

GASTRONOMIC HERITAGE: A CONTRIBUTOR TO SUSTAINABLE LOCAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Gastronomic heritage is undergoing significant developments, creating a need for competitive strategies to develop food tourism in certain regions. The research explores food culture and tourism in three case studies of Latvia, Romania, and Italy. The article focuses on the information about gastronomic heritage that food lovers request, and the critical components required at a destination for food tourism to flourish. A survey of people involved in gastronomic tourism (151 in Romania, 112 in Italy, 126 in Latvia) using a simple random sample. Based primarily on respondent observations, descriptive and qualitative analysis and nonparametric method are used to explain the phenomenon. SPSS software (26 version) was used to analyze the statistical data. The findings show that people need of information and a new kind of interaction between tourist/consumers and home producers that they can trust. Many of the information are hidden and there is a lack of voice about the gastronomic heritage specially on home producers. The promotion of home producers could be successful if emphasis is placed on attracting tourists and on their visits to home producers, as well as on attracting tourists from abroad. In different countries does not actively promote the opportunity to experience at home producers. A digital food resource and the role of home-organized markets is encouraged in destinations that is promoted to focus the lens on the gastronomic heritage and all its experiences.

Key words: food tourism, sustainability, food culture, Italy, Latvia, Romania

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INTRODUCTION

Rural areas play a critical role in economic and social cohesion, in the resilience of regions and in the contribution of countless services in various local ecosystems, including food production, to strengthen them, socio-economic prosperity, the capacity for innovation, to achieve a sustainable and inclusive welfare economy. Food and farming have an important role to play in the future of the rural economy, in achieving national net zero targets, and in improving a range of other environmental outcomes. The types of policies promoted in the countries conceive agro-ecological practices as an intangible collective heritage, with a significant potential for transformation towards local sustainability, in line with the objectives of the European Green and Social Deal, the Next Generation EU recovery package and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (WTO, 2017). Specially, in line with SDG 2 aimed to “end hunger, achieve food security and nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture”, which includes the fact that the sustainability of tourism involves the gastronomic heritage and local products (Kyriakaki and Kleinaki, 2022). Gastronomy is an essential component of cultural heritage for tourists (Martín et al., 2020) and a fundamental pillar for tourists to discover the cultural potential of the places that they visit (Medina-Viruel et al., 2019); it is a key of local development that includes tradition and modernity, as well as authenticity, pervasiveness and sustainable tourism development (Vodenska, 2020). Ultimately, building sustainable and resilient urban food systems in the face of ecosystem changes, ethics, liability, green orientation, sustainability are some of the new models that people seek, and

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consider by also subjecting their food choices to continuous reflection within the existing food system at multiple scales. In fact, for many consumers and also tourists, in defining the behavioural patterns that come from information-awareness aspects, from the relationship between food and health, respectively healthy eating, the cultural aspect is fundamental (Nicolosi et al., 2019). In addition, many studies show the temporal evolution of the literature on gastronomic heritage in parallel with UNESCO's actions on cultural heritage (Bessi re, 2013; Okumus et al., 2018). However, survey in this area has grown substantially. Okumus (2021) finds that key research topics in food tourism address: unique food experiences and how they are offered, authentic food experiences, destination marketing by focusing on food tourism and sustainability; considers that future research studies should follow a multidisciplinary approach and that both qualitative and quantitative research methods should be used. Recently scholars have found a correlation between the tendency to visit leisure destinations and the discovery of local food experiences or cultural events (Klosse, 2021). That has emerged as a means of improving the image of food systems, adding knowing to gastronomy heritage and giving consumers/tourists renewed pride in their city.

Actually, the diversity of services and products offered and the preferences of tourists, continuous changes and new approaches to tourism destinations are needed (Foris et al., 2020). In fact, the expansion of research could be influenced by a systematic analysis of tourism and gastronomic cultural heritage. Specially, gastronomic heritage could be the value of culture as a tourism system component, and here tourism is the value of the national economy as a component of the ecosystem.

The manifestations of this interaction and the benefits of each of the actors involved in the interaction are increasingly becoming the aims of research studies. Climate change, the expansion of digitalization and changes in the social and cultural value systems bring a lot of new visions in the ways tourism is organized and managed. Consequently, it could result in an increase in the value of gastronomic heritage in the system of national cultural heritage as such. The research results prepared for publication focus on one of the selected ways of interaction between tourism and gastronomic heritage – the desire of groups of people and some individuals for and practical contacts with home producers to buy their gastronomic cultural heritage products. In fact, further research to gain a deeper understanding of the role these factors play is needed.

