

## **GASTRONOMIC AND FOOD TOURISM AS AN ECONOMIC LOCAL RESOURCE: CASE STUDIES FROM ROMANIA AND ITALY**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to contribute to the literature on food tourism by proposing the concept of place and events linked to food, and to analyze the opportunity of gastronomic tourism for local development around Romania (Sibiu Region) and Italy (Sicily Region). The materials were 336 interviews with tourists. Specially designed questionnaire allowed fast data collection. The questions were of qualitative and quantitative type, useful to encode the expressed opinions of the tourists. The results highlight the need for destination marketing organizations to pay more attention to the link between destination image and food events. It concludes that tourism practices enable the continuity of local foods, reinterpreted in the light of urban consumption. Further research is needed to explain why, despite recommend a food tourism policy integrating upon the preservation and the development of the cultural and ethnic identity, in order to attract tourists.

**Key words:** cultural heritage, food involvement, culinary events, Sicily, Sibiu.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Culinary culture has been influenced by the structural changes that have taken place in our society. Globalization, urbanization, modernization, and migration have modeled and transformed the way in which modern civilization consumes food (UNWTO, 2017). Consumption of food and beverages is directly influenced by factors such as taste, cost, health care, satisfaction, convenience that generates a pattern of behavior and a manifestation of human identity. When new destinations are visited, this behavior pattern of tourists changes because food is, of course, an essential part of any travel experience (Scott & Duncan, 2017). Gastronomic tourism, also called culinary tourism, food tourism

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or enogastronomic tourism, is a niche area of the fast-growing tourism market at the end of childhood, and has a brief history started somewhere in the early 2000s (Hjalager, 2002; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2005). With the emergence of research that focused on food tourism as a separate entity, many researchers consider gastronomic tourism to be a key tourist activity involving a range of experiences (eg. cookery courses, food festivals). Food is often regarded as a supporting experience in tourism, in fact as Yeoman (2012) affirms, food is about new tastes, knowledge and concepts as a symbol in the experience economy. Discovering a destination through its kitchen is an experience not only interesting and satisfying, but also provocative for visitors in this era of globalization. This suggests that the motivation for traveling for gastronomic reasons, to enter the culture of the place in a deeper and more complex way, is an increasing argument to be taken into consideration. Gastronomic experiences can add value to any type of tourist activity, can also be appealing to a wide range of potential consumers. As confirmed in the II Report published by the World Tourism Organization on gastronomy tourism, this tourism segment in fact “offers enormous potential in stimulating local, regional and national economies and enhancing sustainability and inclusion” (World Tourism Organization, UNWTO, 2017), but also a new possibility to support and revive the primary sector, mostly represented by different producers, traders, chefs, etc. (Matlovičová & Pompura, 2013). The term “culinary tourism” is introduced for the first time by Lucy Long in 1998 (Long, 1998). For Long, culinary tourism is not only a food for tourists but rather intentional participation in exploring gourmet cultures by consuming, preparing and presenting a culinary product, traditional cuisine, eating style, all belonging to a different culinary system, other regions or countries (Long, 2004).

The forms of gastronomic tourism are numerous and are becoming more and more popular, year after year being invaded by curious tourists and eager to taste the gastronomic culture of other countries: visits to food producers, gourmet festivals, restaurants and special places related to some special foods, tasting special culinary products, observing its production and preparation processes, as well as seeing how to cook a specific dish, culinary touristic circuits, visits and tastings at beer and olive oil factories, distilleries and culinary products, visits to kitchens, vineyards, wine vaults, wine cellars or other culinary attractions (fairs, exhibitions, culinary tours) (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). In addition to this, gastronomy ranks third among the main reasons for tourists to visit a destination, after cultural motive and nature (UNWTO, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to present a radiography of gastronomic tourism in the two regions of Sicily (Italy) and Sibiu (Romania), seen as a key factor for economic revitalization, for local and regional development. Many studies have identified and emphasized the role of food as image-makers for tourism destinations (Lin et al., 2011), as an important part of the branding, as a driving force for enhancing destination competitiveness (Presenza & Del Chiappa, 2013). Romania and Sicily are different destinations but gastronomic tourism is a local phenomenon of universal scope so it is possible to draw a set of general recommendations for tourism destinations promotion of food tourism. A survey of individuals in two countries, carried out during 2016, enables us to get insight into perspectives on gastronomic heritage as cultural value in all the countries, to formulate gastronomic cultural heritage marketing development paths in order to continue to increase the demand for the values and hence revitalize economic activity in the rural local communities. It was intended to differentiate tourists by regions, to determine their profile and present their main motivations in approaching gourmet tourism in terms of the cuisine of the two regions. For this purpose, the paper is structured in sections where in the first the theoretical backgrounds of the constructs and suggested hypotheses are presented. In the methods section, the sample, the data collection and the

survey instrument used are described. The forth section presents the main results and discussions of the research, followed by the analysis of the two case studies (Sicily and Sibiu) and the final section presents the main conclusions of the research.

