

Nicula, Virgil; Popşa, Roxana Elena

Article

Involvement of rural tourism operators in the project "Sibiu European Gastronomic Region"

Amfiteatru Economic Journal

Provided in Cooperation with:

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Suggested Citation: Nicula, Virgil; Popşa, Roxana Elena (2018) : Involvement of rural tourism operators in the project "Sibiu European Gastronomic Region", Amfiteatru Economic Journal, ISSN 2247-9104, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Vol. 20, Iss. Special Issue No. 12, pp. 951-966,
<https://doi.org/10.24818/EA/2018/S12/951>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/283562>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

INVOLVEMENT OF RURAL TOURISM OPERATORS IN THE PROJECT “SIBIU EUROPEAN GASTRONOMIC REGION”

Virgil Nicula^{1*} and Roxana Elena Popşa²
¹⁾²⁾Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

<p>Please cite this article as: Nicula, V. and Popşa, R.E., 2018. Involvement of Rural Tourism Operators in the Project “Sibiu European Gastronomic Region”. <i>Amfiteatru Economic</i>, 20(Special No. 12), pp. 951-966.</p> <p>DOI: 10.24818/EA/2018/S12/951</p>	<p>Article History Received: 21 August 2018 Revised: 18 September 2018 Accepted: 11 October 2018</p>
---	---

Abstract

In the context of the activities specific to the “Sibiu European Gastronomic Region in the year of 2019” project, the sustainable rural development of the five micro regions (Mărginimea Sibiului, Olt Country, Hârtibaciului Valley, Târnavelor Valley and Secaşelor Land), aims to bring a new concept of integrated and systemic approach to the role of promoting traditional activities in which gastronomy plays an important role.

Gastronomic touristic products incorporate values of environment, landscape, parts of local culture, traditions, local cuisine, traditional costumes, local food and rituals, associated with gastronomic experience – the way the edibles are served and presented, as well as ingredients, preparation methods. Identifying the culinary destination is one of the challenges of creating touristic products, in which an important role goes to guesthouses.

The aim of the paper is to analyze the preferences of the tourists for practicing gastronomic tourism and the involvement of the rural tourism operators in the project, taking into account the types of preferred events. In this regard, it has been elaborated a questionnaire for the tourists accommodated in the rural and agro-touristic guesthouses from two micro regions representative of the Sibiu County, respectively Hârtibaciului Valley and Mărginimea Sibiului. Also, there have been held discussions with the guesthouse’s administrators, who are actively implicated in the diversification of the mass tourist services supply by designing new tourist products, which incorporate traditional reinterpreted recipes, accompanied by a story of the place and source of raw material.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism; gastronomic events; micro regions; Sibiu

JEL Classification: L83; Q10

* Corresponding author, **Virgil Nicula** – niculavirgil@yahoo.com

Introduction

Gastronomic tourism is part of cultural tourism. In this context, gastronomic tourism offers are viable if service providers or local producers take into account the cultural characteristics of the territory. Gastronomy allows tourists to make contact with cultural and historical heritage of a destination through testing, experimentation and buying gourmet products. Also, it needs to be taken into consideration the emergence of new cultural values which enhance the richness and cultural diversity of a region. In this regard, tradition and innovation coexist in a natural way. Gastronomic tradition is a process in a constantly evolution and the challenges for professionals are to incorporate innovation, to renew and adapt their offers to the needs of the new consumer culture (Gaztelumendi, 2012).

The evolution of gastronomic tourism in Sibiu County should include the extension of tourist routes to producers, engaging in a well-organized network of integrated tourism in the region of origin of the resources or culinary products, either by visiting the farms, guesthouses, restaurants or by accessing the festivals, fairs and specific areas where tasting food in the local landscape will be the main reason for attracting tourists.

The results of the researches has formed the basis of the formulation, in the last part of the study, of some methods of implication of the administrators of rural and agro-touristic guesthouses in actions meant to achieve the objectives of the "Sibiu European Gastronomic Region in the year of 2019" program.

The paper is structured in four points, namely: presentation of some elements that bring in the foreground Sibiu as a gastronomic and European region, the review of the scientific literature from the domain, methodology of research and the research results.

By means of activities involving restaurants, local markets from Sibiu, the local producers, consumers and then, the valences of the natural landscape, local tour operators can support, preserve and capitalize on traditional knowledge and historical values as part of the cultural immaterial heritage of Sibiu that underlines the development of traditional local cuisine and a true source of inspiration for the future of the gastronomic tourism from Sibiu.

1. Sibiu - European gastronomic region

Sibiu County is situated in an area rich in traditions. The geographical diversity of a territory is defined by the variety of types of rocks, mineral resources, soil and the current features of the relief, to which the social and economic growth of local communities is added. The ongoing interaction between man and matter, based on craftsmanship, workmanship and cultural customs, has generated the specific, local tradition. Each of the five micro regions of Sibiu County is an entity characterized by specific landscapes, by the typical capitalization of the wealth generously provided by the natural space, by cultural and gastronomic interferences that have put their identity mark on places. Although well-individualized entities, these five micro regions (Marginimea Sibiului, Olt Country, Hârtibaciului Valley, Tarnavelor Valley and Secaşelor Land) form a unitary one which individualizes Sibiu County within the southern region of Transylvania even at a national level. The progress of micro-centres for purchasing local food resources that underlie the taste of unique gourmet products leads implicitly to accessing new financial mechanisms to support the rural economy in a regional context and implicitly of urban and regional ones. Thus, gastronomic tourism can

be a superior form of exploitation and access to the entire immaterial and natural cultural heritage with beneficial effects on Sibiu and its inhabitants.