The study aims to explore and identify: firstly, the descriptions of gastronomic tourism by representatives of the studied countries (Romania, Italy and Latvia) and, secondly, the similarities and differences in views and actions regarding the value of gastronomic heritage. The authors will attempt to answer the following question: is gastronomic heritage become a resource and component of economic, social, cultural opportunities? How may it be a source of regional and local development?

The three countries were chosen to find out differences in culture since they all represent different parts of Europe and also cultural backgrounds. For this purpose, it is relevant to focus on the manifestations of the values of the gastronomic cultural heritage in geographically distinctive territories in European countries.

A survey of people in these three countries involved in gastronomic tourism, using a sample, enable us to get an insight into the importance given to the gastronomic heritage in each of them. This knowledge may help to develop the gastronomic and food tourism. In addition, to formulate the most effective way to develop gastronomic tourism and home production in order to continue to increase the demand for these values. It is relevant to offer strategic changes to ensure economic and sustainable activity in the local communities.

DIMENSIONS OF FOOD TOURISM, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT. LITERATURE REVIEW

The establishment of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals highlighted the need for research, policy, and practice on tourism development to incorporate economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Yoopetch and Nimsai, 2019). In this regard, special attention has been paid recently to sustainable tourism where scholars and researches addressed various aspects of this broad topic: aspects regarding cultural heritage (Jeroscenkova et al., 2016; Gica et al., 2021), sustainable tourism development, tourism's contribution to environmental/socio-technical/economic sustainability (Panzer-Krause, 2019; Hall, 2019), as well as the interdependence relationship between tourism and local/regional sustainable development Rinella and Epifani, 2021). The tourism industry as a critical component of the global economy can play an important role in influencing consumers to participate in sustainability through their food consumption choices (Higgins-Desbiolles and Wijesinghe, 2019). The European Parliament states that gastronomy constitutes a part of our identity as well as European cultural heritage and recommended that gastronomy should be included in cultural initiatives and programs (EP, 2014). "Gastronomy is one of the elements incorporated in a new concept of cultural heritage and cultural tourism, driven by growing trends of a well-being lifestyle, authenticity, environmental protection and the need to have a high-quality experience" (Rivza et al., 2017).

Food tourism, or gastronomic tourism, is an emerging phenomenon that has expanded so much so that it has become one of the most dynamic segments of tourism in the world (Peira et al., 2018). Food tourism has been defined as a mix of activities of knowing and visiting food producers or restaurants, of participating to food festivals, for which food tasting and/or experiencing local foods are the primary motivating factor for travel (Hall and Sharples, 2003), and "any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, or consumes branded local culinary resources" (Smith and Honggen, 2008). Gastronomic tourism relates to food and eating experiences of travellers (Marine-Roig et al., 2019). The relationship between food and tourism from the perspective of food as part of a reflection of local culture has been analysed by several authors (Getz and Brown, 2006; L pez-Guzm n et al., 2018; Ghanem, 2019; Fust -Forn , 2022). The traditional gastronomy has an important role in preservation of the local traditions and the cultural values. Raji et al. (2020) consider that integration of the relationship between food and tourism destinations has become an important issue in the current food tourism study.

Nowadays individuals are interested in traditional foods, the techniques of preparing the foods and the traditions of consuming them (Kruzmetra et al., 2018). A traditional food product represents an important part of the local culture

through education and learning about food preparation; it focuses on showing unique products to tourists or consumers in the territory where they are produced; its development to understand the knowledge on authentic recipes through also workshops and cooking (Vanhonacker et al., 2010), also a vacation in agritourism (Plokhikh et al., 2022).

Local food, usually traditional, is an instrument for tourists looking for authenticity and is often defined as “authentic products that vividly demonstrate the traditional local culture” (Sims, 2019); as “an expression of destination cultural attractions”, in the context in which local food highlights stories, traditions, legends, and symbols (Zhang et al., 2019).