## **DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP AND IMPLICATIONS OF FOOD-TOURISM. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Defined as “the art or science of eating well”, the gastronomy study is the understanding of the production and preparation of food and beverages, as well as the place, time and reason for which they are consumed (Gillespie, 2001).

Other authors define gourmet tourism as a type of tourism where a tourist buys or consumes regional products (including beverages) and pursues and participates in food production (ranging from agriculture to cooking schools) (Ignatov & Smith, 2006).

Specialized literature has analyzed gourmet tourism in numerous works since 2002, such as Hjalager & Richards (2002), the two works coordinated by Hall where wine tourism (Hall et al., 2000) and food tourism (Hall & Sharples, 2003) are analyzed based on a demand-side perspective, Boniface's study on tasting tourism (Boniface, 2003), Long's extensive exploration of culinary tourism (Long, 2004), Cohen and Avieli's study (2004), Kivela and Crofts investigations on the relationship between tourism and gastronomy (2006). Other studies investigate the relationship between food and tourism (Henderson, 2004; Quan & Wang, 2004; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006); identity gastronomic destinations or types of culinary tourism (Fox, 2007; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014; Jeroscenkova et al., 2016) or analyzes the ways in which the cultural heritage is redeemed through the Gourmet Culinary Heritage (Guzmán & Cañizare, 2011; Jiménez-Beltrán et al., 2016), through tourism or authenticity (Bessiere, 2004; Sims, 2009) either through schemes certifying origin or quality (Parrott et al., 2002; Matlovičová & Pompura, 2013) or the impact of how tourism develops in agricultural regions (Thompson et al., 2016).

In the specialized literature, there are also studies that analyze gastronomic tourism in various regions of the world, especially the Asian geographical area, which sets the current trend in the field (India, Thailand, Japan, Vietnam, Turkey) (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Okumus et al., 2007), the European area (Italy, Spain, Denmark, Finland, Slovenia) - Repnik & Divjak, 2015, and the Latin American area (Mexico, Peru) - Castano et al., 2014. In Romania, gastronomic tourism and its intimate ties with rural tourism, agritourism, cultural tourism or wine tourism have been in the attention of several researchers, such as: Tomescu & Botezat (2014), Soare & Costachie (2013). Local food markets serve the needs of a wide range of local stakeholders, including local inhabitants, retailers, farmers, producers, restaurants and, eventually, the entire community. However, the traditional strategies in the development of gastronomy tourism must evolve into strategic tools to articulate the quality, variety and uniqueness of local products and gastronomy of a territory. Specially how local food cultures evolve from the link between people and the food that is grown as an effect of particular regional conditions and people's culinary practice.

Food tourism provides the opportunity for job creation and the development of local economies, which in turn positively affects other sectors. It is also a major contributor to overcoming seasonality (UNWTO, 2017). Contemporary consumers are increasingly searching for locally produced ingredients and food, highlighting a business opportunity of interest for both local food producers and service providers (Long, 2004). Indeed, this fact is emphasized for peripheral tourism areas which, in lieu of flagship attractions and pristine nature, have to lean on other resources to build a destination brand identity, attract travelers, and, which benefits both hosts and guests. In essence,

local food can be used for differentiation in the context of marketing activities, and as a fundamental element in the process of sustainable tourism development (Sims, 2009).

In addition, local food markets serve the needs of incoming travelers. For them, local food provides a gateway into a destination's intangible heritage. This concerns, especially, those tourists who want to gain in-depth knowledge about the local cuisine and of a destination's culture (Diaconescu et al., 2016; Hjalager, 2003; Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011), and who perceive the food locality as a welcome ingredient in their overall holiday experiences. Research has found that a destination's food and eating habits may attract those tourists who search for extraordinary experiences, yet also those who search for authenticity and locality (Pesonen et al., 2011). Florek and Conejo (2007) stress that food can be part of a destination's flagship model, while Okumus et al., (2013) add that it is also an ingredient for brand-identity building. This is supported by Forristal and Lehto (2009) who found an influential link between personality, preferred food specialty and place, such as a specific destination.

