

A MODEL OF GOOD PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM FROM THE MOUNTAIN AREA - A CASE STUDY "GURA RAULUI", SIBIU COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present a model of good practices in sustainable rural tourism in the mountain area of Romania, exemplifying a well known tourist village. from the Sibiu County. At the beginning, there were described the stage of development of rural tourism in the mountain commune named "Marginimea Sibiului", in terms of the structure of the tourist accommodation and public food units, touristic and anthropological objectives, the promotion of the tourist offer. Then, there were calculated and interpreted some indicators of the tourist circulation. The second stage of the research analyzes the expectations of 360 tourists from a vacation spent in the tourist village of Gura Râului, the selected case study, as a model of good practices in sustainable rural tourism. The survey was carried out based on a structured questionnaire including 13 questions, which was utilized as a working tool. The respondents' answers were collected, summarized and then the data were statistically processed using Excel, v. 365 Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA. The results showed that Gura Râului becomes a more attractive destination for the rural tourism lovers and a real example of sustainable rural tourism to be followed by other mountain villages of Romania.

Key words: sustainable, rural tourism, mountain area, Gura Râului, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism contributes to the economic, cultural, social, and environmental sustainability of rural areas [26]. As a rule, rural tourism is associated with the concept of sustainable tourism [20]. It allows the diversification of the activities of agricultural holdings, protects extensive agriculture, creates employment opportunities especially for women, reduces the depopulation of villages, allows the direct exploitation of food products produced by peasants, and promotes local culture, products, and services [8, 17]. The creation of jobs in the rural environment is even more important, as the number of people employed in agriculture in Romania in 2022 was 878 thousand people, representing only 65.7% of the agricultural workforce, existing in 2013 [13]. Rural tourism jobs

involve improving the professional and digital skills of rural residents, especially young people working in the service sector [33].

[1] state that the sustainable development of rural areas requires a balance between already existing economic activities and tourism activities.

Rural tourism in general, and in a special way in mountain villages, contributes to keeping the cultural heritage and rural lifestyle [24]. In such of communities, rural tourism must value the connection between man and nature, on the use of extensive agricultural practices, with an emphasis on the superior quality of the food products obtained [18].

In U.E. in 2021 there were 1,832 million nights spent in EU tourist accommodation [20]. 43.1% of the number of overnight stays in 2021 in tourist accommodation structures were recorded in

the months of July and August, indicating a high degree of seasonality.

However, the number of nights spent in EU tourist accommodation by domestic tourists was 17.9 % lower in 2021 than it had been in 2019, respectively, in the pre-pandemic period [10, 11].

In 2022, the European Union had 12,696,794 places (beds) in the tourist accommodation structures of the rural area, which represented 43.80% of the total existing accommodation capacity [9]. This aspect reflects how important is the development of rural tourism for the member states.

In this context, the goal of the research is to analyse the actual state of development of rural tourism in Gura Râului village, Sibiu County and to identify what tourists expect from a vacation spent in the mountain area, at Gura Râului.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research work was based on a large variety of information from the literature in the field and on the collection of information from the case study in Gura Râului village.

The methodology included at the beginning desk research methods and procedures to collect the primary data from official information sources and data bases regarding lodging and travel services provided. In this case it was used the site of The National Authority for Tourism under the coordination of the ministry in charge of tourism activities and also the data were picked up from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. After setting up the data collection for this research work, there were calculated some competitiveness indicators of rural tourism in Gura Râului commune, Sibiu County.

It is about the following indicators:

The tourist flow density needed to be calculated as a ratio between the number of arrivals and the number of resident population (January 1) and it reflected the direct connection between tourist traffic and the resident population in the village [25].

$$TD = TA/P \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

where:

TD = tourist traffic density

TA = total number of arrivals

P = population of the locality on 1 January

The intensity of tourist flow was determined dividing the number of overnight stays to the resident population in the village [2].

$$TI = Os/P \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

where:

Ti = tourist traffic intensity

Os = number of tourist overnight stays

P = total population on 1 January

To assess the size of the tourist development in the studied area, it was evaluated the tourist operation rate, whose formula involves to calculate the ratio between the total number of accommodation units and the resident population.

$$Tfr = Tacu/P \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

where:

Tfr = tourism function rate

Tacu = total number of accommodation units

P = total population on 1 January

A sociological survey was run in the second stage of the research in order to quantify the expectations of young people who love to spend a vacation in such a charming rural area and in the Gura Râului village. In order to solve this problem, it was developed a structured questionnaire which served as a working tool.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions regarding rural tourism as follows:

Q1 – What were your sources of information to choose a rural tourism destination where to spend your holiday?