Tasting local food is a way for tourists to explore local culture (Viegas and Lins, 2019), giving them clues about what and how locals eat, how they prepare their food, the ingredients used and the taste of local food. Food is part of culture, and people often consume it as part of the touristic experience (Chang et al., 2010). According to Jaeger et al. (2022) perceived (or subjective) wellbeing is regarded as key to understanding consumer and tourist food choices and the development of strategies to promote desirable eating habits. The newer forms of culinary tourism demonstrate the need of collaborating experiences in culinary heritage tourism. Examples include city culinary tours, restaurant tours, wet market tours, and cooking courses, with the approach of providing an engaging voyage, hands-on experience, storytelling, and customization (Chiu and Huang, 2022). Gastronomic trails are a phenomenon in the context of gastronomic tourism and are typically themed around different types of food or beverages (Roy et al., 2019). Also, they are increasingly popular tourist products to help get knowledge of gastronomic heritage and an approach in terms of consumer opinion, for understanding the gastronomic tourist. Food cultures and people’s engagement with healthy food production and consumption are key contemporary concerns, with a growing sustainable hospitality and tourism literature (Moskwa et al., 2014).

Authentic lifestyles lead to changes in the tourist food supply chain. In this sense, the small food businesses are catalysts for common good, an aspect that has considerable local tourism influence and impact (Carrigan et al., 2017). The sustainability of gastronomy needs to consider more than simply protection or conservation, and it needs to focus more widely than the food producer (Richards, 2020). The diversity of food, food culture, food traditions, and nutritional knowledge has influenced the cultural traditions, architectural and landscape heritage in Europe (Elss et al., 2020).

Considering the actual model of the agri-food systems, based on agroecology and food sovereignty, as cultural heritage to support sustainable local development and food cultures (Richards, 2012; Privitera et al., 2020), a wide range of agro-ecological practises allow collective identities to emerge around characteristics of rural space, strengthening local life, focusing on the coevolution of the society-ecosystem of local identity (Scarpato, 2002).

Travellers’ gastronomic experiences have multiple implications and hold a dynamic feature that justifies scientists’ attention. Regarding the importance of the role of local food in tourism, Kim and Eves (2012) developed a measurement scale for tourist motivation to taste local food and identified five underlying motivational dimensions of local food consumption: cultural experience; interpersonal relationship; excitement; sensory appeal; and health concern. Ellis et al. (2018) consider that food tourism or gastronomy and tourism has emerged as a major theme for recent tourism research, and conclude that the literature on food tourism is dominated by five themes: motivation, culture, authenticity, management and marketing, and destination orientation. To better appreciate the local culture, tourists choose to eat ethnic food (Ting et al., 2019) or street food as a local food. Considering that gastronomic tourism is linked to the concepts of local, rural, tradition and history, it is important to understand whether for tourists, exploring regions where they can visit local food producers and experience the local traditional cuisine is interesting, and what their motivations are for such experiences. Reis (2020) analyzed the scientific production regarding issues which refer to local foods as vectors of the tourist experience, found that local cuisine represents and transmits local culture, providing memorable experiences for tourists. Gastronomic heritage is recognized as a relevant component worldwide for the number of benefits it brings to a destination, such as economic development or the promotion of local culture through food or territories (Bolborici et al., 2022).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey instrument was to be designed to find out customers’ needs and interest in the local food tourism development possibilities. In addition, to understand the importance of gastronomic heritage as well as a resource and component of economic, social, cultural opportunities of regional and local development.

This study is based on a qualitative investigation where the three countries were chosen because to find out differences in culture. Although the three EU Member States have many common features, they are geographically very different: Latvia is located by the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, Italy - in the southern part of Europe by the Mediterranean, while Romania - in the south-eastern part of Central Europe by the Black Sea. The areas and the populations of the countries are different. At the second phase, a survey of people involved in gastronomic tourism (151 in Romania, 112 in Italy, 126 in Latvia) was conducted to identify the views and analyse the results obtained, while the Eurostat and OECD databases were used to describe the countries. In addition to the choice of Italy, Latvia and Romania have been chosen as a research area because they are destinations that have won the title of the region of gastronomy award, designated as Sibiu (Romania) the European Gastronomy Region for the year 2019, East Lombardy (Italy) in 2017 and Riga Gauja Region (Latvia) in 2017. All of these are tourism areas with relevant potential for gastronomic and food tourism because of their outstanding cuisine-related heritage. All this was confirmed by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT) to contribute “to better quality of life by raising awareness about the importance of cultural and food uniqueness; stimulating creativity and gastronomic innovation; improving sustainable tourism standard; highlighting distinctive food cultures and strengthening community well-being” (IGCAT, 2021). The samples were required and identified by two main factors – firstly the survey was done among persons who already are doing local food tourism to see what is motivating them and secondly – among those who may be a potential tourist to find out the factors that could stimulate their wish to visit local food producers.

