

THE CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY, 2019



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University of Novi Sad | Faculty of Sciences DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, TOURISM AND HOTEL MANAGEMENT

Contemporary Trends in Tourism and Hospitality, 2019

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3. Motivation, behaviour and human resources in tourism

RURAL FOOD FESTIVALS IN THE PERCEPTION OF LOCAL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS IN THE SOUTHERN GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN REGION

Bettina Tóth^{A*}, Bertalan Pusztai^B, Gábor Hegedűs^A

Abstract

Nowadays, the organization of rural food festivals is becoming more popular in villages and towns all over the world. The reason of this is that the local communities can reach many advantages from the development of settlements. Food festivals help with the marketing of the community, selling local food, increasing the income of local producers, as well as the tourism supply; and these festivals offer entertainment opportunity to local residents and visitors alike. The last two advantages have a particular role in this study. That is why festivals, especially food festivals are one of the main entertainment possibilities for the inhabitants of many smaller communities. Based on these, it is an important issue how satisfied the inhabitants and visitors from other villages are with the offer of food festivals, why they visit rural food festivals, moreover, how the organisers of the festivals could improve the offer of the festivals. We are trying to give an answer based on the research of a Hungarian rural food festival. In order to achieve this, we have conducted structured interviews between the participants of the rural food festival. Based on our results, participants of the festival took part in the festival in order to taste food, meet with their acquaintances and to have fun. Many interviewees emphasized that rural food festivals are very important because these events offer an opportunity for relaxation and the atmosphere of the festivals is also very pleasant. Most of the interviewees like visiting rural food festivals because they are familiar and cheap. However, some visitors were not satisfied with the programmes of the festivals and they did not experience improvement over the previous years. According to our results, organising the festival as well as ensuring its sustainability is of great challenge for the organizers of the food festival. There are fewer resources for the organization in many cases, and the organizers have to take the demand of local residents and visitors into consideration. Furthermore, the organizers have to be innovative year after year to sustain the interest of visitors and reach other advantages of urban and regional planning.

Keywords: Food tourism, Rural development, Rural food festival, Hungary, Southern Great Hungarian Plain Region, Derekegyház

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Introduction

Nowadays eating and drinking as additional services are becoming more and more important in the travel experience; they may even be the main motivation for travelling. As a result, gastronomic tourism has been established as an independent branch of tourism industry, which is growing in importance worldwide, including in Hungary. There are several forms of gastronomic tourism, of which our study deals with gastronomic festivals. Gastro festivals have many urban development benefits for the organizing municipality. More and more settlements would like to take advantage of these benefits; therefore, they organise festivals based on a traditional local product or some novel product that is not made or grown locally. Based on all these factors, it may be interesting to explore for what reasons festival visitors attend the event and what they think about it. In this article, we are studying the ideas of locals as well as visitors about the festival in the context of a selected village gastronomy festival.

General characteristics of gastronomic tourism

The tourism product type resulting from the relationship between food and tourism can be defined as follows: 'the main motivation factor for travel is to visit primary and secondary producers, food festivals, restaurants and special places where you can taste food or learn about the special food production characteristics of the region." Hall and Gössling (2016: 6). Thus, during a gastronomically focused trip, the tourist is interested in the gastronomic traditions of a particular region, area or community; aims to taste the local foods and drinks, and might even master their cooking techniques (Bujdosó et al. 2012). The action of eating and drinking can be experienced in many ways, including in restaurants, gastronomic thematic trips, fairs, gastronomic museums, gastronomic festivals as well as other gastronomic events (Bujdosó et al. 2012; Vargáné Csobán et al. 2015). Of these, gastro festivals are one of the most popular forms of gastronomic tourism, which usually give special attention to the organizing community once a year. An important issue with regard to gastronomy and gastronomic festivals - an issue that is interpreted diversely by the literature - is, for example, how the concepts of locality and authenticity can be interpreted and applied (Pratt, 2007; Pusztai, 2013). Nowadays there are many festivals with similar themes, still the organizers of these festivals are trying to be more innovative, unique and product-oriented according to the changing needs of the demand (Pusztai, 2003; Fehér et al. 2010; Kulcsár, 2016; Kóródi and Bakos, 2017). Places wishing to become part of the gastronomic tourism scene usually map out their gastronomic traditions and resources on the basis of which they can organize a festival (Csurgó, 2014). Also, there are places that do not rely on their own traditions, but choose a product instead which they attribute to themselves without any particular local origin or uniqueness (Pusztai, 2007). By using this method, communities that have limited resources of their own for tourism and are located in less touristy areas can be included in tourism (Fehér and Kóródi, 2008; Pusztai, 2011).

