

OPPORTUNITIES TO CAPITALIZE THE RESOURCES OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

Virgil Nicula¹

University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Simona Spânu

University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania

Christian Hell

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Abstract

This paper presents some opportunities for developing a new way to capitalize local resources through gastronomic tourism. Gastronomic tourism products incorporate environmental values, landscape, parts of the local culture, traditions, local cuisine, traditional costumes, local food and the rituals associated with the gastronomic experience - how foods are served and presented, ingredients, preparation methods. Identification of the culinary landscape tourist destination is one of the challenges of creating tourism products, in which an important role have the agritourist pensions from the five micro regions of Sibiu County. 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 tourist destination 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. In order to organize and promote the gastronomic tourism in the rural areas of Sibiu, it is necessary the establishment of partnerships among tourism providers (households / farmers in the rural community), local authorities, other economic providers of tourism related services, travel agencies etc. Only by working together they can solve the major problems of development and promotion of this form of tourism in the context of socio-economic development of rural communities, with beneficial effects on local tourism. Without a general infrastructure development and tourist facilities, one cannot speak of a competitive tourism in either micro-regions or localities.

Keywords:

Gastronomy, tourism, culture, sustainable development, environment values.

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Introduction

Heritage is an indicator of identity and a feature that differentiates a particular area, a certain community. The tourist destination must benefit from the attractiveness that motivates the choice of the tourists to visit the specific services of the accommodation, food access, based on transport infrastructure availability by complex tourist packages that can be offered to the tourists based on their stay in the tourist destination and support services that meet the needs of tourism consumers. The natural and material heritage of a tourist destination is a competitive advantage of the area and its inclusion in the development of new markets and tourism products is the key to creating a stimulating economic environment for local communities with real and harmonious benefits connected to the protection of the environment.

The value that the territory acquires in terms of heritage becomes a strategic factor for its development. At present, there are many consecrated destinations that specialize on certain segments of tourists in order to cope in terms of quality and innovation, more fiercely from emerging countries. Such an example can be based on the development of gastronomic tourism in the Sibiu region as a limited segment of niche, within the competitive tourism offers. In this context, it is necessary to develop and diversify the tourist offer that promotes “The traditional gastronomy in the locality of Sibiu County” aiming to improve the performance of local actors who are present on the local market by increasing the quality

¹ niculavirgil@yahoo.com

of services and providing lands or buildings by local municipalities tax exemption of some taxes, connection to sewerage, water networks, etc.

1 Method

In this paper, a lot of data has been used regarding the total touristic incoming in Sibiu County from 2007 until 2017. For the same period, we also used data concerning the evolution of the number of nights spent in Sibiu County (no. day/tourist), because it is a correlation between these data and the interest of the tourists in practicing gastronomic tourism in Sibiu County. The data show a continuous increase in the number of tourist arrivals and the number of overnight stays, which shows the interest for this area.

2 Harnessing the gastronomic potential, a chance for sustainable rural development

Besides the development of specific tourist products that can increase the attractiveness of the five micro-regions of Sibiu County making the tourist's stay more enjoyable, it is also necessary to stimulate some activities such as the production of handicrafts that can be used in the folk art fairs and handicraft organization of folklore shows all accompanied by traditional product development.

Supporting tourism investments that promote traditional cuisine specific to each micro region or initiatives to capitalize on the tourism's potential can be focused by accessing European funds in the current 2014-2020. Increasing the role of the local Tourism Fairs and diversifying the offer of tourist information which operates in different localities, is established in objectives that are achieved until 2019 and after, when Sibiu will be a European gastronomic region.

Expanding tourism forms such as rural tourism, agritourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism are some of the most dynamic forms of travel which gives local communities a chance to grow economically, representing an alternative to the decline of agricultural activity by capitalizing on the local resources, better employment, encouraging entrepreneurship and increasing individual and collective energies.

In the strategy of organization and promoting of rural tourism and agritourism, as well as of cultural and gastronomic tourism in Sibiu County, it is necessary to establish a partnership between the providers of tourism services (householders, farmers in the local community), local authorities, other economic agents' providers of tourist services, travel agencies, etc.

Only through this co-operation can be solved the major problems of the development and the promotion of these forms in the tourism context of the social economic development of the rural communities with beneficial effects on local tourism. Without the development of the general infrastructure and of the technical and tourist technical facilities of the initiation of measures for the protection of the natural and built environment, one cannot speak of a competitive tourism at the level of each micro region or localities.