Q2 - Ways to book the tourist stay?

Q3 - On a scale of 1 to 5 how much do you prefer Mărginimea Sibiului as a holiday destination?

Q4 - Can you locate the commune of Gura Râului?

Q5 - What motivates you to choose Gura Râului like a tourism destination?

Q6 - Which is the preferred season for spending a holiday at Gura Râului?

Q7 - What is the distance between your home and Gura Râului commune?

Q8 - What means of transportation did you use during a vacation in a rural tourism destination?

Q9 - What is the length of stay in a rural tourism destination?

Q10 - What kind of tourist services do you prefer?

Q11 - What are the most attractive activities you want to do in a rural tourism destination if you stay in the local community?

Q12 - What kind of local products do you prefer to buy in the tourist village?

Q13 - On a scale from 1 to 5, how much would you like to return to the Gura Râului tourist village and recommend it to others?

The sample size was 360 respondents. Respondents received the questionnaire on their email address and were asked to share it with other friends/acquaintances. The questionnaire was also distributed through social media platforms. Responses were collected between March 1 and April 30, 2022.

The questionnaire also included questions to classify respondents by age, gender, domicile, level of education, number of persons in the household, average monthly gross income level.

Then, using Excel, v. 365 Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA, the data collected based on the respondents' answers were statistically processed.

According to the well known procedures which are used in processing the answers collected from field survey, we passed to calculate the frequencies and the shares of the received answers using:

- *Semantic Differential Scale* (Osgood, C.E.,1957), to highlight the intensity of the opinions in terms of the weighted arithmetic mean for each item of a question, using the formula:

$$\sum_{i=1}^n f_i \dots \dots \dots (4)$$

where:

x_i is the score linked to the evaluation, f_i is the frequency, more exactly the number of answers registered for each score.

- *Likert Scale* (1932), emphasizes the agreement and disagreement of the respondents related to an item of a question. In this research, the 5 Point Likert scale was utilized [14].

Suggestive graphics were set up to help the readers to better understand the analyzed phenomenon. The tables synthesized a part of the results. Finally, the results were correspondingly interpreted and the main conclusions resulting from this research were drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Case study: Analysis of the rural tourism infrastructure in Gura Râului commune and the determination of tourism competitiveness indicators

Geographical, demographical and cultural description

The poet Lucian Blaga states: "You should see Gura Râului sometime to understand what a corner of heaven with an ancient tradition means in Romanian culture".

Gura Râului commune in Sibiu county, Romania is one of the 18 localities that form the well-known pastoral area "Mărginimea Sibiului". In this region, the tourists have the opportunity to admire the beautiful mountain scenery and to benefit of the authentic cultural experiences which are harmoniously combined, which contributed to the awarding in 2015 of the title of "European destination for tourism and gastronomy" [29].

In the past, the area was known for transhumance of sheep, but currently only four localities practice it: Poiana Sibiului, Jina, Tilișca and Rășinari. The sustainable development of the Mărginimea Sibiului area must be achieved by revitalizing traditional economic activities and rural tourism [27]. The importance of rural tourism in Sibiu County and in the "Mărginimea Sibiului" area has grown year by year [21]. In the "Mărginimea Sibiului" area, the local communities have developed over time a mixed economy, based on agriculture, animal

husbandry, especially sheep breeding, handicrafts, and in the last thirty years it has become a well-known destination for rural tourism and agritourism. In this area in 2021, 182 tourist structures with accommodation function were operating [7].