The fact that the town is surrounded by localities belonging to the five micro-regions with a pronounced multicultural character contributed to the amplification of a special personality of the city and of Sibiu County, European Gastronomy Region for 2019. In this sense, now more than ever, the inhabitants of Sibiu have the opportunity to realize the value of the traditions for the preservation of the intangible patrimony, in general, and for the enlargement of the values in the gastronomy in particular.

Traditions and gastronomy influence each other in their process along the human evolution, their preservation and perpetuation being essential to ensuring food security and economic mechanisms specific to regional or county development. The life of Sibiu, the culture of the Sibiu gastronomy, are built on the values of the traditions of the county, which in turn contribute to the expression of their own spirituality, as we perceive today and which we have not yet been able to define in concrete terms in the spirit of cultural events gourmet. On this line, we can see the interconnectivity between the natural resources, the Christian calendar the cuisine and the eating habits of the Sibiu. The constant association between the Christian calendar is pregnant, the cuisine and activities of the Sibiu, a triad that merges and completes the intangible cultural heritage of Sibiu.

Taking into account the integration of gastronomic tourism into the values of the immaterial cultural heritage of Sibiu, it is clear that the most exquisite, existential tourist wishes to test original menus in the Sibiu restaurants, to know their story, the origin of the food resources underlying the gourmet product, being interested in integrating the taste of local wines or other refined drinks at regional level. The tourist will want to test the Sibiu agro-alimentary market, make sure they can find food in the restaurant, finding out interesting things about where they come from.

The connection between the Sibiu restaurants and the county's network of producers is supported by the Sibiu European Gastronomy Program 2019. Integration into the story of the gourmet product of tourist offers that go to the area of origin of the recipe or products is necessary. The European gastronomic region, as an international concept, requires the decision makers to be sustainable for sustainable development while maintaining the quality of the environment, as well as ensuring the long-term adequate food security. The concept of gastronomic region ensures and supports the implementation of FAO international recommendations on food security, as well as the conservation of biological diversity in all its forms (e.g. genetic diversity, species and ecosystems). Sibians are entitled to food security for both the city and the region that supplies the food, ensuring access to one of the finest services - gastronomy.

The products of the project are novel: defining the gastronomic footprint, presenting the Sibian public with innovative gastronomic products starting from traditional resources, accessing the business environment in a novel way, developing a guide for gastronomic tourism in protected areas, involving the Orthodox Christian priesthood community in the awareness and defining the parish's attitude towards the program, the old photographic art exhibitions in Sibiu are values that can underpin the success of the European Gastronomy Region Sibiu Program 2019.

Romania's Tourism Fair held at Romexpo, from 17 to 20 November 2016, promoted the offer in the stand organized on the occasion of this important event. Through the Sibiu European

Gastronomy Program 2019 developed in partnership with the Sibiu County Council the connoted people have brought to light the permanent dialogue established between nature, people and traditions, their cultural and gastronomic customs.

Supporting investments that promote tourism-specific cuisine or micro initiatives to exploit their tourism potential can be materialized by European funds in the current programming period 2014-2020. Increasing the role of tourism fairs and diversify the local tourist information centres operating in various localities, constitute the targets that can be achieved in the future.

The Sibian Association My Transylvania has been involved in recent years successfully organizing gastronomic events local to Sibiu County, with a decisive role in getting Sibiu the title of Gourmet European Region in 2019, a distinction which the town would share with Southern Aegean Region of Greece, which includes islands like Santorini, Mykonos and Rhodes. The title is awarded each year by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture and Tourism, with the support of European institutions. The award aims to stimulate innovation in the field of sustainable tourism and culinary.

This title is desired a boost to link "the food, hospitality, tourism, culture, health and sustainability to support the economic, cultural, social and environmental."

Both winning regions will organize events related to gastronomy throughout the year 2019. This is the second major title for the city of Sibiu, which was European Cultural Capital in 2007 and Sibiu, which received in 2009 the Golden Apple for the hospitality of the inhabitants of Mărginimea Sibiu and Eden Award as a destination of excellence for the same micro-region in 2015.

The story of "Gourmet Transylvania - Food Culture Festival" began in 2008 with the aim to support the development of rural areas in southern Transylvania to promote the products, recipes and local culture. Tourists from all over Romania, but also many foreigners fell in love with the picturesque Transylvanian villages, authentic gastronomy, culture and stories of places within a tourism project. Started in 2008 and developed by several associations, namely Hosman Durable Mioritics Association, the Association Sibiu County Tourism and My Transylvania project Transylvania Brunch is now in progress in 18 towns in the counties Sibiu, Brasov and Mures on the last Saturday of each month, from April to October. The idea came from a German married to a Romanian, set in a village in Hârtibaci Valley, who had seen something similar in the former East Germany. There were organized meetings for people who had something in common with villages and who did not want them to become urbanized, being concerned to keep as much of the rural authentic. "His wife and him have started from the idea to hold a regular meeting once a month in villages in Transylvania, in order to discuss issues that concern us all - tourism, rural development projects, agriculture, heritage protection, preservation of traditions" says Cristian Cismaru project manager of Mytransylvania.

