

LOCAL GASTRONOMIC SITES – A WAY FOR RURAL AREAS’ SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Nicoleta Belu¹

Abstract

Over the last years and in a special context, spending one’s free time in rural areas has become an increasingly sought-after option of tourists.

Less crowded tourist destinations, the diversity of outdoor activities, unique culinary experiences all turn rural areas into places with special tourist potential.

In this context, Local Gastronomic Sites as a new type of public catering are an option to consider by rural and gastronomic tourism enthusiasts, and also with a view to the chance of sustainably developing rural environment, to preserving and disseminating special traditions, customs, and intangible cultural heritage.

Key Words: *tourism, rural areas, gastronomy, sustainable development*

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Introduction

Recent years have brought about major changes, with the tourist phenomenon in rural area acquiring new meanings. Life simplicity and naturalness, spirituality, specific traditions and customs, participation in agricultural or craft activities, including in the gastronomic occupations in a certain area are attracting more and more tourists. In this context, culinary tourism is appreciated as the most active and creative tourist segment.

Defined as an experimental trip to a gastronomic region for leisure, relaxation as well as to visit various local culinary producers, for participation in gastronomic festivals, culinary exhibitions, gastronomic contests, food tastings, culinary tourism directly contributes to the economic development of an area, region or even country, by highly capitalizing on all specific resources.

Background of Romanian gastronomy

The history of Romanian gastronomy is closely linked to Romania’s so often troubled history to which an important contribution has also been its geographical position. Here, on the border between the West and the East, today’s authentic Romanian gastronomy has been formed along the years, under various influences.

The archaeological remains over the last decades show that Dacian food consisted of meat, game, boiled cereals (stews made of millet, buckwheat, wheat), boiled vegetables, fruit such as grapes, apples, pears, along with honey and of course indispensable fragrant wines. During the Roman occupation, the Romans brought along new dishes such as bread (flat-bread or leavened bread), cold-pressed olive oil stored in amphorae, and also a variety of soups and juices. In addition to dishes, the Romans improved the cooking techniques with new cooking utensils, such as the “țest” pot, a clay pot with a lid, still used nowadays.

When various migrant peoples came to our land until the thirteenth century, eating habits kept changing, people used to eat in a hurry, they used to eat raw herbs, and also raw tenderized meat. The Slavs from the south of the Danube brought sour meat and vegetable soups into the Romanian cuisine, and in the houses of famous people of the times, they would use two-pronged forks brought by Venetian merchants.

¹ PhD Associate Professor, "Constantin Brâncoveanu" University of Pitești, nicolbelu@yahoo.com

After that period, until 1820, the Ottoman occupation left its mark on the Romanian cuisine to which other influences were added: Greek, Arabic, Armenian, Byzantine. Due to the large tributes to the Sublime Porte, more and more wheat was grown which the Turks did not want, and more and more pigs were raised, hence the famous dish name “pomana porcului”.

In 1653, following his trip to the Romanian Principalities, Paul of Aleppo wrote about how he was served at the Royal Court: with extremely varied dishes served on platters, with gold and silver spoons and forks. Royal meals did not lack oil, olives, lemons and peas. He also wrote peasants’ food at that time consisted of meat, fish, especially borsches, also milk, ewe-cheese, many vegetables (onion, leek, garlic, cabbage, horseradish, radish, cucumber and celery). In the monasteries, they would mainly eat boiled beans, oil-fried lentils, and vegetables boiled in salted water, with cider instead of wine. At the same time, coffee as well as tobacco and narghile became well-known.

The influence of church was felt, too, with the Romanians being known as a people with strong religious beliefs through their specific monastic dishes: “cozonac,” “sarmale,” “piftie,” nettle food, dock food, green borsch, sarmale with rice and raisins, and also with nuts, mushroom food, bean caviar, eggplant balls, fish cooked in various ways, all those are just some of the contribution of monastery dishes to the current Romanian gastronomy.

As of the year 1700, the westernization of the Romanian cuisine has been going on: the Austro-Hungarian Empire has influenced Transylvania and Banat; Russia has influenced Moldova; France, Greece, and Italy have influenced Muntenia, whereas Turkey and the East have influenced Dobrogea.

Transylvania and Banat, and to a certain extent Bucovina, have been influenced by the Austro-Hungarian cuisine: soups often made sour with sour cabbage or vinegar juice, enriched with eggs and sour cream, paprika, soup, goulash, Hungarian-style sausages are just a few examples.