Gura Râului commune had a population of 3,811 inhabitants (ins) on January 1, 2023 and is a compact locality, with the hearth of the village located on the Cibin River valley. The locality is 18 km from the city of Sibiu, being in the mountain area at an altitude of 544 m [12] and is documented since 1380 [15]. The total area of the commune is 10,545 km², with a population density of 36 inhabitants/km².

The structure of the land fund of the commune includes 3,882 ha - area of grain cultivation and animal breeding, of which 942 ha are arable land and 2,958 ha are pastures and hayfields. 1,312 households are registered in the commune, of which 1,312 are owners of agricultural land and 193 are animal breeders or bee families. The forest area of the commune is 6,217 ha [16].

Natural tourist attractions

The main attraction of the commune is the beauty of the mountain landscape. The reservoir of 65 ha surface situated in the vicinity provides edible water both for the whole county, and also for the municipality and all kind of localities in the region.

In the proximity of the commune, it is situated the Cindrel Natural Park, which has a surface of 9,873.9 ha and is located on the territories of the communes of Gura Râului, Rășinari, Tilișca and Jina) and the Iezerle Cindrelului Nature Reserve, with an area of 609.6 ha.

Anthropogenic tourist attractions

In the commune there is a village museum established in 1969 which houses a village collection of ethnography and local history. In the locality there are several historical monuments, among which we mention: an Orthodox church (18th century), a hydraulic textile installation (19th century), a covered wooden bridge (19th century), wooden houses (19th century).

The commune was famous in the past for the installations that used water power, such as

mills, mills or pines. Today, such hydraulic installations are still preserved in households, such as oil presses [28].

In the period 2007-2010, the Sibiu County Council and the Sibiu Regional Ecomuseum Association organized a symposium here entitled "Water Civilization" through which these hydraulic installations were highlighted.

The local public authority understood the importance of organizing local events that would attract tourists and help promote local identity and preserve traditions [5]. On the first weekend of July, the "Peony Festival" is held in the commune, to pay tribute to the mountain peony (*Rhododendron Rotschy* or the smardarul) that blooms in the nearby mountain area. The event is organized over two days and includes an "Evening as in the barn", with local folklore and a specific menu and a folklore show with the participation of amateur artist ensembles from the area [31]. In the commune there is a vocal group that works in addition to the cultural home. The locality also organizes the celebration for wearing the traditional costume.

The structure of the accommodation and catering base

In the commune of Gura Râului, 31 tourist structures with accommodation function are classified, which include rural tourist guesthouses, agrotourism guesthouses, hotels, cabins, and rooms for rent, with a total capacity of 468 places. Of these, 18 (58.06%) are rural tourist guesthouses, which offer 249 places for accommodation (57.48%) (Table 1).

Their comfort category is 3 stars/daisies for 61.29% of the tourist structures, 4 stars/daisies for 12.90% of the structures and 2 stars/daisies for 16.13 of the accommodation spaces. Some of the rooms for rent in citizens' homes are classified at 1 star, representing 9.68% of the total number of tourist structures.

There are two restaurants, a bar and a wine cellar within the locality, with a total capacity of 278 seats. Also, one of the 35 existing local gastronomic points in Sibiu County was established in the village [18].

Table 1. The structure of the accommodation base

Type of accommodation unit	Specification					
	No	%	Number of rooms	(%)	Number of accommodation places	(%)
Tourist guesthouse	18	58.06	120	57.14	269	57.48
Agritourism guesthouse	2	6.45	11	5.24	26	5.56
Hotel	1	3.23	30	14.29	61	13.03
Chalet	5	16.13	21	10	46	9.83
Rooms for rent	5	16.13	28	13.33	66	14.10
Total	31	100	210	100	468	100

Source: own calculation base on [17].

In the commune there is a sheep pastrami producer that has registered its product on the optional "mountain product" and "traditional product" quality schemes.

Indicators of tourist traffic



Fig. 1. Dynamics of tourist traffic density in Gura Râului, between 2018-2022
 Source: Own calculation based on [19].

Figure 1 shows that in 2022 it was observed the highest value of tourist traffic density accounting for 2.04 in the whole interval 2018-2022.

