

Enhancing Rural Integration into European Agriculture: Rediscovering Sustainable Agri-Food in Romania

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ABSTRACT: One of the factors that threatens the sustainability of rural areas is the hegemonic agro-industrial model with obvious environmental and social impacts which dramatically limits rural life. The study draws attention to the opportunities offered by alternative agri-food systems based on agroecology and food sovereignty as cultural heritage to support sustainable local development. The results of the study demonstrate how the recovery and promotion of traditional ecological knowledge can help increase the capacity of socio-ecological systems to cope with shocks and disruptions and maintain long-term resilience. At the same time, 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. The case study analyzed in Romania counties shows that 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 their consolidation socio-economic prosperity, the ability to innovate, to achieve a sustainable and inclusive social economy. The types of policies promoted by Romania conceive agro-ecological practices as an intangible collective heritage with a significant potential for transformation towards local sustainability.

KEYWORDS: rural areas, rural tourism, sustainability, food security, Bran-Rucăr corridor

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1. INTRODUCTION

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 forecasted 9.1 billion population in 2050 will require an increase in food production for an additional two billion people. There is thus an active debate on new farming practices that could produce more food in a sustainable way. Specially, agroecological practices are agricultural practices aiming to produce significant amounts of food, which valorise in the best way ecological processes and ecosystem services in integrating them as fundamental elements in the development of the practices. Indeed, agroecological practices contribute to improving the sustainability of agroecosystems (Wezel et al. 2014, p.3). Changes will improve the food

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system for people, place and planet and sustainability development can only be achieved through economic and environmental balance (Li et al., 2019). Agroecological approaches are a more holistic way to farm and produce food, integrating nature and societal concerns more coherently than the business-as-usual methods of conventional agriculture. Production techniques pioneered the organic farming and food movement, as well as initiatives based on the principle of food sovereignty including shorter and regionalised food supply systems are core parts of moving towards agroecology. The rural economy has known an increasing improvement during the last years, determining the prosperity of the rural populations, hence farm diversification became necessary in order to achieve good biodiversity and high employment mainly for young people (Chmieliński et al., 2021). The most viable way of farm and rural diversification are traditional products and crafts. Also, traditional food products which has been gaining in popularity among tourists represents a way to increase attractiveness of an agricultural farm offer which has value for the farming in which relates the “contributes to the public awareness of the value of farming in general” (Stotten, 2021). Usually, traditional products are considered healthier, sustainable produced and strongly connected with the cultural heritage of the local communities (Pamukçu et al., 2021, Privitera et al., 2018).

The European Commission (2006) provided the following definition of the term “traditional” related to foods: “Traditional means proven usage in the community market for a time period showing transmission between generations; this time period should be the one generally ascribed as one human generation, at least 25 years” (EU, Council Regulation, 2006). In order to provide a better understanding of traditional food concept the European Food Information Resource Network has developed separate guidelines (Pieniak et al., 2009) regarding the traditional ingredients, composition and traditional type of production and processes (Trichopoulou et al., 2007).

Rural traditional foodstuffs, from agricultural practices to culinary ones are linked to rural tourism activities and represent a pull factor for visiting a particular rural destination (Rachão et al., 2019), hence local food is essential to the success of rural tourism and a means of promoting rural development through traditional cuisine (Stalkos et al., 2021). The gastronomic experiences proven to be an intrinsic connection between food and culture, becoming a way to enhance tourists cultural experience (Horng and Tsai, 2010), thus the traditional food encourage the tourism sector increasing synergies between tourism networks and adapting the offer to the consumer’s needs.

Gastronomic tourism generally refers to the origin of a dish as it is connected to a specific location (Green & Dougherty, 2008) and the topic foster social, environmental, territorial and economical cohesion in rural settings (Figueiredo et al., 2021), in order to offer opportunities for the local communities to reinforce and sustain their identities through the promotion of the traditional food products and also events (UNWTO, 2017). The local identities of the communities are also reinforced by farmers’ markets, food and drink trails which at local and regional level are important vehicles for sustainable regional development. In order to create a ‘sense of place’ farmers’ markets, producers in the rural sectors and wineries provide motivation and reasons to visit the rural areas mainly by the “the landscape within which they are located” (Hall & Mitchell, 2005, p. 86). The study focuses attention on the issue of what are the opportunities offered by alternative agri-food systems, based on agroecology, as cultural heritage to support sustainable local development. The second part of the article also provides a case study, in rural areas of the Romania that plays 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 achieve a sustainable and inclusive social economy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The current global food system is associated with a range of challenges including health ones, the climate emergency, poverty, and environmental crises. The EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems (Willett et al. 2019) identified the production of food as being the most significant cause of environmental change globally, as well as highlighting the overwhelming impacts of unhealthy diets on morbidity and mortality. Similarly, the global call to action in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development recognises food as vital, emphasising the need to '(e)nsure sustainable consumption and production patterns' (Goal 12).

Specially, sustainable agriculture goes beyond simply obtaining food and non-food products, it is also economically sustainable for farmers (who do not use products that have a cost), it respects the environment, it improves the quality of life of both the farmer and the consumer who buys the products obtained from this practice. It also has ethical and moral objectives: to ensure a fair income for the farmer; ensure the health of the farmer and the consumer; implement and preserve soil fertility; safeguard and preserve environmental and landscape resources; promote biodiversity.

The way food is produced, bought, supplied, sold and consumed can be a part of whole system solution to the intertwined challenges of climate, nature and health crises. Food procurement is increasingly recognised as playing an essential part in transforming supply chains and addressing global challenges. 2030 is just here. So many sustainable solutions are integrated and adopted on a regional and national scale to improve human and environmental health but not always on wide and global scale.

Agri-food biodiversity and family and small-scale agriculture are in fact endangered worldwide due to industrialization of agriculture, genetic erosion, food transformation, climate change, abandonment of rural areas, migration or the COVID-19 pandemic, but also military conflicts that have forced a global disruption of the supply chain. In order to be as competitive as possible, techniques and plants have been used which aim at increasing yields, but which destroy biodiversity and the very integrity of the territory in which we live.

Consecutive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have progressively broadened the rationale for rural development policies, from simple support to encouraging its development by promoting agricultural policies, better care and financial support for both qualifications. and the conservation of the environment and the rural space, the improvement of the quality of life, as well as an increasing diversification of rural economy and food produced.

Actually, the concept of food is closely linked to the new role assigned to agriculture in relation to the environment, the territory and the safety and quality of the same. In this development, food is a strategic entry point to national issues as it relates productively to space at all scales, from the intimate one of bodies (Guthman, 2014) to that of global supply chains (Morgan et al., 2006).

In this context, policies and practices nowadays often converge towards a re-territorialisation of the existing food systems (as opposed to the de-territorialisation associated with the placelessness associated with global agro-industrial supply chains), which take new forms. In particular, it is crucial to highlight the role of the relationship between food and the places of its production (local food) within the process of the socio-cultural construction of culinary quality (Barbera et al., 2018).