The 1948 generation, that is boyars’ children returning home from their studies in Western Europe revolutionized the gastronomy of those times. There were the first cookbooks written in Romanian, e.g. “200 Recipes for Dishes, Cakes and Other Housework,” where the authors M. Kogălniceanu and C. Negruzzi stated that the Romanian cuisine was rudimentary, people ate “*neîngrijit, la întâmplare și că nu există mâncăruri alese*” (Eng. “*carelessly, at random and no dainty food.*”)

“*Mici/ mititei*” meat rolls appeared in the Romanians’ meals over a century ago, thanks to innkeeper Iordache Ionescu. He was famous in Bucharest for his exceptional sausage recipe and discovered the “*mici/ mititei*” meat rolls by chance. One evening, the innkeeper ran out of sausage coatings and had to put the filling alone on the grill.

Along with “România Mare,” Romanian gastronomy became modern. Luxury restaurants were inaugurated in the big Romanian cities, where master chefs trained in Western Europe used to cook, and there were also the famous slum pubs and bistros which were often the most appreciated. The most famous was by far Casa Capșa - confectionery, hotel, restaurant, the property of Grigore Capșa, whose own recipes had unparalleled taste and refinement. Additionally, there was the famous Joffre cake specially created by modifying an original recipe for the Bucharest festive dinner in honour of Marshal Joseph Joffre.

The communist period was famous by the fact that at least in the beginning they attempted to remove Western-influence dishes as much as possible (served more often and exclusively for the high-class dinners of the time) and gradually ended up with rationalized nutrition. The years right after the 90’s were characterized by the rapid take-over of fast-food or junk-food dishes to the detriment of traditional Romanian dishes.

In conclusion, it can be said that for a long time gastronomy used to be something related only to wealth, at the same time a prerogative and concern of the elites of the time. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, advances in all areas of social life, the chances of

easy access to food have changed that perspective. There have been numberless innovations in the world of cooking, starting with the Nouvelle Cuisine Trend whose representatives focus on fresh, simple and tasty food, and also on simple and elegant food appearance and plating. The idea of cooking complicated dishes which used to require much carefulness and had to be served in a pretentious way has been given up. Consistent intricate dishes have been replaced by quickly healthily cooked food, in small portions, elegantly presented, addressing all five senses, the visual being as important as the gustatory one.

Late 20th century also meant the emergence of *fusion* cuisine characterized by the fact that it allows for and promises the most appetizing cultural transfers. It combines elements typical of several culinary traditions without identifying itself with any of them, starting from its openness to new experiences while observing the growing sophistication of tastes. The trend has taken various forms ranging from the inspired combination in a delicious synthesis of several of regional cooking ingredients and methods on to fantasy explosions which combine elements of various traditions with new ideas in order to create original recipes. It is the dawn of globalization on the plate, combining traditional products with cooking methods, but scientifically regarding what processes take place in the pan. The concept of molecular gastronomy was launched in 1969 to show how physics and chemistry can work together in food preparation.

The 3rd millennium brought about new gastronomic challenges which are generated by a new living standard and implicitly eating habits. Against such a background, there is a risk of forgetting certain traditional dishes, even a certain food culture. It is about a tendency to ignore culinary diversity to the detriment of standardizing taste when it comes to food. Therefore, there is a trend that is spreading both aggressively and efficiently: the *fast-food* concept, very well adapted to the hectic life nowadays, which has profoundly changed the concept of food and meal. Against the background of such gastronomic offensive, another phenomenon has occurred - *slow-food* - an eco-gastronomic trend symbolized by a snail, which started from the idea that the rampant industrialization of food markets and the globalization are destroying culinary diversity, part of cultural diversity.

The phenomenon is also present in Romania, with the confrontation between old, rich gastronomic tradition, built during thousands of years ago versus modernity, namely fast food. Feeding oneself is not just simply getting energy supplies. It means much more than that, it means the entire millennial human existence.

Local Gastronomic Sites – A Factor in Rural Areas' Sustainable Development

Local gastronomic sites are private kitchens inside rural houses where culinary products are prepared and served, according to area-specific recipes, directly to the end-user, for a maximum number of 12 people; culinary products must be cooked from raw materials coming mainly from the primary production of their own household as well as from local producers or from officially approved/registered establishments according to health, veterinary, and food safety standards. The new type of public catering unit has been regulated by Order no. 106/2019 on amending and supplementing the Veterinary-Sanitary and Food Safety Regulation for the veterinary-sanitary-food safety registration procedure of obtaining and directly selling/retailing animal or non-animal origin food, as well as of producing, processing, storing, transporting and marketing non-animal origin food products, approved by Order no. 111/2008 of the President of the Romanian National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority.

