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THE ROLE OF LOCAL GASTRONOMY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM SERVICES

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Abstract: *Changes in consumer behavior have led to an increasing focus on authentic and personalized experiences, and food has gone beyond its traditional role of satisfying a physiological need. Contemporary tourists seek to discover local culture through culinary dishes, traditional products and direct contact with host communities. In this context, gastronomy has become a factor of attractiveness and differentiation for many tourist destinations. Gastronomic tourism, also known as culinary tourism or food tourism, is a form of tourism in which the main or secondary motivation for the trip is to explore the culinary heritage of a destination. In Romania, interest in capitalizing on gastronomic heritage within rural tourism has increased considerably in recent years. The development of local gastronomic points, the promotion of certified traditional products and the organization of culinary festivals contribute to the integration of gastronomy into the tourist offer of Romanian villages. These initiatives allow the capitalization of local resources and support the economic development of rural communities.*

Introduction

In rural areas, local gastronomy occupies a central place in the life of communities, as it reflects the close relationship between man and the environment. The products used in traditional dishes usually come from local agriculture, animal husbandry or the exploitation of natural resources specific to the region. Thus, local gastronomy becomes an authentic expression of the cultural identity and heritage of a community.



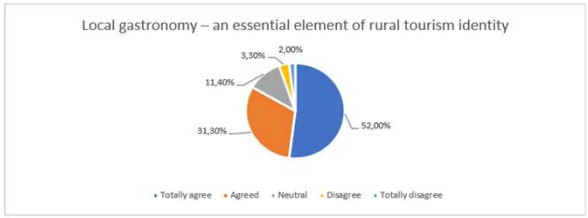
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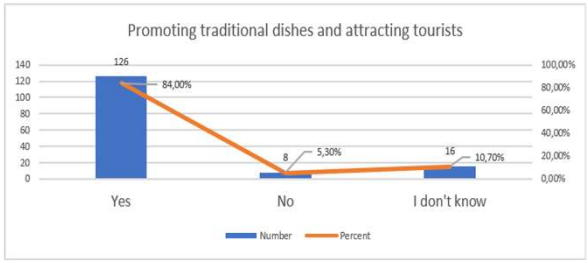
Gastronomic tourism

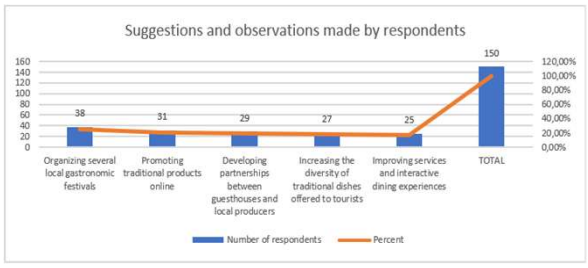
Material and method

The research aimed to analyze the role of local gastronomy in the development of rural tourism services, by investigating the perceptions of tourists and consumers regarding the importance of traditional dishes, local products and gastronomic experiences in choosing and recommending rural destinations.
The study used the questionnaire-based survey method. The sample was a non-probabilistic, convenience sample, consisting of people available to participate in the research in the established places and period.

Results and discussions







Conclusions

The study reveals that local gastronomy directly influences the choice of tourist destination. Over two-thirds of respondents consider that traditional dishes have a high or very high influence on the travel decision, and over three-quarters appreciate local gastronomy as an important element of the tourist experience. These results confirm that the culinary offer can represent a competitive advantage for rural destinations.