The survey was conducted through the formulation and administration of a semi-structured questionnaire with free and/or reformulated answers to consumers/tourists available for the interview and intercepted in the three countries. The interviews were carried out in the period between March and October 2020, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The interviews were conducted “face to face”. Based on interviews, observations, policy documents, and related materials, in our fieldwork, we centred the interviews around the following questions: the conditions that influence the behaviour and motivations for purchasing local products; points of interest and places to visit to know local food producers; the motivations for culinary experiences and events; the opportunity to obtain sufficient information about gastronomy products and sustainability; the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed subjects (gender, age; level of education, employment, income). Subsequently, consumer responses were processed in relation to purchasing habits and the motivations that guide their choices on gastronomic products.

The number of respondents was selected using a simple random sample. The survey results were analysed and the data processed by applying methods of descriptive statistics (frequencies, central tendency and crosstabs analysis), data visualization methods and a nonparametric method - the Chi-square test, the Cramer's V coefficient, Kendall's Correlation Coefficients -. SPSS software (26 version) and MS Excel 2016 were used to analyse the statistical data (Cohen, 1988).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism diversification

There are two basic ways of visiting and getting to know a country's rural areas: either participation in a group tour, which is usually carried out under the guidance of a guide and according to a plan, or a person develops an individual tour plan, which includes a visit to a home producer. In the three countries, both ways were used for sightseeing and examining the countryside. The difference lied in the choice of a way. In Romania and Latvia, the individual tour was strongly predominant, while in Italy the two ways were almost in balance in terms of preference, which was probably determined by its historical experience. There was also a category of people in the three countries who visited the Rural Traveller website for information to choose a way, which included visits to home producers (Figure 1).

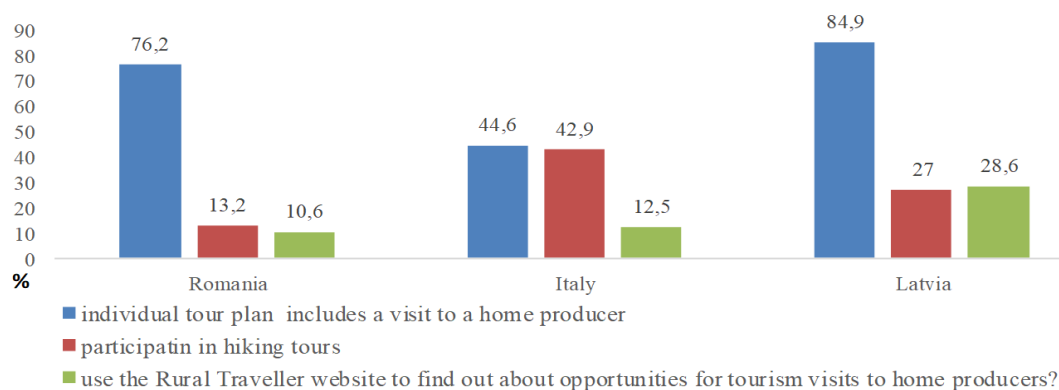


Figure 1. Percentage (%) breakdown of respondents' replies regarding their ways of visiting rural areas (Source: Research results of the authors of the article, 2021)