The first event took place in Biertan, Sibiu County in 2008 with just 15 people. At the same time, it appeared the idea to ask someone from the village to prepare something to eat, not necessarily local, while they recount freely. Interest for projects in rural areas has increased and then became regular, meetings on the last Saturday of the month, the idea of "meet and change the village". This is how Transylvania Brunch appeared, an event that celebrated in 2016, eight years after launch. Professional tourism associations – The National Association of Tourism Agencies (ANAT), The Association of Rural Ecological and Cultural Tourism

(ANTREC), local associations of tourism, NGOs, and so on - can engage in tourism development at the local level, with policy-makers at public and private operators. As growing forms of tourism such as rural tourism, agro-tourism, ecotourism, cultural and gastronomic tourism, are some of the most dynamic forms of travel, which offers a chance for local communities to develop economically, represents an alternative to decline agricultural activity by harnessing local resources, better employment of the workforce, encouraging entrepreneurship and increasing individual and collective income.

Gastronomy plays an indispensable role in promoting tourism at a regional and local level. Therefore, the creation of gastronomic tourism products is seen as a priority for tourist destinations that can offer experiences in this regard. Motivations of choosing tourist destination "Sibiu - European gastronomic region" are related to cultural and natural attractions, special events and festivals, food experiences in each micro-region, gourmet connections, social interaction and emotional, but also other opportunities for recreation and entertainment. The image created over the city, past experiences, friendliness of residents, recognized with the award "Golden Apple" by World Federation of Travel Journalists and Writers (FIJET) for the hospitality of the inhabitants of the Sibiu border, exchange of experiences, the variety of gastronomic and attributes of diversity and characteristics of the destination, such as proximity are other factors of attraction.

The essence of gastronomic tourism is to develop a tourism product customized to create, through marketing, additional income for farmers and other categories of local entrepreneurs and ultimately lead to socio-economic rise of the village/area, stability demographic and conservation/environmental protection and cultural-historical heritage, that of sustainable development.

With the award of the European Gastronomy Region 2019, an added value to Sibiu as a tourist attraction is the gastronomic events, the cuisine of restaurants and guesthouses that offer something new, private, and attractive to keep tourists in the region. Another feature is added to current tourism, namely gastronomy, making the notion of gastronomic tourism integrated into sustainable regional promotion.

2. Literature review

In the current socio-economic complex, we can see that a new type of tourist, which is interested in trying local food products, has emerged. The motivation of this type of tourist relies in visits to food producers, attendance at food festivals, or visits to restaurants to try dishes typical of the area, thus reinforcing the importance of local food and the local actors involved in the supply chain (Montanari and Staniscia, 2009).

One of the most used definitions of Gastronomic tourism is one proposed by (Lee et al., 2015): gastronomic tourism "is a journey, in regions rich in gastronomic resources, ho generate recreational experiences or have entertainment purposes, which include: visits to primary or secondary producers of gastronomic products, gastronomical festivals, fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings or any activity related to food."

This travel experience is closely related to a lifestyle that includes experimentation, learning from different cultures, acquisition of knowledge and lessons learned by tasting traditional foods, the qualities or attributes of culinary tourism and culinary specialties produced in the

regions visited. Experiencing gastronomic tourism is considered as such when all the above are the main reason or the main motivation for visitors to travel to a particular destination.

Gastronomy tourism has a cultural value and can be seen as the expression of a place's social and cultural capital (Bertela, 2011). Under these conditions it is important to highlight the role and the importance of food as a basic element which attracts tourists. (Fox, 2007).

According to some authors (Tikkanen, 2007), gastronomy interacts with tourism in four distinct manners as an attraction in its own right which the destination can use to promote itself; as one component of the tourism product, in which it is used to establish food routes; as an experience, due to the existence of one or a few places where the cuisine on offer has acquired a very high level and has become famous in its own right; and as a component of the local culture sustained by a series of food festivals.

Furthermore, food tourism is better developed in localities where the cuisine is better connected with the local culture (Riley, 2005). Thus, gastronomy has the potential to develop tourist destinations and it is therefore fundamental to use local ingredients, quality foodstuffs, and to preserve and teach the traditional cooking methods.

At the same time, the existence of several food routes; organized activities such as food tasting events in restaurants; food festivals; and the recommendations and advice given by specialized organizations can endorse the quality of the local cuisine and increase the number of tourists (Smith and Xiao, 2008). Looking at this context, food routes and culinary tourism combine the local food resources together with cultural and environmental factors and must also count on the presence of actors such as restaurants, hotels and travel agencies (Corigliano, 2002).

The development of tourism nowadays it is paradoxical, it generates simultaneous processes of globalization and appreciation for local resources. Tourist destinations are indebted to maintain competitiveness in an increasing competitive environment and engaged in a constant struggle to maintain a part of the market. The world is becoming more open; however, tourists seek experiences based on identity and local culture. Also, the gastronomy is an opportunity to revive and diversify tourism, promote the local economic increase, involving different professional sectors (manufacturers / suppliers, chefs, markets, etc.), and bringing new uses to primary sectors.

