

**ADDRESSING PUBLIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
IN TERMS OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM
OBJECTIVES OF THE SIBIU – EUROPEAN REGION OF
GASTRONOMY 2019 PROGRAM**

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Abstract

Nowadays, referring to tourism, one cannot narrow down his / her speech to a mere visit to a museum or to a single attraction point. Nowadays, referring to tourism, one has to extend one's understanding to include the sum of all the experiences lived at a given destination.

In economics too, focus is shifting away from a static, grass-root thinking towards a dynamic, abstract one based on talent and creativity. Experiences have already grown into economic offers distinct from services and consumer goods.

The real battlefield for economic competitiveness extends nowadays in the area of building and selling unique and memorable experiences. Gastro-tourism follows the same trend, with gastronomy becoming the third coordinate that gauges the attractiveness a given destination exerts on tourists, alongside with visiting the local heritage and taking part in cultural events and shopping.

Tourism aligns itself to the global trends aiming to create a new range of skills that cover not only the traditional management of tourist services, but also the creativeness and the innovation that emerge as a new area of expression. On such base, Sibiu accepted, in 2014, the invitation extended by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT) to become a member of the association, to contribute scientific papers and to

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implement and develop, in 2019, the Sibiu – European Region of Gastronomy Program.

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Brief history of developments in approaching gastro-tourism

Gastronomy can be a marker of identity of a given region, a means of promoting agricultural products and a tool to facilitate meeting with the specific needs of consumers, producers and other actors in rural tourism.

The first scientific paper outlining an incipient form of gastronomic tourism came in 1974 and was presented by its author, James H. Brown, at a conference on issues of agricultural economics. Studying the impact of the tourism industry on the agricultural sector in Jamaica, the paper focuses on the flow of resources for both sectors between 1965-1972, as well as on the growth and structuring processes the market of agricultural products undergone in the framework of the tourism industry in the same period. (Brown, 1974)

Later on, in the decade 1980-1990, gastronomic tourism study focused on the research of possible interference between food production and tourism consumption, food being regarded more as a logistics problem of the destination. The 90s brought about several changes and refinements in the way gastronomy was considered as part of the tourism industry. Then new logical connections progressively emerged, gastronomic tourism being related to cultural tourism or health tourism.

The first researchers who accurately stressed the importance of food and local products, respectively, in sustainable tourism and sustainable development were D. Telfer and G.Wall, in 1996 (Telfer & Wall, 1996). Even so, gastronomic tourism continued to be seen and studied only in the context of rural development.

In 1998, J. Bessi re, studying the relations between rural tourism and culinary tradition as heritage, analysed the patterns of contemporary urban eating habits and came to the same conclusion as N. Herpin, who, in order to describe the social impact of industrialization came up with new nutritional terms, such as: "de-concentration", "de-installation", "de-synchronization", "de-ritualization and" re-location" (Herpin, 1988). Gastronomy is regarded only as a marker of identity of a given region, a means of promoting agricultural products and a tool to meet the specific needs of consumers, producers and other actors in rural tourism (Bessi re, 1998)

Gastronomy has preserved the same meaning up to the present time, the local agricultural products and traditional food preparation techniques still being the main attraction of rural tourism.

The emotional return to the "country" is practically a way to reactivate our rural identity and in the same time an irrepressible attempt to come closer to landscape, nature and a way of life characterized by human cohesion, social recognition and participation in community life.

Food is an important part of our holidays and rural tourism can play a mnesic role in reactivating dietary habits, as nostalgia is a powerful marketing vehicle.

The 2000's brought about a coagulation around the term of Experience Economy. B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore described the new concept as the novel economy ensuing from the agrarian and industrial economy. Experiences have already grown into economic offers distinct from services and consumer goods. More and more companies meet these requirements and draft their travel deals accordingly. The real battlefield for economic competitiveness extends nowadays in the area of building and selling unique and memorable experiences (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998). Gastro-tourism follows the same trend, with gastronomy becoming the third coordinate that gauges the attractiveness a given destination exerts on tourists, alongside with visiting the local heritage and participating in cultural events and shopping.

Tourist experiences function as a personal source of information for one's narratives, for how one's memories are recounted and significantly shape the way travellers perceive themselves in relation to their deeply personal and unrepeatable experiences. (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011)

Nowadays, referring to tourism, one cannot narrow down his / her speech to a mere visit to a museum or to a single attraction point. Nowadays, referring to tourism, one has to extend one's understanding so as to include the sum of all the experiences lived at a given destination. In economics too, focus is shifting away from a static, grass-root thinking towards a dynamic, abstract one based on talent and creativity. Today we are witnessing a transfer in thinking penchants, attention shifting away from the industrial era towards the informational era. Business is not product-oriented any more but consumer-oriented and the industry-based economy slowly slides towards an economy based on talent and creativity.