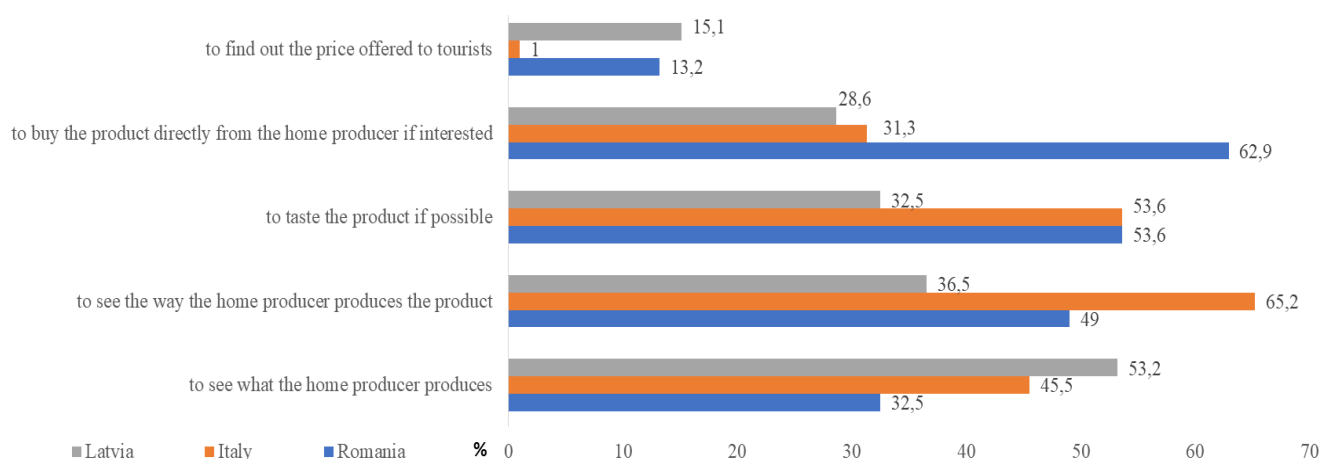


Figure 2. Percentage (%) breakdown of respondents' replies regarding their motivations for visiting home producers during tours (Source: Research results of the authors of the article, 2021)

In all the three countries, the most popular way is to go to the home producer individually, using the information available on the Internet, but the second most popular way is to take part in hiking tours with the home producer. However, there are significant differences between the countries as indicated by the Chi - square test ($\chi^2 = 60.53 > \chi^2_{0.05} = 9.49$, $df=4$, $Sign. = 0.000$, $n=621$). The numerical value of Cramer's V-factor (Cramer's V = 0.22, $df = 4$, $sign. = 0.000$ taking into the account the number of degrees of freedom) also indicates a large response of the associations to this question with the country from which

the respondents came. There is enough information on home producers, and opportunities for household tours could be found on the Internet. To confirm this, one could refer to some of the rural tourism programs in each of the countries included in the research. Each of the programs, more or less, includes also visits to producers of gastronomic heritage products.

According to the survey, a large segment of the society looks for information about the opportunities for visits to home producers, and this indicates that the share of gastronomic tourism in total tourism could increase. If the demand for this kind of tourism tends to increase, then, logically, a question arises - what motivates people to visit home producers and get acquainted with food products produced in such a way. At the same time, if a home producer is involved in the sales network, of course, s/he needs to know exactly what tourists who visit his/her farm pay the most attention to (Figure 2).

According to the respondents, their key interests in home production as such were to see what the local producer produced, how the local producer produced the product and, possibly, to taste the product as well. If a visitor also wants to buy what s/he saw during the visit, it is important for the tourist to know whether the product is only demonstrated or it is also for sale. If a product is for sale, a question might be asked about the price of the product; however, according to the survey, this was not the most important criterion. Even in Latvia, according to the respondents, it did not exceed 15.0% (Figure 3). Accordingly, the motivation for visiting a home producer and often also buying a product was not financial, but gastronomic. The interest in the home produced itself was equally strong or perhaps even stronger, which can motivate the visitor to buy it. Here, too, there are statistically significant differences between countries, as indicated by the Chi - square test ($\chi^2 = 49.41 > \chi^2_{0.05} = 9.49$, $df=4$, $Sign.=0.000$, $n=1025$). The numerical value of Cramer's V-factor (Cramer's V = 0.16, $df = 4$, $sign = 0.000$ taking into the account the number of degrees of freedom) also indicates a medium response of the associations to this question with the country from which the respondents came.

The respondents were interested in the ingredients that made up the basic part of the product and also in the set of added spices, as the quality of gastronomic heritage was significantly more important among the criteria. The quality of the product was the most important criterion for the respondents in Latvia, and it took first place (53.2%), while for the respondents in Romania it was even more important (84.8%). The respondents in Italy ranked the quality of the product in second place (43.8%), preferring the set of ingredients (56.3%), which was, basically, the same main factor determining the quality of the product (Fig. 5). In general, the difference in views is also indicated by the Chi - square test ($\chi^2 = 63.2 > \chi^2_{0.05} = 9.49$, $df=4$, $Sign.=0.000$, $n=1253$). The numerical value of Cramer's V-factor (Cramer's V = 0.16, $df = 4$, $sign = 0.000$ taking into the account the number of degrees of freedom) also indicates a medium response of the associations to this question with the country from which the respondents came. Examining the correlations between the answers to the questionnaire revealed a high correlation between "What motivates you to visit some home producer if it is offered on a tourism website?" and "What are the most important criteria for choosing homemade products?" (Kendall's Correlation Coefficients >0.90, Table 1).