Through the development of gastronomic tourism it can be ensured the expansion of traditional economic activities, without being marginalized or replaced, in order for the local economy not to be subordinated to the external and internal exchanges and influences. The tourism activities developed under the emblem of the gastronomic tourism offer specific opportunities, the local population and tourist industry needing to use sustainable resources and appreciate valuable natural and cultural objectives.

Once recognized the importance of gourmet tourism for the protection and preservation of natural and cultural heritage, for the economic and social development of local communities in rural areas and for the growth of tourist experience, every effort should be made efficiently for the capitalization on the rich heritage of Sibiu County. The development of tourism nowadays is paradoxes, generates simultaneous processes of globalization and appreciation of the local resources. Tourist destinations are obligated to maintain their competitive environment in growth and engage a constant struggle to keep a part of the market. The world becomes more open but with all of these, travellers look for experiences based on identity and uniqueness.

3 Gastronomic tourism, component of cultural tourism

Tourist gastronomy as a special touristic product is a component of sustainable local development (Stănciulescu et al., 2016). In other words, gastronomic tourism becomes a catalyst for the revival of local microeconomic processes, the awareness of the traditional knowledge associated with local gastronomy for raising living standards. Thus, gastronomy is defined as a tourist destination with beneficial effects in the entire regional economy through the four categories: recreational, existential, reorientation and gastronomic experiments.

Gastronomy has become an indispensable element in knowing the culture and lifestyle of a territory. The kitchen embodies all the traditional values associated with new trends in tourism: respect for culture and tradition, healthy lifestyle, authenticity, durability and feelings associated with it. Also, gastronomy is an opportunity to revive and diversify tourism, to promote the local economic development, involving different pro categories (producers/ suppliers, food workers, managers or rural tourist boarding houses, merchants, etc.) and superior capitalization of primary sectors. This main role of gastronomy in choosing destination and tourism consumption has led to the increase of gastronomic offers based on quality local products and the consolidation of a market niche specific to gastronomic tourism.

The development of gastronomic tourism worldwide is obvious, this representing one of the most dynamic segments of the tourism market. The natural resources that it transforms in touristic products make it possible to identify the territory where these come from, with visible effects on keeping the national, regional or local identity, in an increasing globalized world.

Gastronomic tourism is organized in small groups which spend more than average tourists, request more specific services, and are not uniform, do not support kitsch products and appreciate at the end the quality of the consumed products. Romanian tourists (table no. 1), in general middle-income people, are interested in purchasing a package of accommodation services that include staying in rural areas of no more than two days accommodation services at a rural or agritourist board house and meal services within the same establishments if they also have a family restaurant or establishments offering a traditional menu located nearby.

Foreign tourists generally spend more money on traditional gastronomic experiences and are interested in offers from tour operators which include meal services in various formulas: half-board accommodation, accommodation with breakfast, full board accommodation, etc. with traditional menus. The average cost of one day of full board accommodation and additional services rises up about to ~60/70 euro/tourist and a number of foreign tourists' allocated more than 500 euros for a stay that can reach up to five - six days.

Table no. 1: Evolution of the number of tourist arrivals by types of tourists in the Central Region and in Sibiu County, during 2007-2017

Types of tourists	Localization	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	Central Region	1329992	1291514	1072785	1126887
	Sibiu County	327925	287103	244708	228195
Romanians	Central Region	1028324	1023032	859527	898820
	Sibiu County	235873	214926	188900	166902
Foreigners	Central Region	301668	268482	213258	228067
	Sibiu County	92052	72177	55808	61293
Types of tourists	Localization	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total	Central Region	1435771	1654856	1859853	1953022
	Sibiu County	263684	285136	329986	355698
Romanians	Central Region	1166422	1358256	1538809	1593685
	Sibiu County	190374	207762	253151	265905
Foreigners	Central Region	269349	296600	321044	359337
	Sibiu County	73310	77374	76835	89793
Types of tourists	Localization	2015	2016	2017	
Total	Central Region	2332362	2585938	2856558	
	Sibiu County	438611	503620	565346	
Romanians	Central Region	1901886	2094943	2307137	
	Sibiu County	328071	360766	401406	
Foreigners	Central Region	430476	490995	549421	
	Sibiu County	110540	142854	163940	

Source: insse.ro, Tempo online, 2018

As for the situation overnight stays, data recorded in official statistics show a growing preference for accommodation in Sibiu (table no. 2).