Although there is growing political, civil society, and academic interest in local food policy, only recently has the importance of sustainable food planning been recognized, a field of planning geared toward finding new paradigms for urban and rural planning that support sustainable and equitable food systems (Marsden & Morley, 2014). In fact, the diffusion of integrated food policies is a recent innovation, aiming to integrate different food dimensions and sectors, consistent with an innovative vision of food and food systems (Morgan, 2013; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019).

Food policies emerged as a relatively autonomous sphere, albeit integrated with agricultural, environmental and other sectoral policies, being implemented at, and impacting different scales: from the international level - with the role of agencies such as the FAO and the WHO; to the EU level with the CAP review process, the proposal for a European Food Policy (De Schutter et al., 2019), the construction of the "From Farm to Fork" strategy and the Food 2030 research programs; till, eventually yet not exhaustively, to the national and regional levels, involved in different ways depending on each context.

The production of food involves a plurality of narratives, extensively explored in the scholarly literature, which addresses a diversity of issues, such as: the image and identity of places (Pollice, 2018); the regional specialization of food production (Morgan et al., 2006); local and tourist development linked to territorial specializations (Hall & Mitchell, 2002) and sustainability (Vodenska, 2020); food-health relations (Neff et al., 2009); deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of food systems (Wiskerke, 2009); conventional and alternative food networks (Corsi et al., 2018); the multiple meanings of food regions

(Kneafsey, 2010; Nocco, 2021); and challenges of sustainability in its different dimensions (Lang & Barling, 2012).

In this context, the COVID-19 emergency has further pushed existing food systems to their limits (FAO, 2020). The pandemic's global scale has made even more evident the complex multiscalarly of agri-food systems. Moreover, the emergency has brought to the fore some of the intrinsic fragilities of food systems (Hendrickson, 2020), but has also highlighted new potentials for resilience.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted on the monitoring of a number of 29 localities (6 cities and 23 villages) of the 2 counties (Braşov and Argeş) with entrepreneurship on certified traditional products, based on the working point by querying data from the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP) and tourism statistics from the website of the National Institute of Statistics. In the analysis has been included the certified traditional products, not the food products obtained according to the well-known Romanian recipes, even if they are the object of completing the agri-food system in the analyzed area. The research was carried out using the cartographic method by interpreting the data in a visual form such as maps of the two counties using the Arcgis program. Hence, the data obtained from the NRTP site were used by displaying the results obtained.

4. CASE STUDY: BRAŞOV AND ARGEŞ COUNTIES IN ROMANIA

The study area is compound of localities, also villages as Fundata, Şirnea (Braşov county) and Rucăr (Argeş county) that were among the declared experimental tourist villages declared (out of 118 identified and selected localities) since the communist period. Also, Fundata and Şirnea are part of an older typology of tourist villages in Romania of 80's, latter mentioned in many scientific papers for its nice climate and landscapes, and also for tourist resorts and sport practicing.

It is worth drawing the reader's attention to a detail that we consider quite important, precisely in this corridor between the two counties - known as the "Bran-Rucăr corridor" - is concentrated the largest number of producers of traditional products. That is, we argue that apart from the purpose of recreation and relaxation, a significant percentage of tourists opt in favor of spending their holidays within these localities not only because of the existence of a strong base of accommodation units, due to natural resources but also because of traditional products. In order to explain this hypothesis, we opted to produce a questionnaire that was distributed to a number of about 500 respondents. The survey was conducted between April 24 and May 7, 2022. Of this, 214 responses were valid and included in the research.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Traditional products and entrepreneurs - geographical distribution and characteristics

In the Romanian context, a network of entrepreneurs with certified traditional agri-food products had emerged up to the threshold of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, in 2018, in the first part of May, on the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP) on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development were listed 607 certified traditional products, as a result of entrepreneurship in 156 localities (cities and villages, including villages registered as belonging to some cities), being part to the 30 major administrative-territorial units (compared to the total of 42 of Romania) of which 118 villages (75% of the total network of localities). Practically, through the development of the network of entrepreneurs and, at the same time, through the proliferation of the certified traditional products, Romania reformulated its potential of affirmation and recognition at European level. Similar research were approached by authors as Brochado et al., (2019); Morgan (2013); Morgan et al. (2016); Hall & Mitchell (2005).

The effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic were felt in all sectors of the Romanian economy, mainly in the lifestyles of the population which is why the situation reported in the NRTP of the Ministry's website

stopped on June 23, 2020 (according to Order no. 2013 with subsequent amendments and completions), with a total of 715 traditional products.

This situation came after the modification of the measures to prevent and combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic ordered during the state of alert (Decision no. 434 of 28 May 2020). Even though the Covid 19 pandemic was officially declared in Romania as closed and no changes have been reported, the area chosen as a case study is still a representative one for Romania.

Thus, in the analyzed geographical area Brașov-Bran-Rucăr-Dragoslavele, superimposed on Brașov and Argeș counties, 212 products are certified as traditional ones, representing 29.65% of the total country, benefit of the business environment inserted in 29 localities of which 23 villages. In 2018, these two counties sum up 205 products (Brașov-166 and Argeș-39), increased respect to 2014 (Brașov-81 and Argeș-29). According to National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP) it includes almost all categories of certified traditional products, except for the “other” categories such as: meat products; milk products; vegetables fruits; bread, bakery and pastry; drinks, fish. Most of the products are from the first 2 statements, as the area under study is recognized by the age of the occupations related to animal husbandry, especially grazing. The most typical examples of certified traditional products are muttom sausages from Dumbravă, fresh/smoked curd, smoked bacon from “Curtea Brăneană”.

These traditional products use local raw materials and do not contain food additives, moreover they present traditional recipes, traditional production and/or processing methods which are distinguished from other similar products belonging to the same category, hence they are listed as food products that provide food safety and increase the tourist attractiveness of the place.

4.2. Tourist localities that guarantee sustainability and food security

Rural tourism is a major factor in maintaining the local and zonal tradition, in supporting and developing entrepreneurship with certified traditional products generated by the tourist flow and accommodation units on the one hand and the tourist potential of the whole area on the other hand. Tourism is present in almost half of the villages with entrepreneurship, most of which belong to Brașov County (see the Figure 1).