This primary role of gastronomy in destination choice and tourist consumption resulted in increased for gastronomical offers based on high quality local products and strengthening a separated market for gastronomic tourism (Gheorghe et al., 2014). Gastronomic tourism as a special tourism product, a component of sustainable local development (Stănculescu et al., 2016).

Gastronomic tourism is organized in small groups, which spend more than regular tourists asking for more specific services, are wary of uniformity, are not kitsch fans and appreciate the quality of consumed products at the end, through this type of tourism are aimed the following objectives: life experiences of local people to attend cultural activities. Through the travel, tourists leave their problems and concerns at home and integrate in a crowd of people imitating the experiences with the same zeal and vigor as the local people are living (Chemnasiri and Kaewmoung, 2008).

In other words, gastronomic tourism becomes a catalyst for the revival of local micro-economy processes, awareness of the value of traditional knowledge associated with local gastronomy for raising living standards. Gastronomy is thus defined as a tourist destination

with beneficial effects in the whole regional economy through the four categories: recreational, existential, reorientation and gastronomic experimentation.

Beyond the profit-orientation, a tourism company must get actively involved in the development of the communities in which it operates. (Țigu et al., 2016).

Tourists who practice existential gastronomic tourism wish to know gastronomic products with local taste, recipes, production mode, innovative and traditional forms, thus becoming catalysts for the revitalization of the connection between rural and urban areas, with restaurants that become part of a concrete regionalization process by promoting local gastronomy either in a traditional or innovative context.

3. Research methodology

To analyse tourist's preferences for practicing gastronomic tourism and the involvement of rural tourism operators in the project "Sibiu – European Gastronomic Region", research was carried out throughout the year 2016. Thereby, on one hand, there have been questioned 160 tourists accommodated 95 rural and agro-tourist guesthouses, from which 78 were from Mărginimea Sibiului and 17 from Hârtibaciului Valley, two micro regions of the county representative for rural tourism activities, and on the other hand, there were discussions held with the 95 guesthouse's managers.

The questionnaire, developed as a working tool, included useful data in quantitative and qualitative analysis, therefore there were taking into consideration aspects such as: the need for the question and whether the respondents have the ability to remember, possibility influenced by the time elapsed since the occurrence of the event, the existence of a stimulus or of an auxiliary element; determining the method of answering the question: open questions, closed questions (with optionally answer); determination of the language used: when writing the questions there have been used simple, clear words there have been avoided key questions and confusing questions, but also the implicit alternatives and assumptions. At the same time, the estimates were avoided and the respondent's reference framework was taken into consideration; determining the sequence of questions by observing the criteria of logical and psychological nature; determining the physical characteristics of the questionnaire, that form to the respondent a certain image of the seriousness of the study initiated by us.

Statistical data was used in order to establish the survey base offered by the National Tourism Authority – The list of reception facilities with classified functions. Meanwhile, the following formula was used to determine the size of the sample:

$$n = t^2 * p * (1-p) / e^2 \quad (1)$$

where:

n – the size of the sample;

t – the theoretical value of the accepted probability (it is usually set $t = 1,96$ for a confidence level of 95%);

p – the percentage in which the population has the sampling feature (usually = 0,50);

e - the tolerance limit for acceptable representativeness (there are accepted values between 1% and maximum 5%).

After applying these formulas, the sample obtained will be corrected according to the size of the total population using the formula:

$$n1 = n / [1 + (n-1)/N] \tag{2}$$

where:

n1 – the size of the corrected sample;

n – the size of the obtained sample;

N – the total population.

Therefore, to determine the sample size at a maximum permissible error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, the calculations were the following:

$$n = 1,96 \cdot 2 \cdot 0,5 \cdot (1-0,5) / 0,052 = 384,16$$

and the correction for the final sample, taken into consideration a number of 126 of guesthouses – according the above mentioned report:

$$n1 = 384,16 / [1 + (384,16 - 1) / 126] = 95 \text{ guesthouses have been questioned.}$$

At the same time, to increase the representativeness of the sample, a layered sampling scheme was applied; see the following table:

Table no. 1: Layered sampling data

The tour operator	Number of units	Micro region	Number of units	Share in total (%)	Size of the sub-sample
The touristic unit with accommodation functions (house-guest)	126	Mărginimea Sibiului	103	81,74	78
		Hârtibaciului Valley	23	18,26	17
TOTAL	126	--	126	100	95

The data obtained on the basis of the research questionnaire, have been processed with the computer programs SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). At the same time, we used the following analysis models to achieve the objectives: descriptive data analysis; the Chi-square test to determinate the correlation between the number of tourists interested in practicing gastronomic tourism and the chosen area.

4. Results and discussions

Gastronomic tourism is a new form of tourism niche trying to achieve a perfect balance between helpful and pleasant, between the daily needs of food and a dining experience that can leave an extraordinary imprint for the tourist. Consumption is actually an integral part of the travel experience, which is equally a consumption of places, customs and traditions and also a local flavors consumption through specific dishes.