Great minds are now preferred over large factories. Every community has its future assured given that it knows how to attract talented minds that can increase economic competitiveness. The dilemma any city that experienced this permutation of values is faced with has become "how to attract talent?". New technologies facilitate the increase in competitiveness of tourist destinations. Technology changes the way one looks, books and pays for a trip. We are more connected and prone to geolocation. Everyone is a "user" and any destination must be "online".

In the tourism industry, we speak no more of employees or workers, but of actors, performers or storytellers. Tourists are now travellers and want to live authentic experiences at their destination, to be informed about the local history, festivals, people, cuisine, and any "behind the scenes" story. They want to capture and live an authentic moment in the history of the place they are visiting. Local cuisine is the only experience that cannot be digitally copied. Genuine taste and smell are able to generate that excitement, that souvenir that lingers on the tourist's mind and is emotionally re-accessed whenever he or she feels the same taste or eats the same dish.

Cultural Heritage Organization defines tourists as "people travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. This experience includes historical, cultural and natural irreplaceable resources." (Cultural Heritage Organization, 2012). Since in the collective mentality providing a "local" food product to the tourists is synonymous to making available an "authentic" product, tourists seek local authentic culinary experiences.

Greg Richards noted:

"If the cuisine may be related to specific countries or regions, then it acquires the potential of a powerful marketing tool. Authenticity has always been regarded as an important aspect of tourism consumption as building a unique experience requires local and regional "authentic" food likely to turn into reasons to visit a specific destination". (Hjalager & Richard, 2002).

Sibiu – European Region of Gastronomy 2019

The European Region of Gastronomy Program was officially launched by the newly created platform dedicated to the candidate regions running for the title of European Region of Gastronomy. In the regions assuming the organization of the program, granting of this title should lead to an increase in the quality of life by highlighting local gastronomic culture and education towards a more healthier, sustainable and in the same time innovative lifestyle. These objectives could be achieved through best practice exchange programs deployed with the support of the European institutions in the field. Best practice exchange programs will be coordinated by the International Institute of Cuisine, Culture and Art (IGCAT).

As a concept, the European Region of Gastronomy has been developed by the European experts Greg Richards, Diane Dodd and Robert Palmer and approved by the Committee of the Regions (CoR), acting in the person of the President of the Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Research, Mr. Anton Rombouts, at the plenary meeting that took place in Brussels on October 8th 2014. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is an advisory body of the EU, composed of representatives of the 28 Member States, elected at regional and local levels. Through the CoR, they can directly express their views on EU legislation with impact on regions and cities.

Global trends in tourism aim to create a new range of skills that cover not only the traditional management of tourist services, but also the creativeness and the innovation that emerge as a new area of expression. On that base, in 2014, Sibiu accepted the invitation from the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT) to become a member of this institute and to contribute scientific works (by Ilie Rotariu Ph.D., "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu) to the development of the European Region of

Gastronomy Program. In this context, Sibiu has also been given the task to run for the title of European Region of Gastronomy for 2019.

At the time it accepted the invitation, Sibiu municipality envisioned to connect the local culinary culture with the cultural tourism already existing and well developed. Cuisine can create a bridge between tourists and locals, it can connect tourists to local customs and traditions and generate an authentic experience of cultural tourism. In the same time, local food and its preparation techniques are likely to become hallmarks of the local brand and could help to shape a competitive advantage of the destination on an already crowded market. Finally, yet importantly, Sibiu region offers plenty of space for growth and economic development in the field of food production, preparation and selling, an area that could be creatively exploited through the means and skills developed during and after the implementation of the Sibiu – European Cultural Capital 2007 Program. Compared to 2007, the Sibiu – European Region of Gastronomy 2019 Program envisages the inclusive development of several sectors such as agriculture, food producers, environment protection, scientific research, industry and commerce, media, arts and culture.

The candidacy of Sibiu region to the title of European Region of Gastronomy in 2019 has been drafted by a consortium of partners who agreed to work together, initially in an informal manner, so that at the time of application, the partnership take the form of a general agreement to assume the objectives established and agreed by the international jury of IGCAT. The members of the consortium are: Sibiu County Council, the Municipality of Sibiu, the Municipality of Medias, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture of Sibiu, Sibiu County Tourism Association. Taking advantage of the cultural capacity of Sibiu, already developed after the successful implementation of the program European Cultural Capital – Sibiu 2007 (Richards & Rotariu, 2015), discussions were initiated at local level. Thus, overall objectives for the Sibiu – European Region of Gastronomy Program have been assumed and sectoral targets for each thematic area have been addressed as follows:

1. promoting the sustainable economic development of the region by making full, creative use of the gastronomic heritage and by an

integrated approach to local communities, education, culture and business;

2. strengthening the region's gastronomic identity in the European context by involving the population and raising people's awareness concerning the importance of gastronomic culture;
3. direct involvement in ensuring long-term food security, development of measures needed to adjust to the climate change and mitigate its impact and maintenance of the resilience of local communities.