Table no. 2: Overnight stays (no. day/tourist) in tourist accommodation structures by types of structures in Sibiu County (2007-2017)

Types of structures	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Hotels	321959	263496	232394	300689	387928	390203	417901	438272	485275	505516	508844
Hotels for young people	14605	10079	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
Hostels	:	:	7615	5604	8294	3980	805	6023	9225	10268	5718
Motels	38085	26863	16572	10517	10115	6791	9320	8353	13414	16707	16450
Inns	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	1998	2882	4265
Tourist villas	30102	31917	29238	24399	9000	9635	8098	16283	37023	37984	51426
Tourist cottages	14209	14395	14644	9282	8213	14506	22036	22465	23735	25542	31763
Bungalows	:	:	:	576	626	875	1018	2143	273	189	1125
Campgrounds	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	115	2889	4971	7620
Touristic houses	4487	4107	1323	:	:	:	:	:	2194	570	1115
Camps	9719	6038	9187	14024	10176	18632	22166	26003	17599	13630	18631
Tourists guesthouse	54058	48180	26845	11078	9167	15139	19714	19798	77986	119778	145406
Agritourist guesthouses	42876	54267	43854	25409	18117	30499	39449	42050	69335	92258	123637

Source: insse.ro, Tempo online, 2018

After 2017, against the backdrop of the economic and financial crisis, the number of overnight stays declined. In 2013, it was again at a value slightly above that of 2007, and since then the number of overnights stays has registered a sustained, continuous growth (fig. 1).

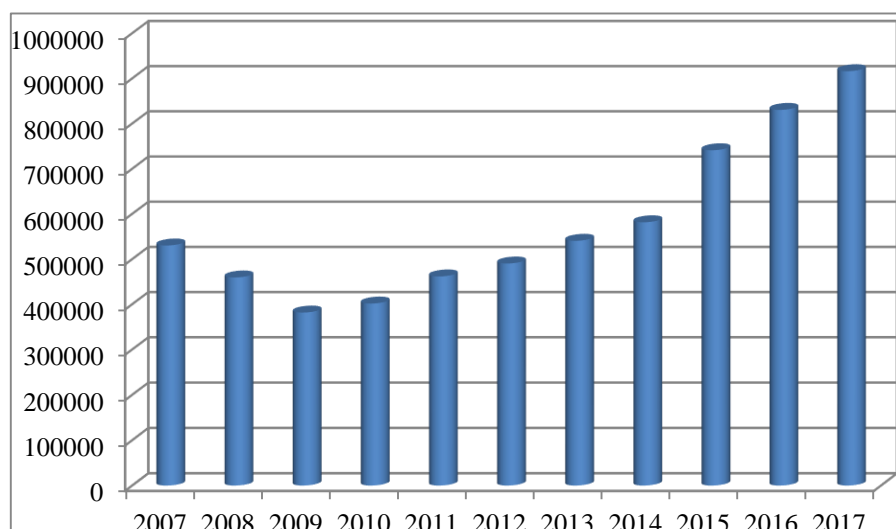


Fig. no. 1: The evolution of the overnight stays (no. day/tourist) in Sibiu County (2007-2017)

Source: data from insse.ro, Tempo online, 2018

Gastronomic tourism is part of cultural tourism. The gastronomic tourism products embrace environmental values, landscape, local culture traditions, local cuisine, traditional costumes, local food and rituals associated with gastronomic experience – how the food products are served and presented, ingredients, cooking methods. Identifying the culinary landscape with the tourist destination is one of the challenges to creating tourist products (Bertella, G., 2011, Nicula V., Spânu Simona, Ciortea G., 2012).

Gastronomic tourism represents a new form of niche tourism that is trying to create a perfect balance between useful and enjoyable, daily food needs and culinary experience that can leave an extraordinary print to the tourist. Consumption is actually an integral part of the tourist experience that is equally custom-made by habits and traditions as well as local

consumption of local flavours through specific dishes. More and more tourists search through the world new experiences and gastronomy is such an experience. The concept of gastronomic tourism is applicable to tourists who plan a full or a partial stay, in order to taste the local products or to take part at activities that are related to gastronomy (Riley, M., 2005).

Even if cuisine is not the main motivation for choosing a destination, being a second or third option in terms of selection criteria that are called an important point for current research. Gastronomic tourism is a growing phenomenon that develops as a new form of materialized in innovative tourist products due to the fact that one-third of the travel budget is spent on food consumption. For this reason, the local cuisine is an important factor in the quality of holidays.