The lowest value of the indicator was 0.71 carried out in 2018.

During the Covid 19 pandemic, small capacity tourist accommodation structures, especially those in the mountain area, responded to the demand for accommodation for families or small groups, who preferred them for sanitary safety [22].

The two indicators, the density of tourist traffic and the intensity of tourist traffic increased in the analysed time interval.

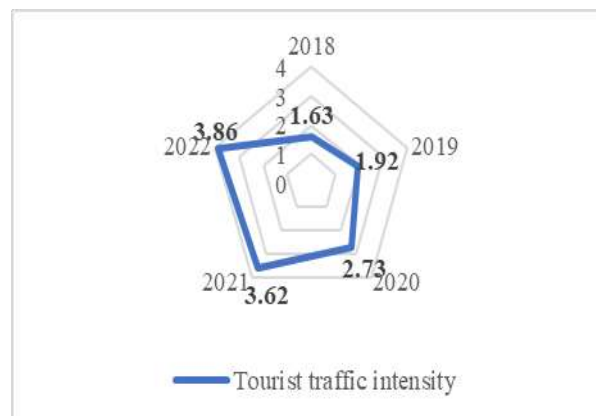


Fig. 2. Dynamics of tourist traffic intensity Gura râului, between 2018-2022
 Source: Own calculation based on [19].

During the Covid 19 pandemic and immediately after it, tourists preferred to spend their holidays in small tourist structures, especially in the mountain area. The rate of the tourist function has for the year 2022 the value of 0.008.

Promotion of accommodation services

The tourist structures with accommodation function in the commune of Gura Râului promote their tourist offer through the platforms: Facebook, Travelminit, Booking, Turistinfo, Directbooking, Agoda, Tripadvisor, La Pensuni, România Turistica, Sky Trip, Tourism guide, and through the websites own [6]. The promotion of services has been carried out since 2014 mainly through the Internet and less through collaboration with travel agencies [31].

The expectations of young tourists from a vacation spent in the tourist village of Gura Râului, Sibiu County

Socio-demographic data of the respondents

The questionnaires on rural tourism and customers preferences have been applied to a number of 360 respondents. Analysing the data obtained using questionnaires, by gender of the respondents, it can be observed that these were applied to 27.5% males, and to 72.53% females.

Table 2. Data on respondents

Specification		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	99	27.5
	Female	261	75.7
	Total	360	100
Domicile	Urban	173	48.06
	Rural	187	51.94
	Total	360	100
Age (years)	18-29	176	48.88
	30-39	71	19.72
	40-49	75	20.84
	50-59	30	8.34
	Above 60	8	2.22
	Total	360	100
Last school completed	Gymnasium	1	0.28
	Vocational school	5	1.39
	Ghigh schools	99	27.50
	Post high school	18	5.00
	Faculty	132	36.67
	Masters	84	23.33
	PhD	21	5.83
	Total	360	100
Family income* (Lei)	Under 3,000 lei	43	11.94
	3,001-7,000 lei	159	44.17
	7,001-10,000 lei	89	24.72
	Above 10,001	69	19.17
	Total	360	100
Persons in household	1	12	3.33
	2	83	23.06
	3	81	22.50
	4	114	31.67
	5	47	13.06
	Above 6	23	6.38
	Total	360	100

*1 euro = 4.9720 lei on 27 December 2023

Source: Own calculation.

The domicile of the respondents is in the case of more than half of the people (187) in the rural area (51.94%). Depending on the age of the respondents it was found that most of them were between the ages of 18-29 years (48.88%), followed by those between the ages of 40-49 years (20.84%), afterwards by the

respondents between the ages of 30-39 years (19.72%), finding at the opposite pole, those with ages over 50 years (10.56 %) (Table 2).

Most of the respondents (247 people) are young, under the age of 39 (68.60 %). More than half of the respondents (237 people) graduated from at least one college (65.83 %). The average monthly income of the household is below 7,000 lei (about 1,408 euro/month, household) for 56.11% of the respondents. It is observed that in the households of approx. 80% of the respondents are under 4 people.