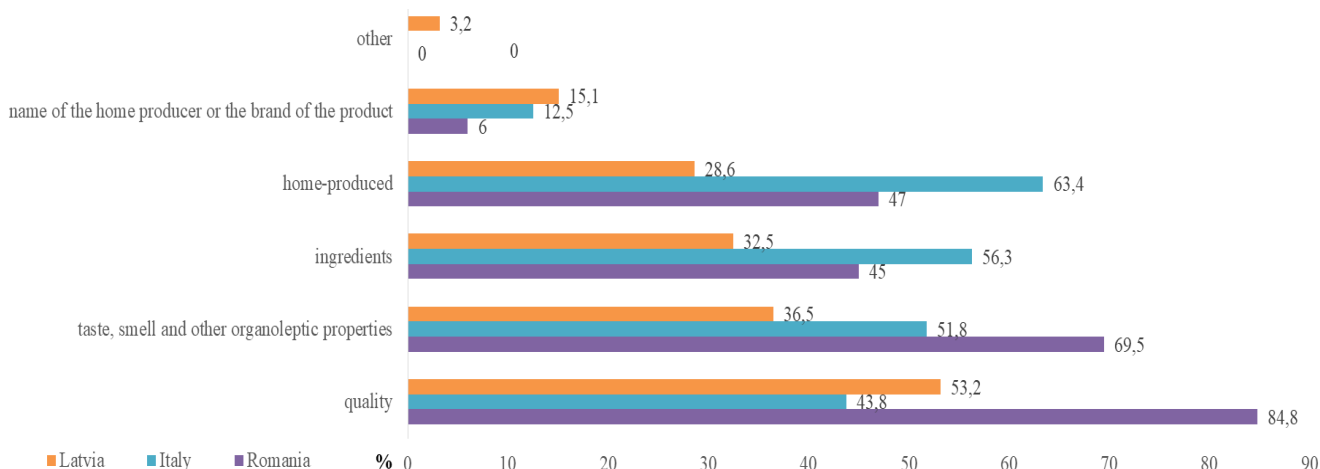


Figure 3. Percentage (%) breakdown of respondents' replies regarding the most important criteria for choosing homemade products (Source: Research results of the authors of the article, 2021)

Table 1. Kendall's Correlation Coefficients (Source: Research results of the authors of the article, 2021)

What motivates you to visit some home producer if it is offered on a tourism website	What are the most important criteria for choosing homemade products?				
	Quality	Taste, smell and other organoleptic properties	Ingre-dients	Home-produced	Name of the home producer or the brand of the product
to see what the home producer produces	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.82	0.96
Sig.(2 tailed)	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.22	0.00
to see the way the homeproducer produces the product	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.82	0.33
Sig.(2 tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.60
to taste the product if possible	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.82	0.33
Sig.(2 tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.60
to buy the product directly from the homeproducer if interested	0.97	0.97	0.97	0.82	0.33
Sig.(2 tailed)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.60
to find out the price offered to tourists	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.96	-0.33
Sig.(2 tailed)	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.00	0.60

Based on the interaction between tourism and gastronomic heritage, visiting a home producer expands the tourist's knowledge about home production as such. If the tourist likes a product, s/he also increases the knowledge about the way the product is produced and an opportunity to buy it via an e-commerce site. The home producer, however, promotes the product as a high-quality product on the market and might increase sales via the e-commerce site, but if not, the home producer at least contributes to the demand for the product at home producers' markets. If the home producer hears a critical remark about the product, s/he can consider improving the composition of the product, which means also an improvement in the quality of the product. As the number of tourists interested in visiting home producers and buying their products increases, and at the same time the home producers have an opportunity to promote their products and obtain information that can help them to improve the quality of their products and increase sales of their products, the interaction between this kind of tourism and gastronomic heritage as a component of cultural heritage becomes apparent. Tourism diversifies, and the recognition of and uses for gastronomic heritage as homemade products tend to increase.