Local food is essential from various perspectives. This appears to be true not only for those travelers who have a special interest in food and are extremely involved in gaining food experiences, but also for those who have a more casual attitude to food and eating. Hence, past findings supports that culinary-gastronomic food as experienced at travel destinations contributes to tourist satisfaction and behavior (López-Guzmán & Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). Areas of management, the organization of events and innovation in channels of communication are fundamental in order to boost the professional development of the sector. Folklorists, food scholars, and food aficionados have long been fascinated by occasions of exploratory eating – instances of eating the new, the unfamiliar, the alien – and by the institutions and artifacts which enable those occasions. Such as ethnic restaurants, international cookbooks, and folklore festivals (Brown & Mussell, 1984).

Locating culinary tourism in the perspectives of individual consumers and producers addresses the question of why it occurs. Some scholars have interpreted the impulse to eat the other as a colonialist, hegemonic act, a taking over of another group by appropriating their cultural traditions, or as representing the capitalist inclinations to display superiority by mastery over ever expanding arenas, including new cuisines (Goody, 1982; Mintz, 1985; Montano, 1997). Culinary tourism can also be seen as a sign of prosperity, allowing producers and consumers to elevate food from being mere sustenance to the realms of art and recreation (Appaduray, 1981; 1986; Bourdieu, 1984). A more optimistic interpretation sees culinary tourism as the willingness of humans to experience the cultural worlds of other people (Long, 2004).

The motivations for culinary tourism are complex, but generally well-intentioned. People intentionally consume an “other” because they are curious, because they are bored with the familiar, because they do not want to be rude to a host, because they want to balance their nutritional intake, because they want to belong to a specific community of eaters, because they feel pride in the heritage represented by a foodways, or because they want to authenticate an experience by relishing it, so to speak (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). As both a social system and an aesthetic system, food is a powerful medium through which to enter another culture. As numerous scholars have demonstrated, through food we can communicate identity, relationships, ideologies, emotions, as well as the fulfillment of basic physical needs, but food also offers us an aesthetic experience. And like other aesthetic realms - music, dance, art - it allows an individual to experience another on a sensory level, not just an intellectual one. By consuming the foods of a group distinct from us, we may be acting out larger cultural impulses, but the aesthetic nature of food explains the pervasiveness of food in tourist

sites. The act of eating offers a way to share our basic humanity while also recognizing, even affirming, our differential identities and subsequently strengthen the economic development base at a regional level (Vittersø & Amilien, 2011).

### **METHODOLOGY NOTES**

The study has been carried out with an explorative intention and the paper aims at describing and analyzing the development opportunity of food tourism for local development around Romania (Sibiu Region) and Italy (Sicily Region). The surveys were conducted in the establishments selected on two premises: food events visited by tourists and the selection of culinary products representing the actual gastronomy of the cities. The choice of Sibiu Region because it is designated as the European Gastronomy Region for the year 2019, after a successful success story, in 2007, when Sibiu, together with Luxembourg, held the title of European Capital of Culture. In 2007, culture was the engine that boosted the economy, tourism and the visibility of the city, while the “Gourmet Transylvania - Food Culture Festival” began in 2008 with the aim to support the development of rural areas in southern Transylvania. The Sicily Region, in Italy, with famous dishes is a location where gastronomy is a well-established and integral part of the tourism offer. Sibiu region and Sicily are two tourism areas with enormous potential in so-called food tourism because of their outstanding cuisine-related heritage. These selected regions are an interesting laboratory to study local food and traditional cuisine as they both have an enviable culinary tradition. Over the last few years, the regional government of Sibiu has been trying to leverage its local food heritage to create a new tourist experience to add to its traditional heritage tourism offer, thereby reaching a new target of consumers, increasing the consumer satisfaction of those who actually visit and extend tourism seasonality. Rather than being pushed by a formal strategic development plan, tourism in Sicily is promoted through a widespread system of authentic, typical and natural resources, and attract flows of tourists looking for that unique experience. Within this context, over recent years, the local food and wine movement has strengthened its role so much that several private initiatives, including a number of events and trade initiatives, now promote local food and typical cuisine.

Following the suggested techniques for organizing and conducting a case study research (Yin, 2004; Baxter & Jack, 2008) multiple sources of data were used. Furthermore, this study aims to identify whether the ratio between the above-mentioned dimensions of gastronomic tourism is mediated by the conversion of the territory into a culinary landscape is one of the challenges of tourism destination.