Respondents' answer to the questionnaire

As can be seen from Fig. 3, the main sources of information regarding the possibility of spending a holiday in Romania are relatives/friends (86.67%), Booking (81.94%), the accommodation units' own websites (71.11%) and Facebook (72.22%). In general, young people are used to using the Internet for information and are familiar with the main social networks or booking platforms.

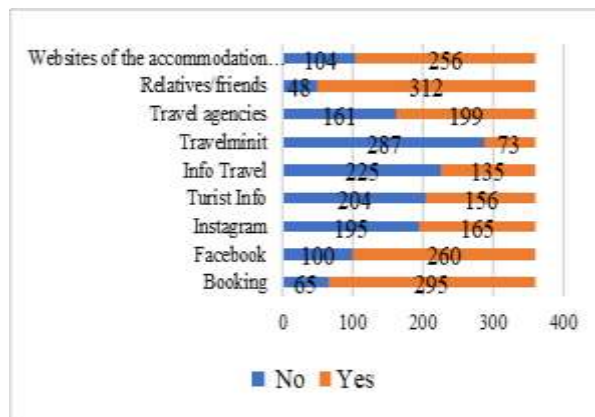


Fig. 3. The main sources of information about holidays in Romania

Source: Own calculation.



Fig. 4. The way in which the accommodation reservation is made.

Source: Own calculation.

The majority of respondents, more exactly 82.78%, being young and familiar with the use of the Internet, they usually practice to make make reservation directly on the website of the accommodation units for tourists (Fig. 4).

The results obtained regarding the use of the Internet and access to social networks are consistent with the statistical data of the E.U. which shows that in 2022, 84% of people use the internet daily and 58.2% of people aged 16-74 have accessed social media accounts in the last three months. [11].

Recently published studies emphasize the importance of technology, mobile phone applications and devices (identification of GPS coordinates, digital maps, the Questo application for the identification of tourist attractions, software that allows the identification of plants or types of clouds) that can be used for sports or in during nature activities The results obtained regarding the use of the Internet and access to social networks are consistent with the statistical data of the E.U. which shows that in 2022, 84% of people use the internet daily and 58.2% of people aged 16-74 have accessed social media accounts in the last three months. [3; 18; 32].

In order to be the extent to which the respondents would choose a rural tourism destination for a holiday, a 5-point Likert scale was used (1 – total disagreement, 3 – neutral, 5 – total agreement).

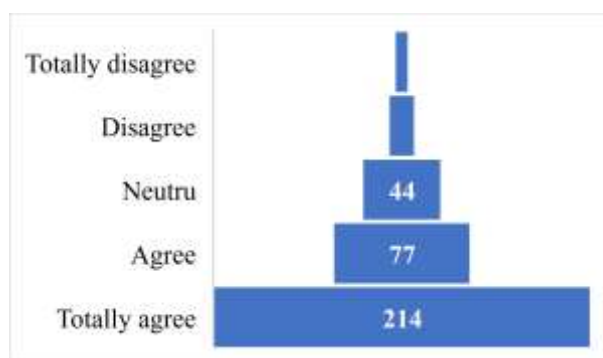


Fig. 5. The preference for choosing the Mărginimea Sibiului area as a holiday destination.
 Source: Own calculation.

They were asked to specify how much they prefer the area of Mărginimii Sibiului as a holiday destination (Fig. 5).

More than 80% of people agree with choosing this area as a holiday destination, which demonstrates the area's popularity as a rural tourism destination.

The respondents know the locality of Gura Râului whose membership was attributed to Sibiu county (96.67%), Mărginimea Sibiului area (96.39%), with a tradition of shepherding (79.92%).

The main motivations for which respondents would choose to spend a vacation in Gura Râului are shown in Fig. 6.