More and more tourists from the world seek to live new experiences and gastronomy is one such experience. The concept of gastronomy is applicable to tourists planning a stay fully or partially, in order to taste local products or take part in activities that are related to gastronomy.

Even if the kitchen is not the main motivation for choosing a destination, being a second or third option regarding the selection criteria, gastronomy is an important point for the current research. Gastronomic tourism is a growing phenomenon that is emerging as a new form of tourism, reflected in innovative tourism products, because a third of the travel budget is spent on food consumption. For this reason, the local cuisine is an important factor in terms of quality of holidays.

Under these conditions, Romanian tourists, generally people with average incomes, are interested in purchasing a package of services for a stay in the countryside (which duration shall not exceed two to three days) which consists of accommodation in a rural guesthouse or agro-tourist guesthouse and dining services in the same units, or establishments offering a traditional menu, located nearby. Foreign tourists spend generally more money for traditional gastronomic experience and are interested in offers of tour operators offering packages that include dining services in different formulas: bed and breakfast, half board, full guesthouse etc. with traditional menu. The average cost of a day's accommodation with full board and additional services amounts to about 60-70 euros / tourist and a large number of foreign tourists spends more than € 500 for a package which can reach up to five - six days.

In the Mărginimea Sibiului concentration zone of accommodation there were included the 18 localities that traditionally define the ethno-folk area (Boița, Fântânele, Galeș, Gura Râului, Jina, Orlat, Poiana Sibiu, Poplaca, Rășinari, Râul Sadului, Rod , Sadu, Săliște, Sibiel, Tălmăcel, Tălmăciu, Tilișca and Vale), plus three other towns in the vicinity of the area (Cristian, Cislădie and Cislădioara). Among the localities mentioned above, the most important accommodation capacity is in localities Rășinari, Sibiel, Gura Râului and Cislădioara, summing nearly two thirds of the number of beds available in this area.

From the fieldwork analysis, it was found that units with a low degree of comfort (2 stars) predominate both in number and size of accommodation's capacity, followed by those with an average degree of comfort (3 stars), which consolidates about a quarter of the total accommodation capacity of the area under consideration. A notable number of units have the possibility to rent ATVs to tourists (17%) or offer sleigh rides in the winter (33%).

Although the specific gastronomy is one of the attractions of this area, few accommodations units have their own restaurants (24%), the majority preferring to provide tourists an equipped kitchen, barbecue in the courtyard and dining room where you can dine. However, the number of guesthouses preparing meals for tourists is bigger, not necessarily as part of organized services of a restaurant. Providing a parking space for visitors who travel by cars is a priority for the accommodation units from this area; moreover, there is a high availability (33% of units) to provide the tourist including auto transport to and from the accommodation unit (transfer from airport / train station).

The micro region of Hârtibaciu Valley, a multicultural space with an unusual ethno-folk dowry, with remarkable cultural and tourist traditions, can be a landmark in national agro-tourism. In addition to the offer of gourmet products and diversified services, rural tourism also has a large dispersion in space (agro-touristic) and is not assimilated to mass tourism, and the impact on the natural and humanized environment is, in most cases, small proportions.

The statistical data on the accommodation units in the villages of the Hârtibaciu Valley are missing, which is why it is impossible to establish an evolution regarding the number of units with tourist accommodation function, the number of places and the occupancy index. On-line booking sites contain several guesthouses where tourists who come to Hârtibaci Valley can board and enjoy the traditional food of the area, among this can be mentioned: BioHaus Nucet; Any guesthouse, the “Hârtibaci Valley” house; Ivvis guesthouse; Elisabeta guesthouse; “Stejărișu” guesthouse; Cornățel farm.

The study identified the factors that make a next visit to a gastronomic event more enjoyable. The gastronomic experience is of greatest importance (Figure no.1) and the food festivals and events are seen as an important part of the marketing of food tourism. They offer to tourists additional reasons to visit a destination over and above the regular product, as the events provide a concentrated and, often, unique supply in a limited time period. Considering the list with attractive destinations the tourist aims to visit, gastronomic events might change his/her priorities. Festivals and events represent effective instruments in attracting first time visitors as well as repeat visitors due to the differential advantage they can offer.