The research was done interviewing a sample of tourists coming from Sibiu, Brasov and Cluj counties (in Transylvania), Iasi, Suceava, Vrancea (in Moldova), respectively Muntenia region (Prahova, Dolj, Gorj, Ilfov and Bucharest) in Romania and Catania and Syracuse in Sicily; it has been preferred to conduct 336 interviews, supposing that the bigger number will cause an improvement of the sample’s reliability, reducing the standard error and also because it was possible to exclude incomplete questionnaires or those filled out in a wrong way. The interviews were carried out from the 1st November 2016 to the 30th December 2016, also during the tourism fair of Romania, and in strategically tourist places of the cities in Sicily (parks, gardens etc.) and wine offer. The sampling applied is the random multistage type, by quotas of age, sex, and locality of residence. Participants completed the survey with complete independence, although the interviewers were present in case they had some kind of difficulty in filling it in. The survey was completely anonymous. For this purpose, data have been gathered from diverse sources as suggested by the grounded theory’s conception as a more “objective” way of doing qualitative inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2008), and directly observing the

local reality by using personal experience and knowledge because being performative, grounded theory research invites researchers to engage sensually, morally, and politically with their world. For selecting the interviews, the purposive sampling technique (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010) has been chosen, thus individuating people who took part in the Romanian festival and who were being clearly interested to food.

A questionnaire was distributed to the tourists sample, which contained questions that required closed or restricted answers (two or more), which means that the interviewed could choose, between various codified options, those which they considered as the most suitable for their position, opinion or method of behavior. The questions were of a qualitative type, useful to encode the expressed opinions of the tourists, and of a quantitative type, with numerical answers to identify the frequencies and the method of consume, as well as to describe the socioeconomic characteristics of the interviewed subjects and their families. In some questions interviewees were asked to indicate the degree of involvement/importance using a Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all involved/important to 5 = extremely involved/important.

### **Study areas: Sibiu Region and Sicily**

Sibiu and its surroundings are one of the most visited areas in Romania (Richards & Rotariu, 2011). Statistical data shows the continuous increase concerning the number of tourist arrivals in Sibiu County. Between 2014-2016 the number of tourist arrivals has increased from 355,698 persons in 2014 to 438,611 in 2015 and 503,620 tourists in 2016. The historic center is one of the best preserved historical sites in the country.

The geographical diversity of Sibiu Region 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 development of local communities is added (Figure 1). The ongoing interaction between man and matter, based on craftsmanship, workmanship and cultural customs, has generated the specific, local tradition. Each of the five microregions of Sibiu Region 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 microregions (Mărginimea Sibiului, Țara Oltului, Valea Hârtibaciului, Valea Târnavelor and Ținutul Secașelor) form a unitary one which individualizes Sibiu Region within the southern region of Transylvania even at a national level. Rural development strategies in Sibiu Region aim to bring a new concept of integrated and systemic approach to the role of promoting traditional activities where gastronomy plays an important role. Traditional gastronomy is very appreciated by tourists and the contact with the local, organic food can occur in the common food court at the accommodation, but also as a traditional rustic meal offered at a simple visit to a village, or as a tasting of traditional products at a fold or in a household (sausages, sheep milk cheese or buffalo cheese, “balmoș”, etc.). Sustainability is highlighted by market demand for specialized tourism products that integrate local traditions and professionally promote the originality of tourism products in the area.

Professional tourism associations (National Association of Tourism Agencies, Ecotourism Association of Romania, National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism in Romania, local tourism associations, such as: Sibiu County Tourism Association, Prahova Association for Promoting and Developing Tourism and others) are engaged in tourism development at the local level, with policy-makers as public and private operators. As the growing forms of tourism, such as rural tourism, agritourism, ecotourism, cultural and gastronomic tourism, are some of the most dynamic forms of travel, which offer a chance for local communities to develop economically, they represent

an alternative to the decline of the agricultural activity by harnessing local resources, better employing the workforce, encouraging entrepreneurship and increasing individual and collective income. The connection between the Sibiu restaurants and the county's network of producers is supported by the Sibiu European Gastronomy Program 2019.



**Figure 1.** Sibiu Region and its position within Romania



**Figure 2.** Sicily and its geographical location in Italy

The integration into the story of the gourmet product of tourist offers that go to the area of origin of the recipe or of the products is necessary.