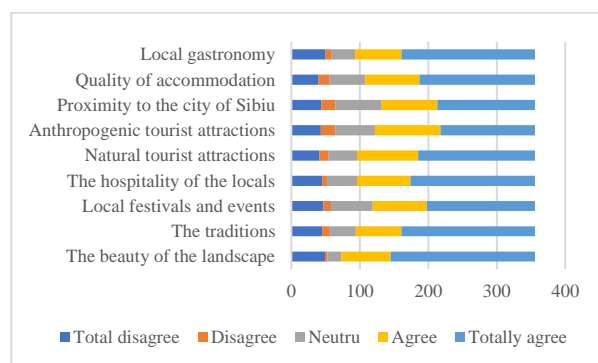


Fig. 6. The main reason why tourists choose to spend a vacation in the village of Gura Râului
 Source: Own calculation.

Using the Semantic differential, the obtained scores allowed to classify the motivations of the respondents in the decreasing order of their importance as follows: 1- The beauty of the landscapes; 2- Traditions; 3- Local gastronomy; 4- The hospitality of the locals; 5- Natural tourist attractions; 6- Quality of accommodations; 7- Local festivals and events; 8- Anthropogenic tourist attractions; 9 – Proximity to the City of Sibiu.

The general average score was 3.92 and considering this level, we may easily notice that almost all the motivations regarding the choice of a holiday in Gura Râului as a rural touristic destination registered higher scores, except the local festivals and events, anthropogenic tourist attraction and, the proximity to the City of Sibiu (Table 3).

Table 3. The scores reflecting the most important motivations of the respondents to choose Gura Râului as their holiday destination

	Score	Rank
The beauty of the landscape	4.11	1
The traditions	4.01	2
Local festivals and events	3.83	7
The hospitality of the locals	3.98	4
Natural tourist attractions	3.95	5
Anthropogenic tourist attractions	3.76	8
Proximity to the city of Sibiu	3.74	9
Quality of accommodation	3.92	6
Local gastronomy	3.99	3
Average score	3.92	-

Source: Own results based on social survey

This shows that respondents want to visit touristic villages, especially from mountains area for their beauty of the landscapes, where the local traditions are well conserved, and the hosts are full of hospitality and offer a large range of local gastronomy.

Statistical data after the Covid 19 pandemic show that 82% of Europeans were willing to change their travel habits for more sustainable practices. These mostly refer to visiting less populated tourist destinations, holidays spent closer to home and eating local, fresh food. The results obtained regarding the use of the Internet and access to social networks are consistent with the statistical data of the E.U. which shows that in 2022, 84% of people use the internet daily and 58.2% of people aged 16-74 have accessed social media accounts in the last three months [26].

The preferred season for a holiday at Gura Râului is summer in the case of approx. 96% of respondents (Fig. 7). The reasons why tourists choose a vacation at Gura Râului in the summer are: the beauty of the landscape (27%), the possibility of practicing activities in nature (25%), participation in the "Peony Festival" (21%) or the "Romanian Port Festival" (13 %) and the desire to visit new places in the summer (14 %).

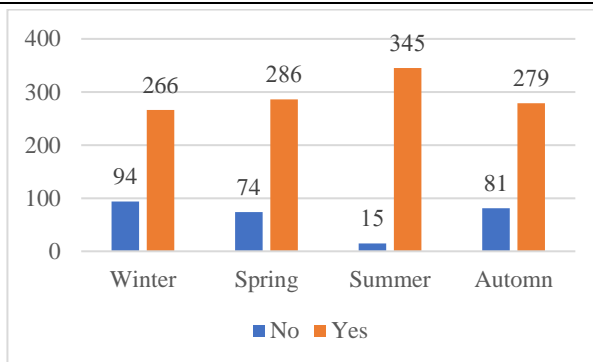


Fig. 7. Favorite season for vacation at Gura Râului
Source: Own calculation.

To find out how far Gura Râului is from the respondents' place of residence, they were asked to specify this distance in km. The 360 recorded data were then processed statistically (Table 4), resulting in an average distance of 133.14 km.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics of the data regarding the distance between the village of Gura Râului and the respondent's place of residence

Mean	133.14
Standard Error	27.05
Median	22.50
Mode	20.00
Standard Deviation	513.23
Sample Variance	263,407.90
Kurtosis	158.94
Skewness	11.28
Count	360.00
Confidence Level (95.0%)	53.20

Source: Own results based on social survey,

Using the Likert scale with five steps the mean of transportation to the chosen tourism village, we observed that 88 % of tourists mentioned their own car (4.4 score)(Table 5).