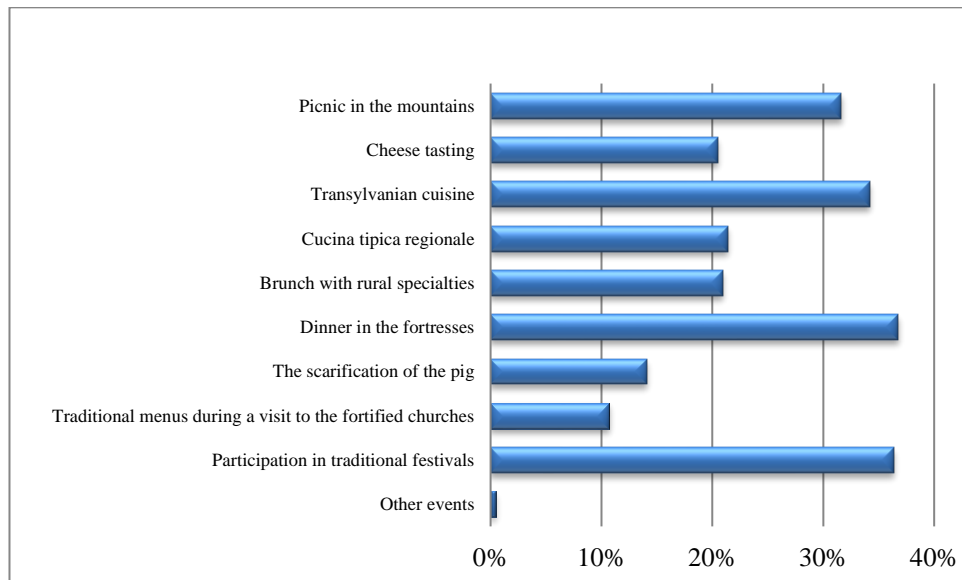


Figure no. 1: Importance of gastronomic events for a future visit to Sibiu Region

An exploratory analysis referring to the satisfaction degree of the interviewed Romanian tourists indicates a share of 25.2% in preferences for gastronomic tourism, they being attracted more by the beauty of the landscape (53.0%), the diversity of the cultural heritage (45.7%), the leisure and recreational activities and resting. The 71.36% of the respondents have visited the Sibiu Region at least three times and 11.9% twice. The defining element for the gastronomy of the Sibiu Region, chosen by the interviewed tourists, confirms their preferences for the traditional gastronomy (80.3%). The Romanian tourists who have visited the Sibiu Region have been also impressed by the local services and hospitality (33.3%), the quality of the menus (11.9%) and the atmosphere in the public catering establishments. (Figure no. 2)

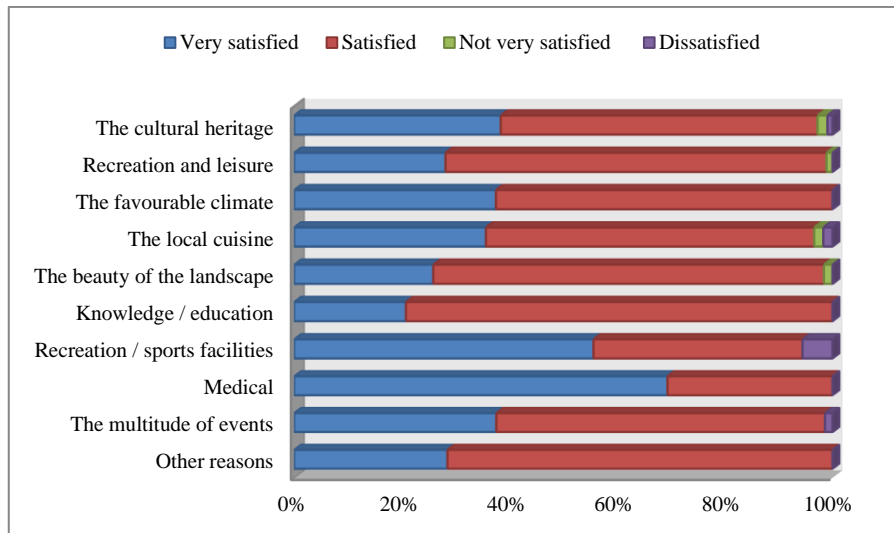


Figure no. 2: The reason for choosing a holiday destination considering the satisfaction degree

The types of gastronomic events preferred by tourists who visit Sibiu Region refer to the dinners organized in the fortresses, the participation to the traditional festivals (the Cheese and Brandy Festivals, the Peony Festival, etc.) and the events dedicated to the Transylvanian cuisine, mountain picnics or brunches comprising rural specialties. Regarding the degree of satisfaction with the gastronomy of the Sibiu Region (if we are referring to the quality of the catering services or the organization of gastronomic events), the results are generally high (36.0% declared to be very satisfied, while 59.0 % satisfied).

Regarding the existence of a correlation between the number of tourists interested in practicing gastronomic tourism in the rural area and the chosen area, using the Chi-square test we have identified that during the period 2013-2016 the number of tourists is the influence of a chosen tourist area – Mărginimea Sibiului and Hârtibaci Valley.

Thereby, in 2013, in Hârtibaci Valley less than 10% of tourists were interested in practicing gastronomic tourism in the countryside, unlike the Mărginimea Sibiului which was much better in the 11-20% category (table no. 2 and table no. 3.).

Table no. 2: Chi-square test to establish the relationship between the percentage of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2013

	Value	Number of degrees of freedom	Level of significance
Pearson χ^2	9.108 ^a	4	.058
Probability Report	13.771	4	.008
Number of valid cases	92		

Note: a. 6 cells (60.0%) is expected to be less than 5. The minimum expected value is, 16.

Table no. 3: The correlation between the percentages of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the rural area and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2013

Touristic area		Percentage of tourists in 2013					Total
		<10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	>50%	
Hârtibaciu Valley	Number of boarding houses Residue adjusted	15 3.0	0 -1.9	0 -1.6	0 -.4	0 -.6	15
Mărginimea Sibiului	Number of boarding houses Residue adjusted	46 -3.0	16 1.9	12 1.6	1 .4	2 .6	77
Total	Number of boarding houses	61	16	12	1	2	92

We note that in the category <10% of tourists interested in practicing gastronomic tourism in the countryside, Hârtibaciu Valley has the adjusted residency -3 and Mărginimea Sibiului 3, this being the category that influenced the addition.