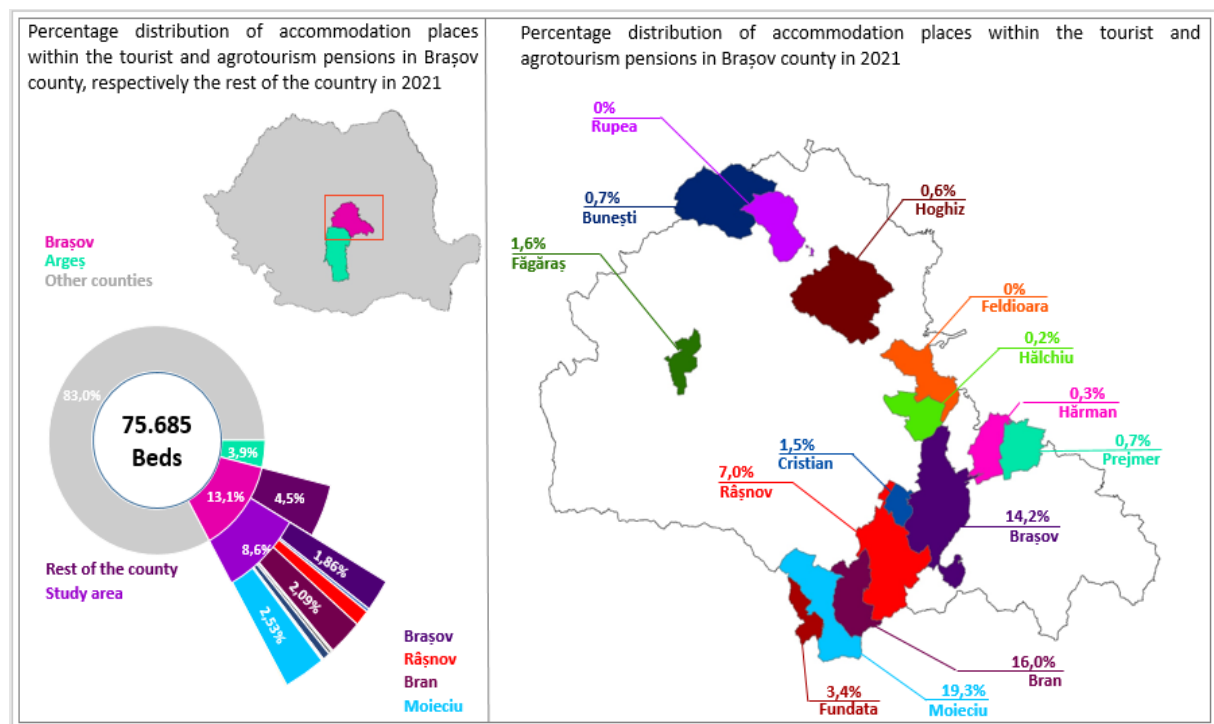


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of accommodation places within the tourist and agrotourism pensions in Brașov county in comparison with the rest of the country in 2021.

Source: Author's own.

Tourists find in these places almost everything they need: relaxation, a healthy natural mountain environment, healthy food with ancient origins and ideas, a good hospitality, convenient distance to the place of residence or even for a weekend.

According to statistical data (NIS, 2022), in 2010 tourist and agro-tourism represented about 12.4% of all accommodation available at country level. During the last decade, the number of these touristic units has experienced a steady growth rate, which has led to the doubling of the number of pensions as well as their expansion in various parts of Romania. Thus, in 2021, tourist and agrotourism held a share of the market of just over 25%. Due to the strategic positioning, to a wide range of tourist resources both natural and anthropogenic, but also to the human resource with an extremely wide openness to tourism, Braşov county was one of the most important poles of tourist attraction at national level. Every 12th place of accommodation in Romania is located in Braşov county. Things change even more when we talk about the touristic and agrotourism, the percentage of such accommodation types in the county being even bigger, that is, every 7th place of accommodation in such units for receiving tourists is located in Braşov county.

The most important clusters for the development of this form of tourism can be considered 4 localities: Braşov city, Râşnov city, Bran and Moieciu localities, which amount to over 56% of the total accommodation places of this type in the county. On the other hand, we are obliged to mention that the number of these accommodation units is increasing at a constant pace in other localities in the county, Făgăraş or Fundata representing two notable examples (Figure 1).

Although it has a significant number of producers of traditional products, it being a neighbor of Braşov and having at its disposal a range of similar natural resources, unfortunately, Argeş county cannot be proud of the same results in terms of tourism as its neighbor in the North-West. The number of pensions in Argeş represents only the third part of Braşov county's, that's about 31.6%. Therefore, it is no wonder that in some localities these types of accommodation units are completely missing (Figure 2). In 2021, the analyzed localities made available to tourists a number of 1,064 accommodation places, the largest number being in comuna Rucăr (369 seats), Câmpulung (271 seats) and Curtea de Argeş (269 seats), equivalent to 25.7% of the total places available in the agritourism at county level.

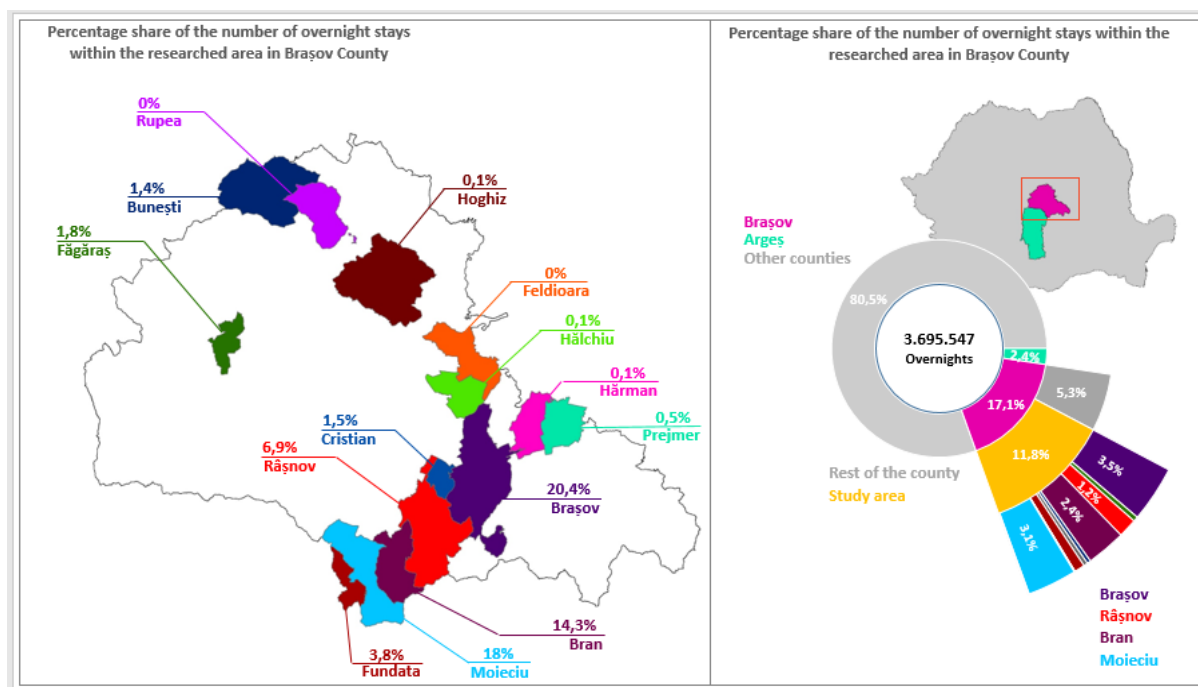


Figure 2. Percentage share of the number of overnight stays within the researched area in Braşov county in comparison with the rest of the country in 2021.