Table 5 Preferred mode of transport to reach your holiday destination

	Score	Rank
Car	4.4	1
Minibus	2.11	3
Bus	2.1	4
Bicycle	2.45	2
Motorcycle	2	5
Average score	2.61	-

Source: Own results based on social survey.

On the second position was bicycle which was used by 49% of the questioned individuals, who preferred this mean of transportation because they like a sporty lifestyle, and they are young people (Table 5).

Regarding the length of a holiday spent in a touristic village, most of the questioned persons (70%) affirmed that it was between 1 and 4 days. They prefer to use weekends for relaxation and activities in nature. About 24.44 % young tourists spent between 5 and 14 days, and only 5.28% had a vacation longer than two weeks (Fig. 8). During a vacation in a tourist village, in addition to accommodation services, 93.33% of those surveyed prefer to benefit from public catering services.

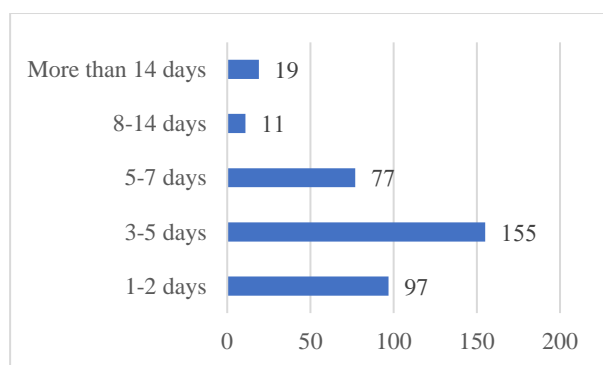


Fig. 8. Length of stay in a rural tourism destination.
 Source: Own calculation.

During a holiday in the countryside, almost half (46.67%) of the respondents prefer to serve all three meals, 36.11% prefer half board and only 17.33% prefer for accommodation with breakfast. At the same time, 93.61% of people prefer local gastronomy, specific to the area, with culinary preparations made from local raw materials, depending on the season.

Tănase et al (2023) showed that when traveling to rural areas, they are interested in the elements of cultural uniqueness, culinary diversity and the price of services [34].

The average score calculated based on 5 Point Likert scale for all the 21 activities possible to be done by tourists in a rural tourism destination was 3.75. A number of 11 activities recorded a higher score reflecting their importance and in the decreasing order they are the following: 1- Mountain hike, 2-

Campfire, 3 – Observation of flora/fauna, 4 - Visiting the hydroelectric plant, 5 – Participation in the local events, 6 - Horseback riding/carriage rides, 7 - Collection of medicinal plants/forest fruits, 8 - Attending a brunch and Visits to the farm/stable, 9 - Learning a folk craft, 10 - Visit to an ethnographic museum, 11 - Folkloric evenings (Table 6).

Table 6. The scores for the most attractive activities for tourists in a mountain rural tourism destination

Activities	Score	Rank
Mountain hike	4.34	1
Fishing/hunting	3.14	20
Cycling	3.66	13
Horseback riding/carriage rides	3.91	6
Observation of flora/fauna	4.03	3
Collection of medicinal plants/forest fruits	3.89	7
Paraglider flights	3.31	19
Team sports games	3.37	17
Detox/spa treatments	3.34	18
Winter sports	3.68	12
Folkloric evenings	3.82	11
Campfire	4.21	2
Learning a folk craft	3.87	9
Agricultural activities	3.51	16
Participation in local events	3.93	5
Attending a brunch	3.88	8
Cooking classes	3.65	14
Visits to the farm/stable	3.88	8
Visit to an ethnographic museum	3.83	10
Visiting the hydroelectric plant	3.96	4
Mountain biking	3.54	15
Average score	3.75	-

Source: Own results based on social survey.

Knowing the activities that tourists want is important both for guesthouse owners, for representatives of the local public administration, but also for other entrepreneurs in the tourist destination.