One of the most used definitions of gastronomic tourism is proposed by Lee and contributors: gastronomic tourism is “a trip to regions rich in gastronomic resources to generate recreational or entertainment experiences that include visiting to primary or secondary producers of gourmet products, festivals, gastronomic fairs, demonstration events, cooking food, tasting or any related to food activities”. This trip of experiences is in trance with a lifestyle that involves experimenting with learning from different cultures and accumulation of knowledge and lessons learned by tasting traditional products about the qualities or attributes related to culinary specialities produced in the visited regions. The gastronomic tourism experience is considered as such when all of the above is the main reason or the main motivation to travel for the visitors of a particular destination (Lee, K.-H., Packer, J. & Scott, N., 2015)

Culture is a set of knowledge and skills behaviours that shape a society that relies on the feeling of belonging. The gourmet touristic offers are viable if the service providers or local producers take into account the cultural and historical heritage of a destination by testing gastronomic experimentation and product comparison. Also, it needs to be considered the emergence of new cultural values that enhance the richness and cultural diversity of a region.

In this respect, the tradition and innovation co-exist in a natural way. Gastronomic tradition is a process between an ongoing evolution and the challenges for the professional are to incorporate innovation, to renew and adapt its own offers to new consumer culture needs.

Recent events in the sustainable development of tourism worldwide, as well as in tourism destination management, are based on attracting and involving visitors to the cultural life of destination towns, well explained and interpreted through cuisine, local products and all related services and activities. Destinations that want to promote gourmet tourism need to get involved at different levels of quality improvement: the protection and recognition of local products, the development of a competitive offer and continuing professional training throughout the gourmet tourism chain to increase visitors' satisfaction. Destinations should formulate a credible and authentic message about tourist products that incorporate local gastronomy, as current tourists are much better informed, making a decision to purchase a package of services long before traveling and their experience is shared on social networks, which have a particularly strong impact on young people.

It is necessary that all actors operating in a destination (producers / suppliers, farmers, fishermen, chefs, public catering establishments, local public administration, accommodation establishments, county tourism associations, etc.) to be involved in defining and managing the products offered by gourmet tourism. Demand for traditional products is growing, which is why many companies are conducting studies to better understand consumers' requirements for these products. The main criteria that a food must meet to be considered as traditional can be summarized as follows: no preservatives, traditional recipes, and natural ingredients, mention of the area in which the product was obtained, etc. (Gaztelumendi, I., 2012, Glăvan V., 2003).

The last decade has marked a turning point characterized by increasing consumer trends in organic and traditional products that are able to meet (comply/satisfy) consumers' requirements for authenticity and safety, contain fewer additives and do not contain genetically modified ingredients. However, they are not accessible to most of the population due to high prices and the need to travel in certain geographical areas.

Tradition is a cultural heritage that is passed down from generation to generation and involves knowledge, crafts, rituals, moral codes, and customs. The term “traditional food” is defined as a way of preparing food and nutrition in rural families (Gheorghe, G., Nistoreanu, B.G., Filip, A., 2013).

Traditional food is a food group that includes a wide range of products (spices, cooked foods, beverages), especially for certain countries or tourist areas. Its origin is due to the Italians, who in the 1950s opened the first restaurant offering pizza. The peculiarities of the different geographic areas with which people came into contact through travel, advertising, advertisements, as well as their own experiences contributed to the accumulation of knowledge in the field. Food innovation has a direct impact on the quality of food, including gastronomic value.

4 Sibiu, a gastronomic and cultural destination for 2019

Gastronomy plays an indispensable role in promoting tourism at regional and local level. In the development of gourmet tourism, traditional strategies can offer the opportunity to use strategic tools to appreciate the quality, variety and uniqueness of local products and the gastronomic specificity of a territory. Consequently, the creation of gourmet tourist products is perceived as a priority for tourist destinations that can offer experiences in this regard.

The motivations for choosing the tourist destination “Sibiu - European gastronomic region” are related to cultural and natural attractions, special events and festivals, food experiences in each micro-region, gastronomic connections, social and emotional interaction, and other opportunities for recreation and entertainment. In 2016, Sibiu County received 142,854 tourists with a plus of 29.23% as compared to 2015 and put the county in third place in the national top after Bucharest and Brasov. The city of Sibiu, which does not exceed 150,000 inhabitants, has around 200 restaurants, a number that is negligible. If we report on recent statistics, the number of restaurants per one hundred thousand inhabitants of Sibiu exceeds Amsterdam, Istanbul or Stockholm.