The areas of interest identified for Sibiu region are described below in accordance with the application file presented for the candidacy of the region to the title of European Region of Gastronomy in 2019 (Primăria Municipiului Sibiu, 2016).

Culture and gastronomic diversity– the thematic objectives are the following:

- to increase the international visibility of the region by promoting local gastronomic diversity given by the uniqueness characterising the access to primary resources and the presentation manner, to encourage creative industries to artistically harness such field;
- to research, inventory and preserve, to harness and promote the local gastronomic heritage, to obtain official recognition as intangible heritage;
- to create collective marks that certify and guarantee the geographical origin of the feedstock and culinary products of Sibiu by developing and substantiating the concept of local gastronomic imprint;
- to promote gastronomy in educational curricula and their related disciplines;
- to create a certification program for the keepers of traditions with direct impact on the gastronomy of Sibiu (genetic resources, traditional recipes, traditional knowledge).

Interconnection of urban and rural areas is a thematic field aiming:

- to scientifically assess tangible and intangible heritage values of rural and urban areas in order to set strategies of tourist interconnection on scientific grounds by accessing traditional knowledge;

- to direct the flow of visitors from the urban space to the rural areas following thematic paths having gastronomic character, and by rural gourmet events;
- to create tourist interconnection programs on gastronomical topics between the two urban poles (Sibiu and Medias, the regional cities) and the rural area adjacent thereto;
- to create tourist interconnection programs on gastronomical topics between Sibiu and adjacent regions;
- to facilitate contact between urban citizens and food producers in rural areas;
- to promote and support the establishment and development in this field of private economic structures, mainly in rural areas.

Education and health aim:

- to implement educational programs for healthy nutrition, with special emphasis on children and experimental application of modern methods of Behavioral Insight in order to increase the chance of their successful acquisition of healthy life habits;
- to develop the concept of local gastronomical fingerprint by assessing local primary resources and technologies applied from agriculture to consumer;
- to encourage sensory taste education programs for children in schools and gastronomic events, in order to induce habits of healthy lifestyle;
- to implement innovative programs in the health sector with the view to propose eating habits reforms and pilot applications in areas enjoying public funding;
- to ensure continuity of the Fruits in Schools Program of free distribution of fruits for children.

Sustainability as a thematic field has the following objectives:

- to achieve an integrated strategy of sustainable development and ethics of tourism and creative industries, focused on practices of food production and gastronomy, able to ensure the production and consumption of healthy and sustainable food;

- to encourage environment protection programs aiming first and foremost the protection of bee keeping and livestock pastures, agricultural land, areas of harvesting herbs or berries;
- to encourage smart farming techniques with a view to ensure adjustment to climate change and preservation of an unpolluted environment;
- to promote the concept of local gastronomy fingerprint, set up an inventory of products that are unique due to their contents and raw materials and created by traditional technology and scientifically documented;
- to attract to Sibiu well established gastronomic events in Romania, in order to strengthen the position of Sibiu as avant-garde gastronomic region;
- to involve local actors in activities and programs of the European Region of Gastronomy network / platform;
- to encourage Local Cuisine - European Tastes Programs of European cooperation: Luxembourg, Ille-et-Vilaine (France), Västmanland region (Sweden), Fribourg (Switzerland), Trondheim (Norway) Tasting Europe program of the European Commission.

Support for SMEs has the following objectives:

- to develop public programs aiming to support small producers and SMEs in the gastronomy and hospitality industry from Sibiu region;
- to create a framework of cooperation between the public and private sectors in order to support local food producers and service providers in the field of gastronomy;
- to ensure sustainability by supporting individual producers, producer associations and SMEs to shorten the supply chain from raw materials to the consumer;
- to encourage tour operators to innovate building on products, recipes and local customs, as a business growth engine.

The digital agenda has the following objectives:

- to develop methodologies and working tools allowing to create digital information about food resources in the area and agriculture;

- to create a digital platform for networking and promoting authentic local producers and services available to them;
- to draft a gourmet interactive map, allowing location of and communication with operators in the gastronomy field and creative industries;
- to support producers in the use of digital systems and e-marketing, e-commerce etc. with a view to promote and sale products and services.

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