A study on youth preferences for ecotourism shows that the main activities that young people want to do in an ecotourism destination are hiking, tasting traditional gastronomic dishes and participating in local events. The possibility of practicing some recreational activities, the quality of local

gastronomy and accommodation services are at the basis of the decision to choose an ecotourism destination [32].

Almost all respondents (98.9%) want to buy local and traditional products. Among the local products that tourists want to buy from a mountain tourist village, we mention: homemade bread (91.11%), dairy products (63.89%), meat products (59.17%), craft products (58.61%), eggs (54.72%), vegetables and fruits (53.33%) and fresh milk (51.94%). A study published in 2013 shows that traditional products support the local economy and contribute to the preservation of cultural identity [4; 30].

Using the Likert scale with five steps the desire to return to the town of Gura Râului was expressed with total agreement by 284 people (78.88%) or agreement by 51 people (14.44%). These people know the tourist village of Gura Râului well and had a positive vacation experience in this locality.

CONCLUSIONS

Gura râului commune in Sibiu County is located in the mountain area and is part of the famous "Mărginimea Sibiului" sheep breeding area. Rural tourism in the locality has been carried out for more than 25 years, and to the attractiveness of the village has been contributed by: the beauty of the mountain landscape; environmental quality; the existence near the village of a hydropower plant, a water storage lake and some protected areas; the events organized at the local level; the existence of extensive farming practices, especially those related to the rearing of ruminants; the existence of craft workshops that in the past used the power of water for the needs of domestic industry (for the processing of wood, wool or food oils); small local businesses related to the processing of meat and offal into local products; the existence of a village museum and historical monuments; the existence of local groups of amateur artists; well preserved traditions; the entrepreneurial spirit of the locals.

Currently, 31 tourist accommodation structures operate in the commune, with a total capacity of 468 places. The tourist

density index in the locality increased from 0.71 in 2018, reaching 2.04 in 2022. The tourist traffic intensity index also increased from 1.63 in 2018 to 3.86 in 2022. The evolution of the two indices demonstrates that Gura râului tends to become a well-known rural tourism destination.

Rural tourism entrepreneurs promote their services through national accommodation booking platforms or their own websites and less through collaboration with travel agencies.

Tourists who want to spend a holiday in the countryside get recommendations from relatives/friends, get information from Booking, or from social networks and pension websites. More than 80% of young people use to book their accommodation services through hostel websites. Hence the need for rural tourism entrepreneurs to invest resources to promote their services through their own websites and social networks.

The basis for choosing the village of Gura râului as a holiday destination is the beauty of the landscape, the well-preserved traditions, and the local gastronomy. Most tourists choose to spend a vacation here, especially in the summer, which allows them to spend as much time as possible in nature, to practice different leisure activities and to participate in the local festival that has a national reputation. The top three activities according to tourists' preferences are mountain hiking, campfire and observing flora and fauna.

The average distance between the town of Gura râului and the residence of the 360 respondents is 133.14 km, the preferred means of transport being the personal car, which confirms the current trends for short holidays, over shorter distances.

Over 90% of tourists opt for accommodation and food services. The promotion of local gastronomy, based on fresh and seasonal raw materials, cooked according to traditional recipes, is of great importance and contributes to preserving the elements of culinary uniqueness. The high proportion of tourists (approx. 99%) who want to buy local dishes, such as bread and meat or milk products, is noteworthy. Unlike other communes in the mountainous area of Sibiu County, in Gura

râului there is a low interest of the locals in registering their products on the optional national quality schemes. Most of those who process the local raw material according to recipes specific to local gastronomy sell their products directly to guesthouse owners or to tourists. It can thus be said that through rural tourism the entire local community supports extensive agriculture in the locality, thus contributing to the creation of short food chains and improving the quality of life of farmers.

The success enjoyed by rural tourism in Gura râului is also confirmed by the fact that tourists want to come back here on vacation.

Gura râului is the second commune in Sibiu County in terms of the number of tourist structures, and the rural tourism practiced here can be considered an example of good practices in the field. Rural tourism contributes to the diversification of the local economy and stimulates rural development.

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