The essence of gourmet tourism is to create a personalized tourist product that will generate additional income for farmers and other local entrepreneurs and ultimately lead to the socio-economic development of the settlement/area, stability demographic and the preservation/protection of the environment and of the cultural-historical heritage, namely sustainable development. Gastronomy tourism remains a complementary activity, seasonal or limited to events and holidays either during the summer period, thus with lower economic impacts, which implies a range of measures to diversify supply and find new solutions for promotion and sales, growth qualitative benefits, in order to increase economic efficiency (Fields, K., 2002, Fox, R., 2007).

Gourmet tourism can help raise the living standards of the rural population, especially those living in more isolated places, such as the mountainous area, fragile natural environments and socio-human. Accessibility facilities, technical-community, tourist, etc., made for the purpose of receiving tourists, facilitate both the increase of household incomes, local economic development, as well as the establishment of social relations, cultural, professional contacts with the resident population, leading to the increase of the degree of civilization in the space connected with tourism (Corigliano, M. A., 2002, Gheorghe, G., Tudorache P. și Nistoreanu, P., 2014).

The development of gastronomic tourism also contributes to the promotion of the image of the rural settlement as an ethno folk entity and not only economic and administrative. It is about promoting tourism in rural areas through the ethno folk tourist village brand, local crafts, customs and gastronomy, the authentic natural environment, all presented in the environment of the traditional ethno folk area. So, we are referring to the village trio - ethno folk area - local gastronomy. The brand image is the rural settlement with ethno folk traditions and the genuine offer of local producers, and the county, which is a temporary administrative entity, can remain an indicative landmark in the country. This brand is stimulating for local authority in the effort to develop the offer and to create facilities for tourism, while protecting/preserving the ethno folk traditions of the rural settlement (Chemnasiri, N. & Kaewmoung, D., 2008, Diaconescu, D.M., Nistoreanu, P., 2013).

In Sibiu County have been identified 11 major cultural influences: Romanian, Saxon, Hungarian, Armenian, Jewish, Roma, Austrian, Turkish, Russian, French and Greek. Gourmet culinary events are conceptualized, that is, always give the participant a reason to experience this experience through stories about the producer, products and recipes, in order to faithfully reflect the personality and specificity of the local cultural space through the design of the dishes, creating a memory that deserves shared and retouched (Hjalager, A.M., 2002).

Each event has its own sensorial context, aspect that facilitates the creation of a cultural knowledge framework for culinary products. This context takes place in the first place with the help of the location (images, smells, sounds), but also by association with a cultural act such as concerts, dances, guided tours, hiking or walking. The events have a social role, establish connections and social relations through the training work (carried out by local communities) and by offering the possibility to know their hosts and their culture, the members of the association placing a special emphasis on promoting the diversity of the local gastronomic culture as an alternative of the region to culinary standardization and globalization (Diaconescu D.M., Moraru R., Stănciulescu Gabriela., 2016).

The actions dedicated to the general public are brought together under the concept “*Discover and understand the local gastronomic culture*” and include a series of events such as: the presentation of gastronomic specialties of various ethnicities in the city of Sibiu; dinner in the city with a menu inspired by special locations in the city centre; promoting local markets as a place to taste and discover local products; promotion of gastronomic specialties of the rural regions in Sibiu County; multicultural specialties from Transylvania; reinterpreted recipes with seasonal products; Romanian boyar specialties.

Conclusions

Gourmet tourism development strategies must bring a new concept of integrated and systemic approach to the role of tourism. Their sustainability is highlighted by the demand on the market for specialized professionals, who are well aware of local traditions and who are eager to professionally promote the originality of existing tourism products in the area. The concept of globalization is thus understood as an opportunity to widely disseminate the types of tourism carried out in different areas, while preserving the personal footprint of each region. Through greater collaboration and involvement and rigorous control on both sides, agro-tourism can become a profitable activity for local organizers and producers as well as for local governments, which provide the framework for local tourism. Gourmet tourism helps to increase awareness and attention to the environment by creating opportunities for leisure in nature and the pleasure of discovering and protecting traditional local culture and nature. For this reason, local actors who create and coordinate activities related to local gastronomy must present an appropriate level of awareness of the cultural and natural values of tourist areas by providing accurate information and using skilled guides or animators. The standard and type of tour service interpretation is planned to meet the interests and needs of the client without damaging or adversely affecting the environment.

The gastronomy to enroll in the cultural heritage of the five micro-regions in Sibiu County represents a competitive advantage of the area and its recognition and inclusion in the development of dedicated tourism products is the key to creating an economic environment in which local communities will have real benefits and will be encouraged to protect the authenticity of this valuable thesaurus.

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