Sicily is a region located in the South of Italy, an Italian island most famous for sea-side mass tourism (Figure 2). It has a rich and varied agricultural and food heritage, due to its wealth of natural resources, very important for its economy. Particularly Sicily is a destination that is not famous for its food offer and where the local gastronomy is not a primary motivation for tourist visits. In addition Italian cuisine is known internationally for various aspects such as its innovative nature or the quality of the raw material used. For some years, in Sicily, different initiatives have arisen in view of the promotion of local food and natural resources and, through them, of the territory. New tourism promotion strategies have been introduced in the last ten years (gastronomic events, etc.), in fact, the tourists choose the place for the desire to know more about the culture and food traditions and to know the historical and artistic heritage of the region. Wine, as others typical products with high added value, can be considered a resource that helps to attract tourists who are interested in places of origin, culture, and know-how that has developed and which has been handed down over time.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of the socioeconomic characteristics, of the interviews, which have been carried out and considered as valid, considers demographic, social and economic factors: gender, age class, marital status, academic qualification, profession, household unit and annual family income (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of survey respondents

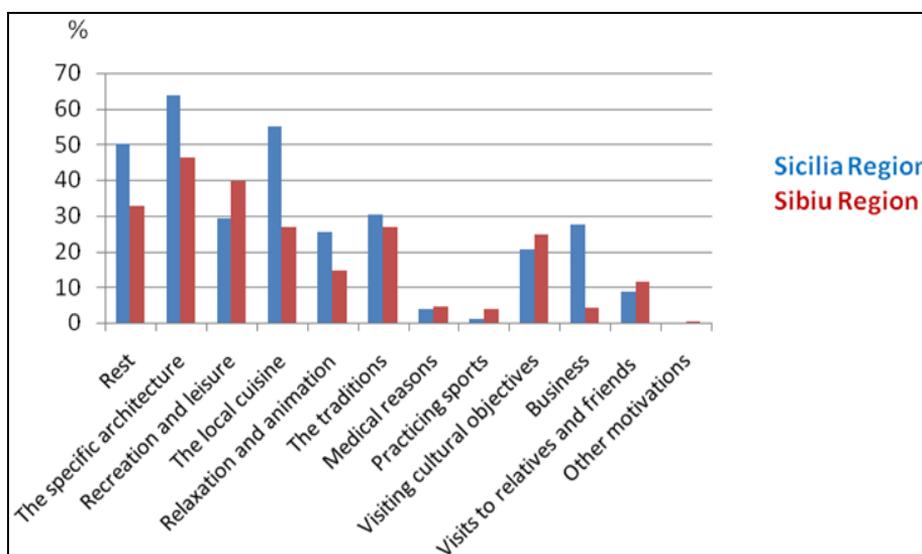
Sociodemographic characteristics	Category	All the sample	Sibiu Region (%)	Sicily (%)
Gender	Female	212	65.4	57.8
	Male	124	34.6	42.2
Age	Under 30 years	161	56.0	29.4
	30-39 years old	64	19.2	18.6
	40-49 years old	57	13.2	25.5
	50-59 years old	34	7.3	16.7
	60 years old or more	20	4.3	9.8
Education	Low school	36	9.4	13.7
	High school Diploma	90	17.9	47.1
	University education	210	72.7	39.2
Income	Under € 350/€ 800	40 / 69	17.1	67.7
	From € 350 to € 800/€ 800 to € 1500	136 / 15	58.1	14.7
	Over € 800/€ 1500	58 / 18	24.8	17.6
Family status	Married with children	89	23.9	32.4
	Married without children	40	6.0	25.5
	Unmarried	207	70.1	42.1
Employment	Employee	222	65.4	67.6
	Student	72	22.2	19.7
	Pensioners	27	9.8	3.9
	Other categories	15	2.6	8.8

From the analysis of the sample it's possible to see that the majority is represented by the fair sex, with a percentage of 63.1% (65.4% in Sibiu Region and 57.8% in Sicily), while the male population are 36.9% (34.6% in Sibiu Region, respective 42.2%). As far as

the age is concerned, the data summarized show that the interviewed sample is represented prevalently by the age class between 20 and 29 years inclusive with 47.9%, while the age class “30-39 years” contains 19,0%, the class “40-49 years” (17,0%) and, finally, the age class “over 60 years” (5,9%). Moving on to analyze the social status of the sample (Table 1), it can be shown that 38.4% are “married” and 61.6% are “single”, “divorced” or “widower”. This data confirm that the majority of the sample lives in a family, which is important information to interpret the final results.