Local gastronomic sites known as family-owned catering units have the following specific elements:

- they can operate in all-year/seasonal households, agricultural farms, fish farms, sheepfolds, wine/fruit farms, wineries, hunting places;

- owners and family members can prepare and serve food directly to end-users (no more than 12 people simultaneously) in their own households;
- food products can be obtained both from primary production in their own farms/households and from other local producers;
- the raw materials used to prepare food must come only from authorized/registered sanitary-veterinary- food safety units;
- in terms of the share of primary products and other raw materials/food, they must predominantly come from their own households or from local producers.

The menus in the local gastronomic sites include a limited range of dishes: at most two kinds of soups or sour soups, two main courses and possibly dessert, in line with the characteristics of the area.

The conditions to set up a local gastronomic site are:

- any form of legal organization such as: authorized natural person, sole proprietorship, family-owned enterprise or limited liability company;
- registration in line with veterinary, health and food safety standards also in compliance with the provisions of Order no. 111/2008 of the Romanian Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (ANSVSA), namely observing the steps needed for site registration as restaurants, as defined in Annex 1, Chapter II, Point 1, Letter a) of ANSVSA Order no. 111/2008 with subsequent amendments and completions;
- serving food produced only by themselves and by their family members, and the health of all those preparing food must be checked periodically;
- registration with the Romanian Agency of Fiscal Administration (ANAF).

In order to get a sanitary-veterinary registration, an application must be submitted (including a minimum of data such as: name and address of the unit, object of activity, places to sell products obtained within one's own unit, number of working staff, etc.) to a county sanitary-veterinary department for food safety, or to such department in Bucharest also including other documents such as:

- design of the place where production activities are to take place;
- a copy of the confirmation certificate or, as the case may be, of the registration certificate issued by the trade register office attached to the court whose territorial area the unit carries out its activity in;
- a copy of the identity document of the economic operator's legal representative;
- a proof that the tariffs laid down by the specific legislation in force have been paid.

Before issuing a sanitary-veterinary and food safety registration document for the activities carried out within retail units, the competent sanitary-veterinary department shall verify the submitted documents and carry out an on-the-spot inspection. They check whether those places follow the legislation in force, namely they must be clean and well maintained in such a way as to avoid contamination, and must be provided with adequate sanitation and refrigeration facilities for a proper quality of the working environment and of the products used, and also for keeping and checking appropriate temperature conditions of food products.

The development of rural communities and local tourism can also be achieved by setting up local gastronomic sites in Romanian villages where one can consume dishes made from local products obtained by traditional, authentic methods. Thus, the gastronomic circuit directly contributes to the sustainable development of a rural area, ensuring the harmonization of links among tourism, economic development and environment preservation. It contributes, among others, to the creation of new jobs in rural areas, to keeping the cohesion of local communities and to preserving culinary traditions.

A local gastronomic site is an efficient way to capitalize on the products of peasant households in family-type catering units, taking account of the specifics of each tourist

area/region, with well-known gastronomic traditions. Unlike restaurants or guesthouses, local gastronomic sites offer tourists the opportunity to benefit from traditional local dishes produced and served directly by family members in their own households, in accordance with the legal requirements concerning hygiene and without affecting consumers' health.

Conclusions

The natural and anthropic legacy of the Romanian village is invaluable. The beauty of the people and places, the traditions, the customs dating back thousands of years, the specific gastronomy, all make the Romanian village an irresistible tourist attraction nowadays. The development of rural communities and local tourism can also be achieved by setting up local gastronomic sites in Romanian villages, where one can consume dishes made from local products obtained by traditional authentic methods. Thus, the products from peasant households in a local community are highly capitalized, meals are served in genuine settings, and the village becomes again a place for socialization and cultural communion.

Local gastronomic sites give extra charm to a Romanian village by generating attractiveness and added value in peasant households, thus consolidating the identity profile of an area.

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Local gastronomic sites are new reliable opportunities for rural and gastronomic tourism enthusiasts for whom the authenticity of culinary experiences prevails, thus contributing to the development of rural environment in a sustainable way, by creating new jobs, keeping the cohesion of local communities, and preserving culinary traditions in harmony with nature.

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