Differences between the two analyzed areas existed in 2014, so in the Hârtibaciu Valley less than 10% of the surveyed tourists were interested in practicing gastronomic tourism in the rural area, but compared to the previous year, the Mărginimea Sibiului ranked much better in the 21-30% of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism (table no.4 and table no. 5).

Table no. 4: Chi-square test to establish the relationship between the percentage of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2014

	Value	Number of degrees of freedom	Level of significance
Pearson χ^2	7.211 ^a	4	.125
Probability Report	10.396	4	.034
Number of valid cases	95		

Note: a. 6 cells (60.0%) is expected to be less than 5. The minimum expected value is, 36.

Table no. 5: Correlation between the share of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2014

Touristic area		Percentage of tourists in 2014					Total
		<10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	>50%	
Hârtibaciu Valley	Number of boarding houses Residue adjusted	15 2.5	2 -.8	0 -2.0	0 -.7	0 -.7	17
Mărginimea Sibiului	Number of boarding houses Residue adjusted	43 -2.5	16 .8	15 2.0	2 .7	2 .7	78
Total	Number of boarding houses	58	18	15	2	2	95

In the next year - 2015 - between 21-30% of the surveyed tourists were interested in practicing gastronomic tourism in rural areas especially in the guesthouses of Mărginimea Sibiului, unlike Hârtibaciu Valley, which was much better in the category of 11-20% of tourists interested in gastronomic tourism practice in rural areas. Instead, we notice in the 21-30% category that

Hârtibaciului Valley has the adjusted residual -2, and the Mărginimea Sibiului has 2. This is the category that influenced the dependence in 2015 (tables no.6 and no.7).

Table no. 6: Chi-square test to establish the relationship between the percentage of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2015

	Value	Number of degrees of freedom	Level of significance
Pearson χ^2	6.903 ^a	4	.141
Probability Report	10.788	4	.029
Number of valid cases	95		

Note: a. 6 cells (60.0%) is expected to be less than 5. The minimum expected value is, 54

Table no. 7: Correlation between the share of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2015

Touristic area		Percentage of tourists in 2015					Total
		<10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	>50%	
Hârtibaciului Valley	Number of boarding houses	11	6	0	0	0	17
	Residue adjusted	1.1	1.3	-2.0	-1.1	-0.8	
Mărginimea Sibiului	Number of boarding houses	39	16	15	5	3	78
	Residue adjusted	-1.1	-1.3	2.0	1.1	.8	
Total	Number of boarding houses	50	22	15	5	3	95

In 2016, the Chi-square test revealed that, as in the previous year, Sibiu's Mărginimea ranked well in the category of 21-30% of tourists interested in practicing gastronomic tourism, and Hârtibaciului Valley in the category of 11-20% (table no. 8. and no. 9.).

Table no. 8: Chi-square test to establish the relationship between the percentage of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2016

	Value	Number of degrees of freedom	Level of significance
Pearson χ^2	11.222 ^a	5	.047
Probability Report	12.708	5	.026
Number of valid cases	95		

Note: a. 7 cells (58.3%) is expected to be less than 5. The minimum expected value is, 18.

Table no. 9: The correlation between the percentages of tourists interested in practicing gourmet tourism in the countryside and the area chosen as a holiday destination in 2016

Touristic area		Percentage of tourists in 2016						Total
		<10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	>50%	
Hârtibaciului Valley	Number of boarding houses	9	7	1	0	0	0	17
	Residue adjusted	.4	2.8	-1.8	-1.3	-.5	-.8	
Mărginimea Sibiului	Number of boarding houses	37	10	20	7	1	3	78
	Residue adjusted	-.4	-2.8	1.8	1.3	.5	.8	
Total	Number of boarding houses	46	17	21	7	1	3	95

Thus, the data presented above indicate on the one hand an increasing interest of tourists for practicing gastronomic tourism in rural areas, especially Marginimea Sibiului and Hârtibaciului Valley, and on the other hand the fact that gastronomic tourism development strategies must bring a new concept of integrated and systemic approach to the role of tourism activity. Gastronomic tourism can contribute to raising the living standards of the rural population, especially living in the most isolated places such as the mountainous area with fragile natural environments and humanities. Accessibility facilities, the technical utilities, travel, etc., made in order to receive tourists facilitates both household income growth, local economic upsurge, and the establishment of social relations, cultural contacts, professional resident population, leading to the improvement of civilization in space connected to tourism.

Not least, gastronomic tourism helps to a better knowledge and attention to the environment by creating the possibility of leisure and pleasure in nature to discover and protect local traditional culture and nature.

Conclusions

Tourism activities measured under the patronage of gastronomic tourism opportunities specific to the local population and the tourism industry have to use natural resources in a sustainable manner and appreciate the valuable natural and cultural objectives. Once the importance of gastronomic tourism has been recognized for the protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage for the economic and social involution of local communities from rural areas and the increase of nature travel experience, efforts must be made to efficiently use the rich heritage of Sibiu County.