The results about the academic qualification possessed by the interviewed consumer and the profession allow outlining the reference frame of the sample. As far as the academic qualification is concerned, it can be shown that the sample has middle-elevated levels of education: 62.5% are post-graduated and 28.8% are graduated; only 10.7% of the interviewed population has an undergraduate school educational level. As far as the distribution of the interviewed persons by profession is concerned, a diversified socioeconomic reality can be seen, where all the considered categories are equally represented. The professions which show a bigger percentage are those of the employees with a percentage of 66.1%, followed by the students with 21.4%, the pensioners with 8.0% (Table 1). The author’s survey currently gives small insight into the respondent’s views on the reason for choosing a holiday destination.

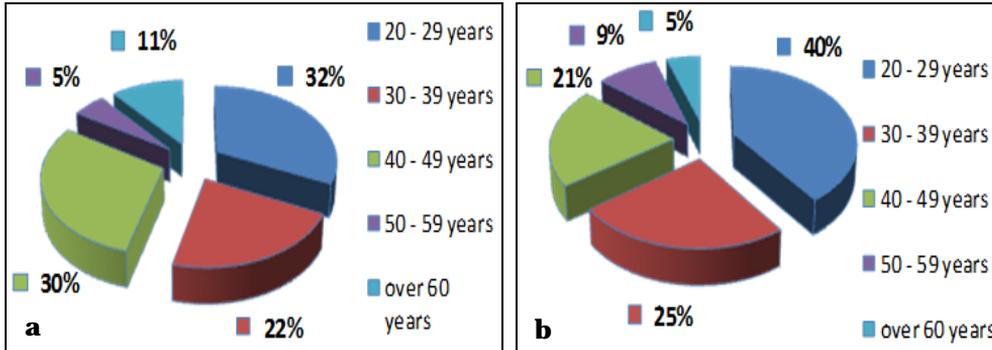
The search for culinary authenticity in a local context, is an important topic related to motivation and helps explain food tourism experiences broadly and in event settings. In fact, one of the important factors stimulating the relationship between tourism and food experiences is the role of both these elements in local development. Both food and tourism have a wide range of linkages to other areas of the economy that tends to increase the value of these activities to the local economy. The local cuisine together with the novelty and the architecture of the location are the main experiences of tourists interviewed (Figure 3).



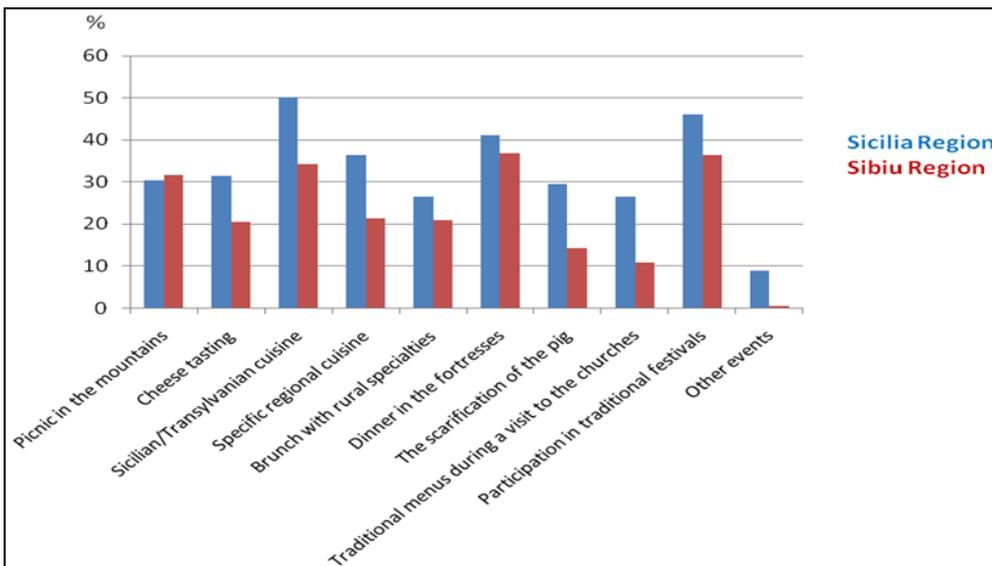
**Figure 3.** Sicily Region and Sibiu Region. The reason for choosing a holiday destination

Among those interested in culinary activities (Figure 4), the young adults were found to be more likely to participate than older ones (16%). The study identified chosen factors that made a next visit to a gastronomic events more enjoyable, as taking

part in traditional festivals and the traditional cuisine. The gastronomic experience is of greatest importance (Figure 5). Food festivals and events are seen as an important part of the marketing of food tourism. They offer the tourist additional reasons to visit a destination over and above the regular product offered.