Gastronomic heritage in daily life

The results of the survey revealed that gastronomic heritage represented not only an object of tourism interest but also sufficiently important foods in general. This was pointed out by the respondents in all the three countries surveyed (Fig. 4). There were people in each of the countries who considered the availability of such products to be very important – in Italy, even $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents. For the second largest group of respondents, it was not always the most important criterion. This group of respondents in Latvia was the largest, 42.1% of the total. According to the respondents, there were also people for whom the origin of the product was not important. The respondents in both Romania and Latvia referred to such individuals. In Italy, 5.3% respondents did not answer this question; therefore, it was not possible to identify their attitude towards homemade products – perhaps they considered this to be irrelevant, but maybe they had no opinion on this matter. Those who, in one or another way, had visited home producers and seen the conditions of home production and also the process of creating the products themselves definitely had an opinion. The Chi - square test ($\chi^2 = 31.33 > \chi^2_{0.05} = 9.49$, $df=4$, $Sign.=0.000$, $n=542$) indicates the different views between the countries. The numerical value of the Cramer's V coefficient (Cramer's V = 0.17, $sign.=0.000$) indicates also a relatively low response of the associations to this question with the country from which the respondents came. If individuals have a positive attitude towards homemade products, it is also important for them to know where to buy such products. The respondents from all the three countries regarded the existence of home producers' markets as important, besides, at well-known places that are not relocated. In Latvia, there is a home producers' market on Kalciema Street in Riga (Figure 5b). Such markets also operate in Romania (Figure 5a) and Italy.

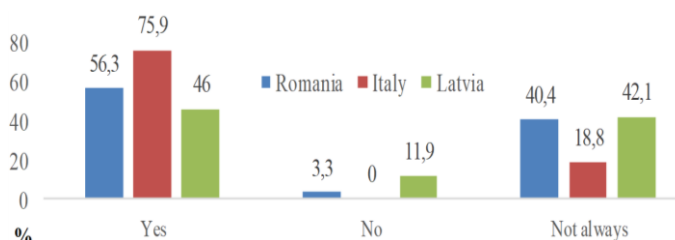


Figure 4. Percentage breakdown of respondents' replies regarding the importance of availability of homemade products (Source: Research results of the authors of the article, 2021)



Figure 5a¹ and 5b². Home producers' markets in Romania and Latvia (Sources: ¹ and ², 2022)

However, a new kind of interaction between tourism and home production is slowly emerging. This, of course, is caused by the expansion of digitalization and e-commerce (Figure 6). If before the buyer (tourist) used to go for the product, now the home producer (gastronomic heritage) goes to the tourist. If the tourist (buyer) is satisfied with the product and its delivery, such a kind of contacts becomes permanent and so-called customer groups emerge. One of the customer group members becomes the maintainer of the group and the e-commerce platform. Although the summaries of respondents' answers to this question are similar between the countries, the Chi - square test ($\chi^2 = 24.75 > \chi^2_{0.05} = 9.49$, $df=4$,

¹ <https://www.dreamstime.com/timisoara-romania-november-aspects-street-christmas-fair-traditional-products-maramures-area-specific-image165624055>

² <http://www.kalnciemaiela.lv/lv/kalnciema-kvartals/telpu-noma/>

Sign.=0.000, n=958) shows a smaller but still statistically significant difference. The numerical value of Cramer’s V-factor (Cramer’s V = 0.11, df = 4, sign, = 0.000) (taking into the account the number of degrees of freedom) also indicates a medium response of the associations to this question with the country from which the respondents came.

The opposite way of cooperation is as follows: the home producer delivers the product ordered to the consumer at his/her place of residence. As the demand for homemade products grows, a logical need arises: the potential buyer must be informed about the availability of such products and services as soon as possible. Many customers are better acquainted with local producers in the immediate vicinity (their region). Latvia is a small country, and that is why it is important to inform potential buyers from neighbouring countries what homemade products and services we supply.

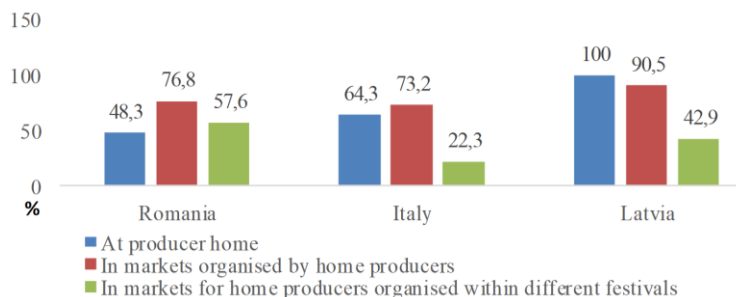


Figure 6. Percentage breakdown of respondents' replies regarding the most suitable places for purchasing homemade products (Source: Research results of the authors of the article, 2021)