Source: Author's own.

The average countrywide medium stays in 2021 was about 2.22 nights. Both counties recorded an average number of overnight stays of 1.87 nights, Braşov being rated better in the preferences of tourists where the number of arrivals at touristic and agrotourism sites was 322,203 arrivals and 631,381 overnight stays, that is about 1.96 nights/tourist. Unfortunately, Argeş had fewer arrivals (61,633) and

87,902 overnight stays, which makes the duration of the nights spent in the accommodation units there to be 1.43 nights.

In the image above (Figure 2) we can see that within Brașov county almost 70% of the number of overnight stays is owned by the same localities that were mentioned when we talked about accommodation capacity. These are Brașov (20.4%), Râșnov (6.9%), Bran (14.3%) and Moieciu (18%).

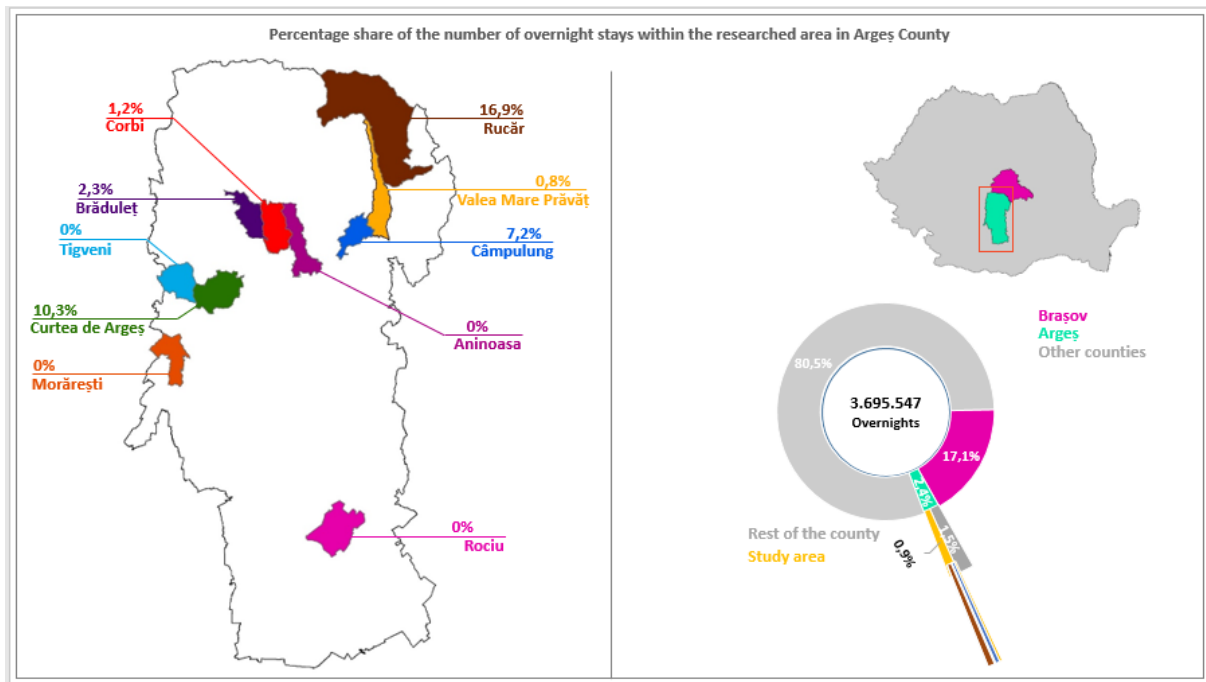


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of accommodation places within the tourist and agrotourism pensions in Argeș county in comparison with the rest of the country in 2021.

Source: Author's own.

Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate where they come from (Figure 3). The answers were divided into four categories: from Brașov; Transylvania, but other than Brașov; Romania but elsewhere than Transylvania; and abroad (Figure 4).

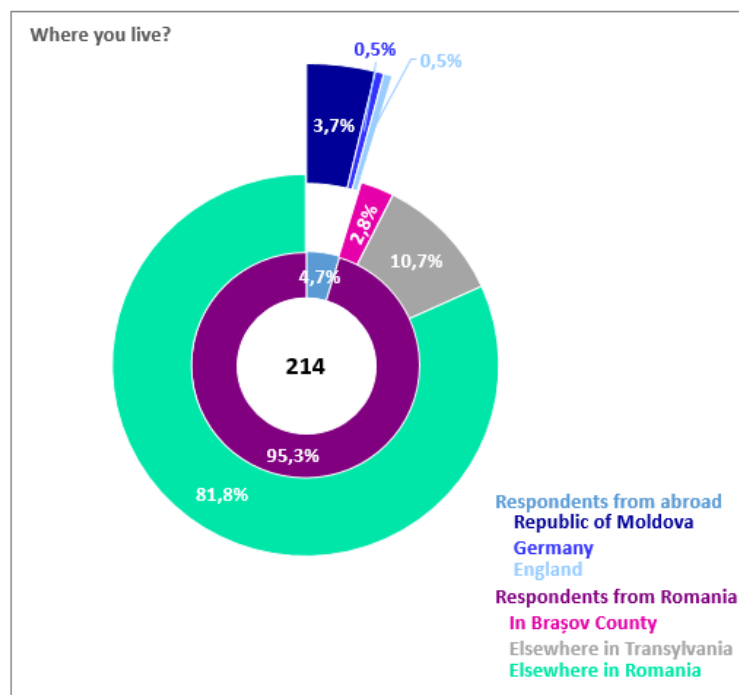


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of respondents.

Source: Author's own.

The age and sex of the respondents is quite varied, the majority (32.3%) are included in the group of those aged between 20 and 29, and it includes part of iGeneration as well as part of Millennials. The majority of respondents have a university degree (87.4%) being followed by people with secondary education. Most (49.1%) are unmarried. The average monthly income of the majority (44.9%) is between 300 and 900 euros, while 40.2% have a monthly income of more than 900 euros. The rest (15%) have incomes below 300 euros per month. The majority (84.1%) visited Braşov county repeatedly, 6.5% were once and 6.1% were twice. Only 3.3% have never visited this county. A 7.7% of respondents see in the local cuisine a reason to visit the county while the majority (26.5%) consider that the landscape is the main asset of the county. The image below (Figure 5) better shows the motivations for which the tourists visit this county. One of the questions was addressed to the respondents in order to identify the defining elements for the cuisine of the Braşov region (including the Rucăr-Bran corridor), hence almost every third person (30.9%) thinks that traditional cuisine is that element. Every fourth person (23%) believes that hospitality and the quality of services provided on the spot are another defining element (Figure 5).