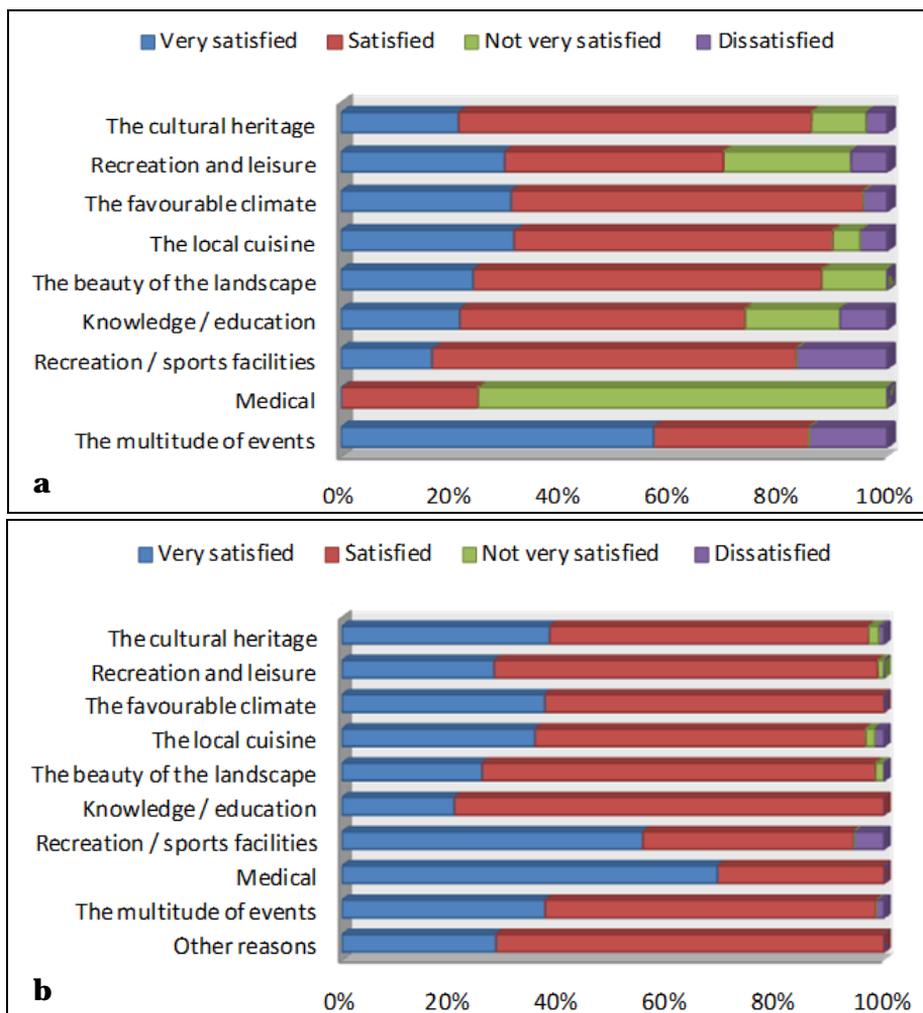
**Figure 4.** The reason for choosing a holiday destination for gastronomic tourists by age (a) Sicily Region; (b) Sibiu Region



**Figure 5.** Sicily Region and Sibiu Region. Importance of gastronomic events to attend next time

Often because events are one-off and take place in a limited time frame and because festivals offer a concentrated and often unique offering in a limited time period. They can cause a place to rise on the short list of places the tourist has in his or her mind as attractive destinations. Festivals and events are both effective instruments in attracting first time visitors as well as repeated visitors due to the differential advantage they can offer. As an exploratory analysis, the preferences for the gastronomic tourism indicate a share of 25.2%, these 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. The types of gastronomic events preferred by tourists in the 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 (Figure 5).



**Figure 6.** The reason for choosing a holiday destination by satisfaction **(a)** Sicily Region; **(b)** Sibiu Region

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) (Figure 6b). The tourist interviewed (54.9%) in Sicily confirm

