responsibility. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that local products represent a decisive factor in restaurant choice, and that effective communication from restaurants can significantly increase purchase intention.

Urban restaurant operators are encouraged to enhance menu transparency, highlight the origin of ingredients, and establish long-term partnerships with local producers in order to increase consumer trust and competitiveness.

Overall, the study confirms the strong potential of local products in gastronomy and the importance of their integration into contemporary food systems. The analysis shows that local products are well perceived by urban consumers and represent a food category with significant development prospects. The high level of familiarity suggests a growing gastronomic culture oriented towards freshness, sustainability, and transparency.

Consumers associate local products not only with nutritional value, but also with supporting the community economy and reconnecting with culinary traditions. The results indicate that purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by trust in the origin of ingredients and by restaurants' communication strategies. Customers seek authenticity, quality and information factors that become decisive at the moment of choice. Where local identity is clearly and visibly communicated, interest and willingness to purchase increase substantially.

However, the market still faces significant barriers, among which high price and seasonality are the most visible. Insufficient information also contributes to lower purchasing frequency, pointing to the need for more effective communication strategies from both restaurants and producers. Strengthening the connection between these two economic actors becomes essential for stabilising and expanding the local product market.

In conclusion, consumer perception of local products in urban restaurants is largely positive, but the market's growth potential depends on how efficiently stakeholders manage to optimise costs, ensure consistent availability, and develop persuasive informational strategies. Strengthening collaboration between restaurants and local producers represents a key direction that may transform current consumption into a sustainable and competitive model capable of generating benefits for both the market and the community..

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