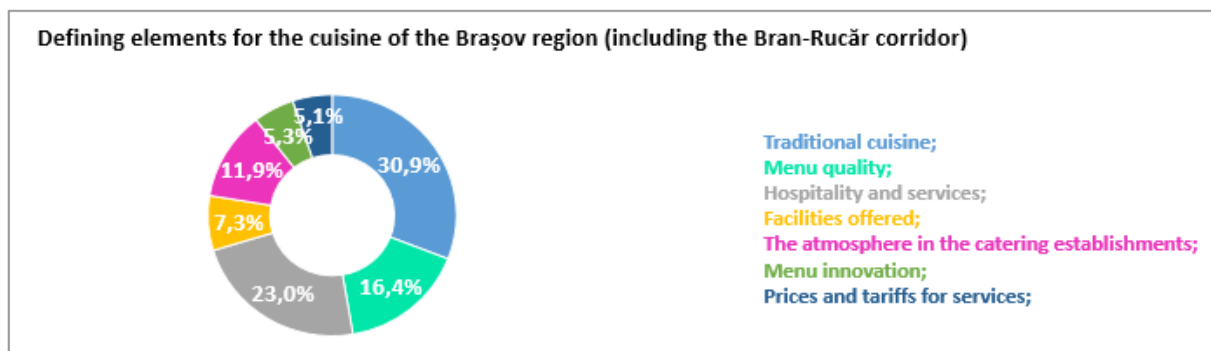


Figure 5. Defining elements for the cuisine of the Braşov region (including the Bran-Rucăr corridor).
Source: Author's own.

When asked if they consider that the products that follow a traditional recipe are of a better quality than the products that do not fall into this category, 67.8% of the respondents had an affirmative answer, 14% a negative answer and 18.2% they abstained. The survey participants were asked to tell us about how often they consume traditional products. Therefore, 36% of them said that the frequency of consumption of these products is several times a week, and 12.6% consume them daily. The detailed situation of these answers can be seen in the image below (Figure 6).

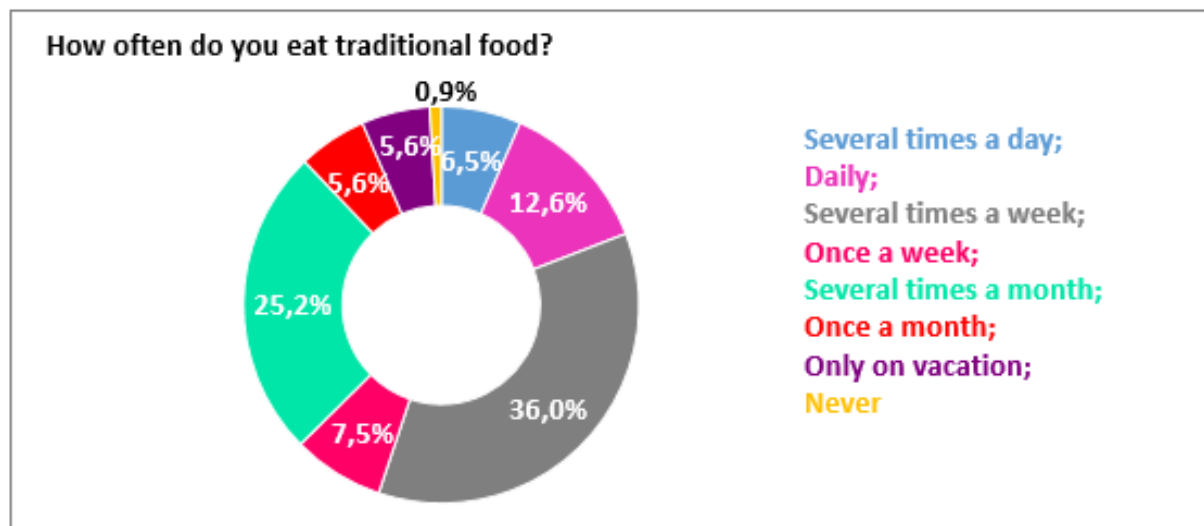


Figure 6. The frequency of consumption of traditional products by respondents.
Source: Author's own.

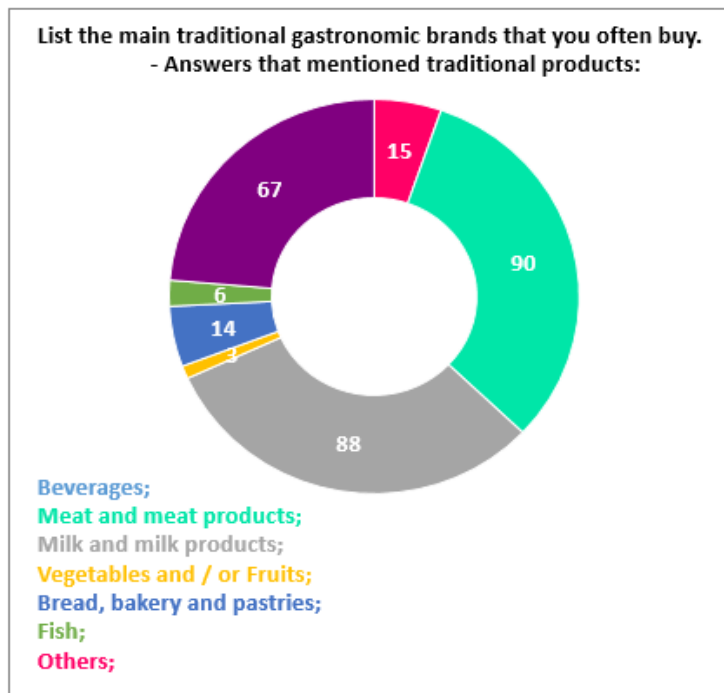


Figure 6.1. List of the main traditional gastronomic brands that you often buy
Source: Author's own.

The answers were categorized as follows: traditional products, almost all traditional food products (Figure 6.1) recognized by Ministry of Agriculture and Sustainable Development (MADR) were taken into account; producers - a significant percentage used the option of naming a specific producer (e.g: Napolact, Matache Măcelaru - famous processor for the production of several meat specialties or Sergiana); localities brand names as Pleșcoi; Bran; Sibiu or Doftana Valley, generic answers as Transylvanian dishes or brands from Bucovina region. Due to the fact that the most common answer was those that mentioned traditional products, for a better representation of these answers we decided to analyze the respective variants (Figure 6.2).