The rural development strategies in Sibiu aim to bring a new concept of integrated and systemic approach to the role of promoting traditional activities in which gastronomy plays an important role. Sustainability is highlighted by the market's demand for specialized tourist products that integrate local traditions professionally promote the originality of tourist products from the area. The concept of globalization is thus understood as an opportunity to make public, on a wide scale, the types of tourism carried out in different areas while preserving the personal footprint of each region.

In order to organize and promote gastronomic tourism in the rural areas of Sibiu it is necessary to establish partnerships between tourism providers (households, farmers in the rural community), local authorities and other suppliers of tourism services, travel agencies, etc. Only through collaboration can be solved the major problems of progress and promotion of this form of tourism, in the context of the social-economic evolution of the rural community, with beneficial effects on the local tourism. Without a general growth of the infrastructure of tourist facilities, one cannot talk about a competitive tourism in the micro regions or localities.

Following the knowledge of the type of gastronomic events preferred by tourists who visit Sibiu as well as the reason for choosing a holiday destination based on the degree of satisfaction that resulted from the research done, the administrators of the rural and agrotouristic guesthouses should be actively entailed by diversifying the offer of mass tourism services, by designing new tourist products incorporating traditional reinterpreted recipes accompanied by the story of the place and source of raw material. These initiatives generate a sustainable development by highlighting cultural and gastronomic interferences that have

put their identity mark on places. At the meeting between the local producers and the board administrators, the latter as well as the representatives of the local restaurants, have welcomed the idea that the list of menus should have recorded the sources of local supply, which would offer confidence to consumers and also represent a local business card.

The inclusion in the guesthouse's restaurant menus of the products specific to the regional gastronomy represents a real opportunity to increase the visibility in the agenda "European Gastronomic Region Sibiu 2019".

It is necessary that the actors who operate in a destination (producers/ suppliers, farmers, fishermen, cooks, catering facilities, reception units with accommodation functions, local tourism associations, etc.) to be involved in defining and managing the tourist products offered by the gastronomic tourism. The demand for traditional gastronomic products is increasing, therefore, many companies need to conduct studies to better understanding of the consumer's requirements for these products characterized by the use of traditional recipes, preservative-free and natural ingredients, and by mentioning the area where the product was fabricated. The last decade has marked a turning point characterized by consumers' trends for organic and traditional products that are capable of satisfying consumers' requirements regarding the authenticity and safety-related terms that contain less additives and do not contain genetically modified ingredients.

Through a greater collaboration and involvement and through a rigorous supervision by tourism authorities and actors from the tourism sector, gastronomy can become a profitable activity for both rural community and the owners of rural or agro-touristic properties, as well as for local governments that provide a supportive environment for the tourism development in the region.

References

- Bertella, G., 2011. Knowledge in food tourism: the case of Lofoten and Maremma Toscana. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14(4), pp. 355-371.
- Chemnasiri, N. and Kaewmoung, D., 2008. Farm development to become agro-tourism area by community involvement in Saraburi, Thailand. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 10(Special No. 2), pp. 184-194
- Corigliano, M. A., 2002. *The route to quality: Italian gastronomy networks in operation*. In: A.M. Hjalager and G. Richards eds., 2002. *Tourism and Gastronomy*. London: Routledge, pp. 166-185.
- Diaconescu, D.M., Moraru, R. and Stănciulescu, G., 2016. Considerations on Gastronomic Tourism as a Component of Sustainable Local Development. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 18(Special No. 10), pp. 999-1014.
- Dinu, V., Savoiu, G. and Dabija, D.C., 2017. *A concepere, a redactare și a publica un articol științific. O abordare în contextul cercetării economice*. 2nd ed. Bucharest: Editura ASE
- Fox, R., 2007. Reinventing the gastronomic identity of Croatian tourist destinations. *Hospitality Management*, 26(3), pp. 546-559.
- Gaztelumendi, I., 2012. *Global trends in food tourism*. Madrid: WTO World Tourism Organization.

- Gheorghe, G., Nistoreanu, B.G. and Filip, A., 2013. Traditional products – vectors of sustainable development on the regional and national markets. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 15 (Special No. 7), pp. 645-658.
- Gheorghe, G., Tudorache, P. and Nistoreanu, P., 2014. Gastronomic tourism, a new trend for contemporary tourism? *Cactus Tourism Journal*, 9(1), pp. 12-21.
- Lee, K.-H., Packer, J. and Scott, N., 2015. Travel lifestyle preferences and destination activity choices of Slow Food members and non-members. *Tourism Management*, 46, pp. 1-10.
- Montanari, A. and Staniscia, B., 2009. Culinary tourism as a tool for regional re-equilibrium. *European Planning Studies*, 17(10), pp. 1463-1483.
- Riley, M., 2005. Food on beverage management. A review of change. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17(1), pp. 88-93.
- Tikkanen, I., 2007. Maslow's hierarchy and food tourist in Finland: five cases. *British Food Journal*, 109(9), pp. 721-734.
- Țigu, G., Popescu, D. and Hornoiu, R.I., 2016. Corporate Social Responsibility – an European Approach through the Tourism SME's Perspectives. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 18(Special No. 10), pp. 742-756