the preferences for the food experience, but the historic and archaeological sites are more attractive (88%), remaining the top choice for all. The tourists were also significantly inclined towards sea activities and the beauty of the landscape. Respondents were also asked how many times they had travelled to Sicily, and 34% of the respondents had done so twice. Since the present research focuses on gastronomic tourism included events, it is important to explain its degree of satisfaction by means of the organization of food events as the quality of regional cuisine in the local restaurant they are interested in. Plus of 73% of the interviewed mentioned to be very satisfied.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The analysis of the literature shows that the food-tourist's reasons are not exclusively related to the food product, but rather to the characteristics possessed by the territory (Boatto & Gennari, 2011). The food tourist has, in fact, the benefits linked to the beauty of the landscape, to the knowledge of habits and traditions, to the authenticity of local culture and to the aspects related to local gastronomy (Brunori & Rossi, 2000; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2000; Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2010). Food tourism involves heritage, farms, local products, cultural and recreational activities in an integrated process of sustainable development, which is a way of life enjoyed by tourists and useful to develop several linked activities (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). Any tourism experience is one in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional or national cuisine, heritage, culture, tradition or culinary techniques. The growth of food tourism worldwide is an obvious fact. It is one of the most dynamic segments within the tourism market.

The rich variety of local gastronomy can satisfy both frugal needs of tourists and those of visitors more interested in gourmandizing. The combination of food quality/territory is the winning strategy if the goal is to re-evaluate a territory. The results highlight the need for destination marketing organizations to pay more attention to the link between destination image and food consumption. Well-directed marketing efforts can turn low-value secondary experiences of sampling the local cuisine into more high-value "peak" experiences. Especially in Sicily it is still customary to consider Sicily as a land, albeit fascinating and rich, as backward and full of defects, to think about and implement strategies that will help to enhance the area is undoubtedly useful. The identification of the determinants that influence the choice and consumption of food products suggests that maybe then the best choice is to focus on tourists, on what they want and the internal pressures that influence them.

The model of culinary tourism that is suggested here provides a framework for seeing the varieties of interfaces in which adventurous eating occurs as instances of negotiating individual and social perceptions. As such, they represent a movement towards expanding the definitions of edibility and palatability and the horizons of the familiar. Furthermore, these instances are connected to a multitude of culinary experiences occurring throughout the culture, all characterized by the dynamic exploration and redefining of culinary universes. Local gastronomic cuisine was considered to be important by all the respondents. In fact local food/gastronomy can play a significant role in enhancing their competitiveness, as well as influencing tourists' choices about where to spend their holidays. Respondents from both regions surveyed stated that they were willing to increase their use of typical/local food in the near future. Therefore, one may assert that it is an important value in all the countries involved in the survey. The location of a country or the ethnicity of a population did not play a role. In all the countries, approximately three quarters of the population consumed them and at least half of them recommended their relatives, friends and acquaintances to consume such

products. One of the key values of food experiences is their link to the local, to specific landscapes, cultures, creative expressions, etc. It is therefore important to define and promote the local dimension of food, even where this is subsequently globalized. The concept of globalization is thus understood as an opportunity to widely publicize the types of tourism carried out in different areas, while preserving the personal footprint of each region. Through greater collaboration and involvement, and through rigorous control by tourism authorities and actors, gastronomy can become a profitable activity for both the rural community and the owners of rural or agrotouristic boarding houses, as well as for local governments that offer a propitious framework for tourism development in the area.

By promoting gastronomic culture, town and region will receive a new motivation to develop. The main purpose of the program is to encourage economic growth generated by producers in Sibiu. The benefits will also extend to tourism and the educational program promoting healthy eating and using food resources responsibly.

In order to organize and promote the gastronomic tourism in the rural areas of Sibiu, 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. is necessary. Only by working together the major problems of development and promotion of this form of tourism in the context of the socio-economic development of rural communities can be solved, 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.

Managerial implications, at the destination level, seem to be rather clear regarding how to communicate with tourists highly involved in the gastronomic experience. Major national market segments, such as the tourists in Italy, have different preferences as described earlier, but in any case all interviewed demonstrated preferences for the local cuisine and gastronomic events. At the same time marketing activities should take this into consideration, especially in Sicily. An improved understanding is provided by the actual and the potential role of food in directly providing or indirectly supporting the tourism experience, especially in destinations where the local gastronomy is not a primary motivation to visit. This study contributes to the discussion by exploring the factors that contribute to the traveler's culinary-gastronomic experiences with a focus on the local food market. This study found that local food is an important tourist attraction and central to the tourist experience. In conclusion, although the results of our research cannot be generalized given the poor representation of the reference sample, some significant relationships between emotions and behavioral responses of food consumers have been identified, and we hope to deepen these in future research.

The future of gastronomic tourism in the two geographic areas analyzed may have a more solid basis if it relies upon the local and regional specific features, upon the preservation and the development of the cultural and ethnic identity, upon the cooperation through diversity and tolerance.

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