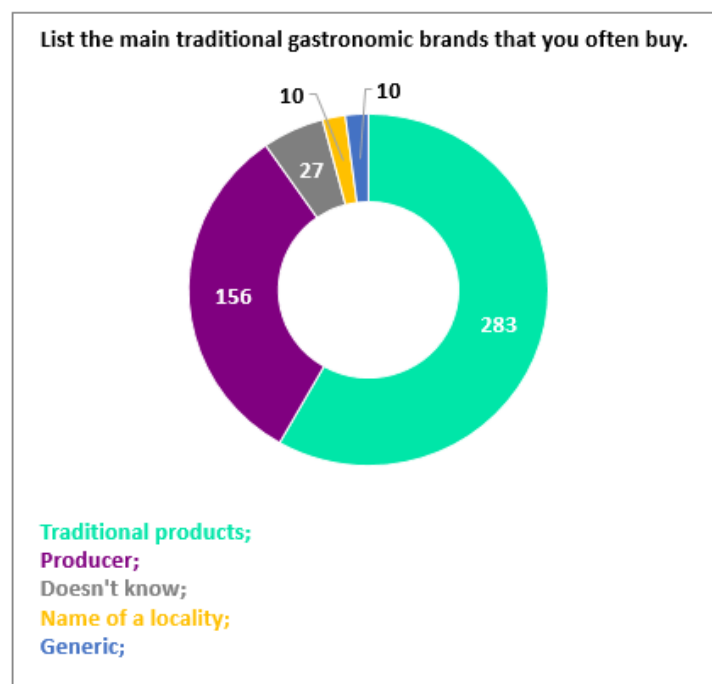


Figure 6.2. Distribution of products grouped by categories according to NRTP.
Source: Author's own.

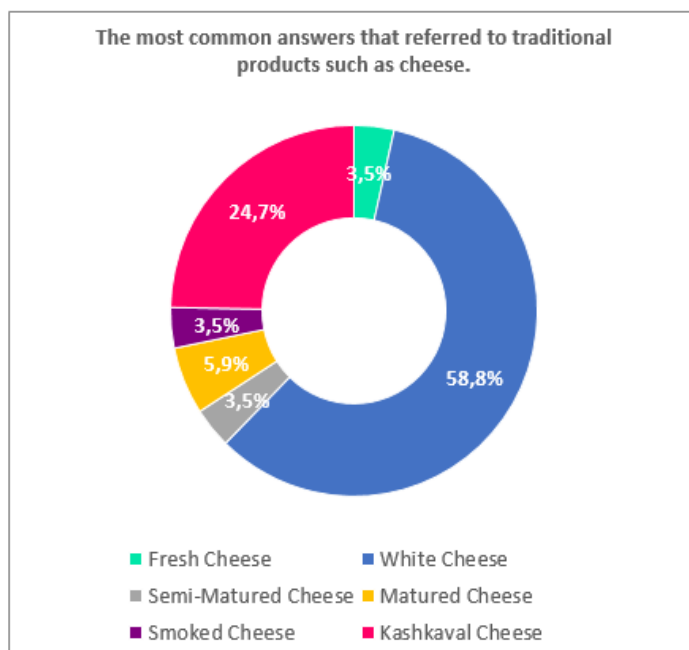


Figure 6.3. The most common answers to cheese.
Source: Author’s own.

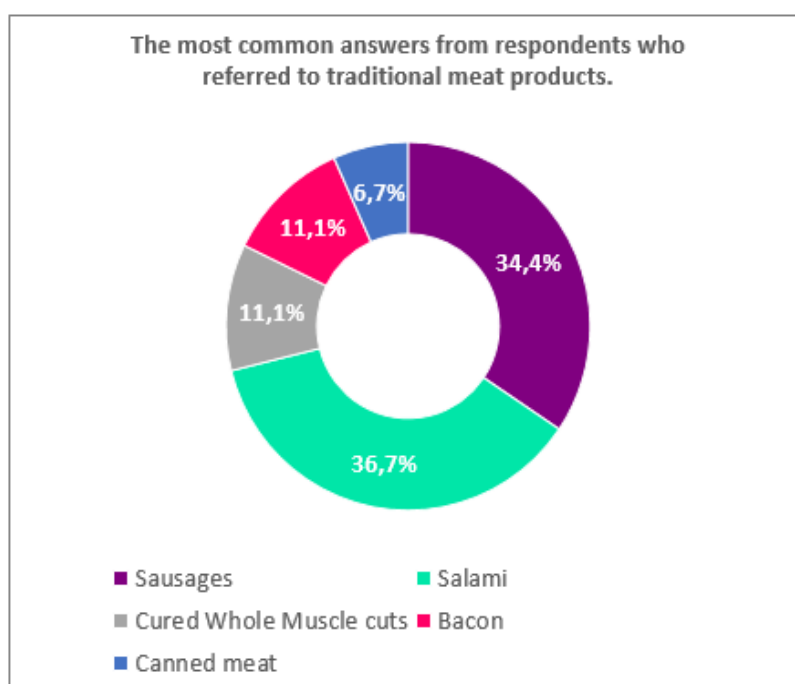


Figure 6.4. The percentage distribution of answers mentioning meat products and their derivatives.
Source: Author’s own.

Among the products that were most often mentioned we can list some of these that are part of the PDO category (PGI) such as: Sibiu Salami, Magiun de Topoloveni, Rucăr Cheese, Pleșcoi Sausages, Telemeaua or Smoked Bacon. Cheeses are mentioned quite often (31.1%), and their geography goes far from the researched area and is spread throughout Romania (Figure 6.3). Thus, the respondents gladly mentioned the Ibănești, Trascău, Fundata, Horezu, Colțești and Mărginimea Sibiului region of cheeses. At the same time, other specific products were mentioned such as: Cașul, Urda, Brânza de Burduf and Cașcaveaua or Cașcavalul de Moeciu.

The most common answers are those that mention sausages and meat dishes (31.8%), they have a wide range of products that respondents remembered (Figure 6.4). Sausages, like cheeses come from

various parts of Romania, so we can meet: Ghiudem-ul tăăresc, Cârnații Ardelenești, Moldovenești, Pleșcoi or Babic de Buzău. It is interesting because a large part of the respondents does not necessarily consider that the traditional product must have a brand behind it, for many, this kind of products are already brands, not of some commercial entities but of the Romanian people.

Among the most popular dishes we can find sarmale; soups - Transylvania, bean or belly to fish brine or bulzul - interpreted by various ways of preparation, such as the variety of Bulzul de Bran or the one with Burduf cheese (Figure 6.5).