CONCLUSION

The food and gastronomy heritage of every country is a valuable asset that should be conserved and promoted. All territories and local communities are rich in gastronomy and food culture. Tourism offers great potential for community revitalization and destination development: it is the value of the national economy as a component of the ecosystem. Especially the gastronomic cultural heritage is the value of culture as a system component. Consequently, the gastronomic cultural heritage connects destinations, entrepreneurs, consumers, tourists and key stakeholders to focus on the business of culinary tourism development and promotion (Table 2). It is clear from the survey that the consumers/tourists of the countries involved see gastronomic tourism as a process of sustainable development, where the importance of availability of homemade products is relevant. The model of culinary tourism that is suggested here provides a framework for seeing the varieties of interfaces in which local eating occurs as instances of negotiating individual and social perceptions.

Table 2. Link between tourism and gastronomic cultural heritage (Source: Personal documentation of the Researchers, 2022)

Tourism - the value of the national economy as a component of the ecosystem		Gastronomic cultural heritage – the value of culture as a system component
Gives: Additional tourist destinations. The goal of tourism: processes in global development and overcoming the problems caused by Covid-19		Gives: Promotion of home producer products; improvement in communication with consumers (tourists); enhancement of information about the home producer
Receives: New tourists who are interested in touring the rural areas of their country and thus discovering the unknown in their gastronomic cultural heritage		Receives: More knowledge about national and cultural heritage; acquaintance with the cultural wealth of the nation and country in practice and increasing love for the homeland.

When popularizing gastronomic tourism, it is necessary to identify current trends in tourist motivation for visiting home producers. The market development and popularization of gastronomic heritage could be effectively promoted by identifying and analysing the current motivations and timely updating this information in all sources for gastronomic tourism. That is a new modern experience based on local tradition in a leisure context. In view of exogenous factors (e.g. Covid-19), as well as the attraction of potential tourists under various conditions, the development of modern technologies and e-commerce is necessary, so that the potential gastronomic tourists can easily and conveniently find information about both tour opportunities and opportunities to visit home producers and purchase their products both in person and remotely, thereby popularizing the national gastronomic heritage. Evaluating the consumer criteria of Italy, Romania and Latvia, it can be unequivocally concluded that the main criteria for choosing the products of home producers are the quality, organoleptic properties and ingredients. When promoting gastronomic tourism to home producers, it is necessary to emphasize the high quality of products in order to promote the successful development of their market. As consumers in Romania, Italy and Latvia point out that the main place where consumers buy home-made products is home-organized markets, it is necessary to include such markets in travel itineraries, together with details of when the markets are open.

Contribution to Practice

It is important to examine and analyse the experience and practices of various countries and nations in order to find the most effective way to develop gastronomic tourism and home production through expanding this market and making it efficient for both tourists (customers) and home producers. These finding could be helpful for producers, organizers and policy-makers in order to overcome some still existing issues in many regions. If we consider that gastronomic cultural heritage plays a key role in attracting residents and visitors into a region and in particular their key interests in home production as such to see what the local producer produced and how and possibly to taste it as well, it seems appropriate to state that these findings could be generalized also to other regions and contexts. To promote and popularize gastronomic tourism, it is necessary to do it outside the local region. The promotion of home producers could be successful if emphasis is placed on attracting tourists and on their visits to home producers, as well as on attracting tourists from abroad. Definitely, we

can assume that gastronomic cultural heritage can effectively represent an enhancer for regional tourism, if well-grounded at the stage of experience economy. One point of strength of the findings is that the gastronomic tourism offers a multisensory experience that encompasses the general sounds of the places visited in addition to the culture heritage one encounters.

Limitations

The current study is not free from limitations, but the work leads the authors to a series of theoretical questions for exploration. It's true, the gastronomy heritage of each country is a valuable asset and local foods should be conserved and promoted in all the world, so is a limitation analyze a specific studied context and the generalizability of results may still be limited. Future studies may employ a cross-cultural approach to compare the attitudes of tourists in different countries. From a tourist standpoint, gastronomy represents an opportunity to know more about a local or a region. It also represents a way to know how people live and eat, its culture, and way of life. It also represents a way to know how people live and eat, its culture, and way of life. Indeed, the role of the most suitable destinations and countries where to travel and buy food local appear be interesting to explore with more depth. It's true our analysis has importance only in Italy, Romania, and Latvia so we recognize the limitations with characters of a specific social context.

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