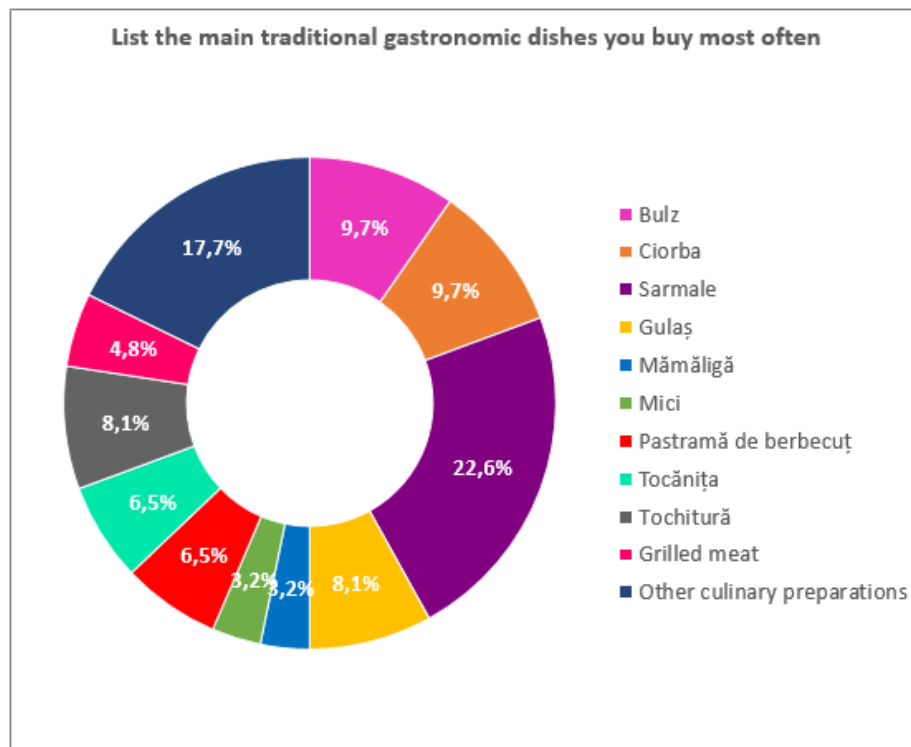


Figure 6.5. Food (preparations) cooked according to the traditional recipes mentioned by the respondents.
Source: Author's own.

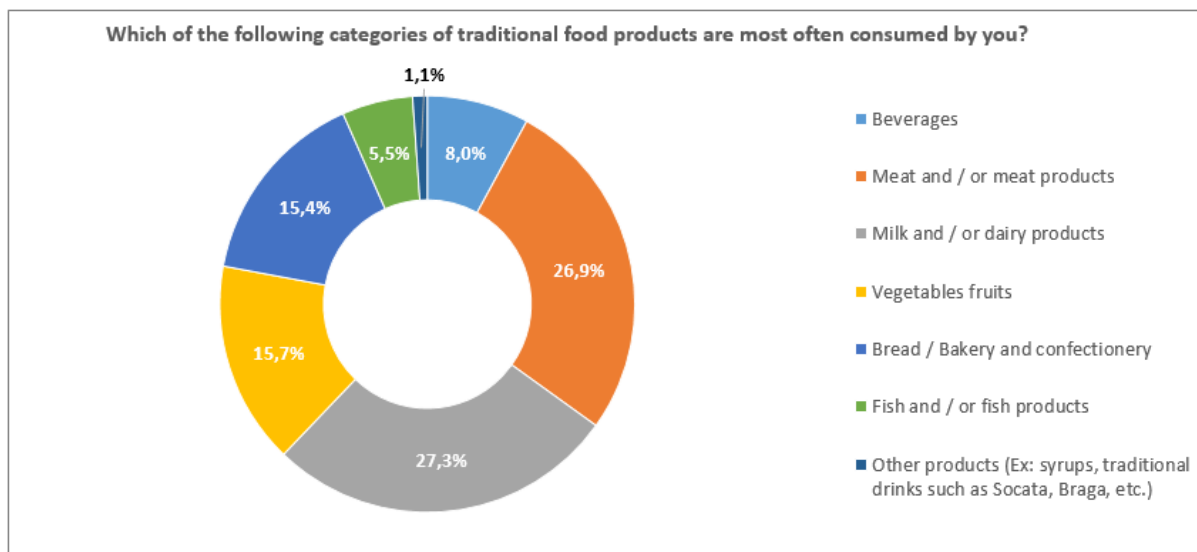


Figure 7. Frequency of consumption of traditional products according to their category.
Source: Author's own.

Respondents were asked to tell us which products are most often consumed by them, so we can see that among the leaders are dairy and meat products (27.3% and 26.9%, respectively). Fruits and

vegetables rank third in the consumption list (15.7%), which indicates that most do not have a high interest in health. More details can be seen in the image below (Figure 7).

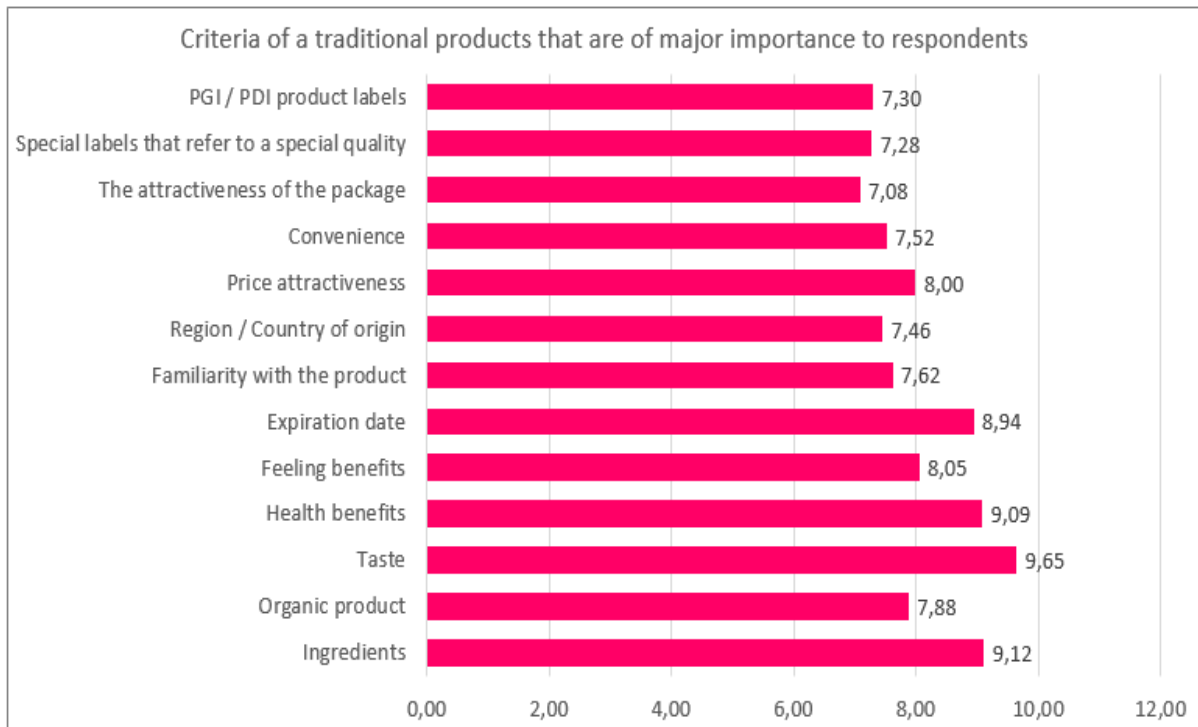


Figure 8. Important criteria for traditional products from the respondents' point of view.
Source: Author's own.

When participants were asked to express their opinion on the quality of public catering services an overwhelming majority (97%) said they were very satisfied or only satisfied with this, with negative responses representing only 3 % (Figure 8).

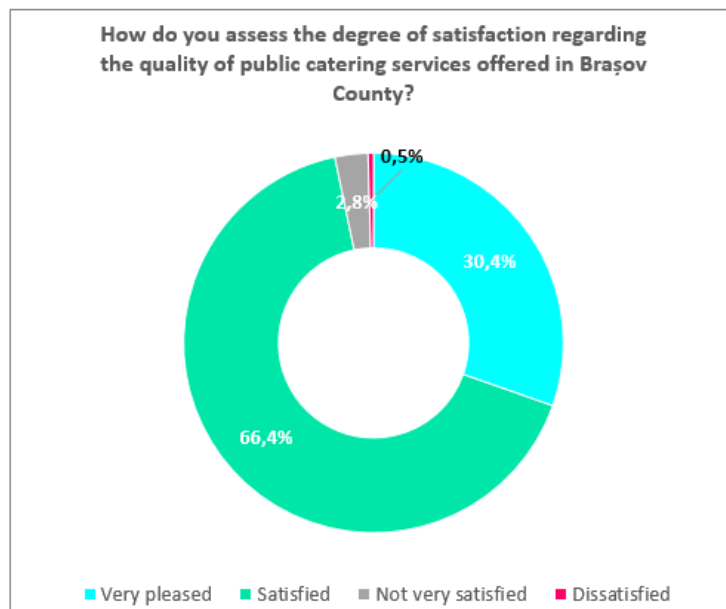


Figure 9. The level of satisfaction regarding the quality of public catering services in Braşov county.
Source: Author's own.

The next question that the people participating in the survey were asked to answer was the quality of the gastronomic events organized in Brașov county, hence the majority were satisfied (66.4%) and the next one related to the level of satisfaction of the respondents regarding the quality of the gastronomic events organized in Brașov county (Figure 9).

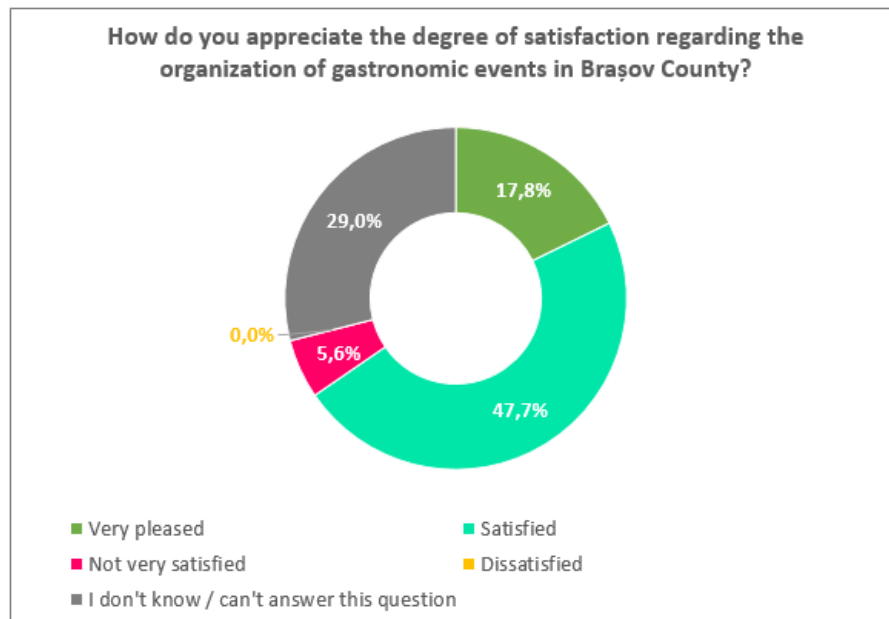


Figure 10. The level of satisfaction of the respondents regarding the quality of the gastronomic events organized in Brașov county.

Source: Author's own.

Most of the respondents are consumers of traditional products from the researched area (Brașov county, implicitly Bran-Rucăr Corridor) and from other parts of Romania. All participants in the survey, regardless of age, seem to be interested in gastronomic tourism (Figure 10) and want to participate in various cultural events aimed at promoting certain elements of local and traditional cuisine. Their interest is motivated not only by the natural or anthropic aspects of the tourist destinations but also by the aspect of the local cuisine and the gastronomic culture of the visited region.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The values of the tourist indicators (accommodation units and tourist flow) during the COVID-19 pandemic period, in 2020 and 2021, express the attractiveness of the beauty of the rural landscape springing from the collective biography of the human-nature relationship.

Judging by the high and diversified number of certified traditional products of the entrepreneurs of the Brașov-Bran-Rucăr-Dragoslavele area in the 10 tourist villages, located in an exceptional natural setting, the daily meals of the tourists can be ensured for the most part even only from the existing fund of certified traditional products. The situation reached highlights the power of influence of the tradition in the area with healthier lifestyles and the existence of an adequate framework in the development of culinary tourism. Even if some are high altitude villages, advances in information technology, internet, mobile telephony, etc. have been an important way in the development of tourism for this area.

Therefore, the successful rural communities have been able to create the right mix of business for tourism including adequate accommodation and catering facilities. They have also developed quality tourist attractions by organizing special events, with greater impact such as gastronomic festivals (with traditional products, some certified), plus all kinds of outdoor activities thus making tourists to stay longer, return to this area and to promote the area through social channels (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) and through live speeches when returning to the places of residence. The tourist attractions of these villages throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, some like Bran, Moieciu, Fundata with priority places in the whole network of villages and with accommodation units and tourist flow of the area, but also throughout

the country express the rediscovery by tourists of the rural world, away from the noise of cities, with accommodation in smaller reception units than hotels.

Compared to the big urban centers as Bucharest, Ploiești, Târgoviște, Buzău, Brăila, Galați, Brașov, Sibiu, the receiving villages in the studied area have an advantage due to their geographical location, being up to about 3-4 hours away driving from big cities, which means that these cities will continue to fuel and resize the flow of tourism.

Future recommendations for this type of research would be the expansion of the study area and the addition of more data in this regard (i.e. from questionnaire or interview methods), as well as the combination of several research methods to obtain more exhaustive results. The work also has limitations in that it is limited to only two counties of Romania and only deals with a certain subject from the perspective of agritourism.

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USE OF AI TOOLS DECLARATION

The authors declare they have not used Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the creation of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to this work. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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