The number of gastronomic festivals in Hungary started to increase in the 1990s. Many of these have since been transformed or discontinued, in addition, many new events have been created over the past few years. The main reason for the growing number of gastronomic festivals is that they provide a number of settlement and tourism development benefits for the organizing municipality, which more and more places wish to achieve. Gastro festivals help to promote the gastronomic traditions or new trends of the community, to increase the income of food producers, to create tourist attraction, to shape the image of the place and to expand

the supply of tourism (Kalkstein-Silkes et al. 2008; Kulcsár, 2016; Timothy and Pena, 2016; Süli and Martyin, 2017). In addition, gastronomic festivals provide a meeting place for consumers and producers, as well as provide visitors with an opportunity to discover new specialties and flavours (Kalkstein-Silkes et al. 2008). Accompanying music and cultural programs provide entertainment for visitors. The tourist aspect of the gastronomy festivals and the community building influence should also be emphasized as eating and cooking together can strengthen community relations (Hall and Sharples, 2008; Horváth et al. 2016). On this basis, gastro festivals fulfil an important social and cultural function, but their economic aspects also come to the forefront (Hall and Gössling, 2016; Kulcsár, 2016).

Gastro festivals can exist in both rural and urban settings. Of these, our research pays special attention to the study of gastro festivals in villages, as these occasions are often the largest events in the area, and in many cases are the only tourist attractions. Because of this, the organizers of a village festival often see the event as a take-off point which can make the name of the village known, and might result in additional indirect benefits (Quinn, 2018); and volunteer helpers play a bigger role than at city festivals (Holmes et al., 2018). It is also an important goal to bring local residents together and provide entertainment. These goals should be of top priority, as many small villages have limited access to recreation opportunities for local residents. In addition, at village events, food and beverages are available to visitors at a low cost and the programs are usually free of charge. This way, this form of tourism is also available to families living in more modest conditions.

The organizers of village gastro festivals this face many challenges both in Hungary and in other countries. They must reconcile the interests of the various interest groups (local residents, tourists, NGOs, entrepreneurs, municipalities) and strive for continuous quality renewal, thereby maintaining the interest of visitors (Cavicchi and Santini, 2014). They need to remain in competition with other gastronomic festivals even though in the case of villages, compared to cities, the range of attractions offered at the festival is much smaller and more similar to that of other villages. They need to strike a balance between the needs of local residents and tourists, as well as provide programs for as many age groups as possible.

Methodology

It is particularly important that festival visitors, locals and tourists alike, are satisfied with the quality of the events they visit, as well as with the food and programs that are offered, according to the purpose of their visit. For this, we consider it necessary to reveal the views of the visitors. Therefore, we looked at why festival-goers attend the selected event, what factors they are satisfied or dissatisfied with, and in what ways they believe that the quality of the events could be improved. In order to answer these questions, we conducted a qualitative research at a selected Hungarian village gastro festival, the Derekegyház Pancake Festival. We conducted brief structured interviews with visitors - tourists and local residents - at the event. A total of 60 interviews were conducted with groups of 2-4 people as well as those arriving alone on the two main days of the event in 2019. The majority of our interviewees include middle-aged or elderly couples, many of those with children; and, to a lesser extent, students and young adults, which reflects the age distribution of all festival participants. It is important to note that only 17 of the respondents were local residents. 97 were tourists, most of them the rest of the participants were mostly from the neighbouring villages. Based on the distribution of the study participants' place of residence, we can conclude that tourists dominate among visitors.

Features of the Derekegyház Pancake Festival

Derekegyház with 1537 inhabitants (2018) is located in Csongrád county, Hungary, 50 km northeast of Szeged. A high-priority event of the village is the five-day Pancake Festival, which has been held every summer since 2007, and has evolved from a local celebration event of the village. In order to go beyond a family cooking competition, the local government tried to give the event a gastronomic theme with the aim of bringing people together through a joint activity and meal. The festival focused on a food that is popular in Hungary, cost-effective and because of its simplicity anyone can prepare it. This is how pancakes were chosen, so the theme of the festival was based on a novel and innovative non-local tradition, as is sometimes the case with other newly created festivals (Pusztai, 2007). There are already several pancake festivals in Hungary, but the one in Derekegyház is among the first ones. The structured interviews revealed that all of the interviewees considered this initiative a good and creative idea, and it was important for them that the event offers a good opportunity for recreation, which is especially important for the villagers, who have only few chances for entertainment. The locals involved in the research also liked the idea of pancakes, they accepted the choice even though the food has no connection to the village, and they are proud that the Pancake Festival and the name of Derekegyház are now intertwined with each other. There were some criticisms of the pancakes, that is to say, the recipe could be innovated or a specialty for Derekegyház should be created. The biggest specialty of the pancake range is the sole jam pancake, which is prepared from locally available wild sloe by the kitchen of the local government. Based on the interviews and our personal participation in the festival, we found that making or eating pancakes at the event was a way to bring people closer to each other and to make the town more popular through a joint movement.

The original purpose of the festival's organizers did not include the attraction of tourists. On the contrary, it was much more about furthering the good reputation of the village and community building, as is the case with many gastronomic festivals that evolved from local events. (Kalkstein-Silkes et al., 2008). However, the number of people interested in the festival has been increasing. Among other things it is due to the record breaking of frying pancakes in the national and regional media in recent years, as well as the positive feedback resulting from the good atmosphere. That is why the needs of tourists have also become into the focus. The previous pancake making method could no longer effectively serve the large number of people queuing for free pancakes, so some years ago it had to be redesigned. Currently, pancake making is organized by the local government, the pancake dough is prepared by the kitchen of the local government, and frying is done by frying teams.

The frying process requires a great deal of teamwork and workforce, as during the festival pancakes are being fried continuously for four days, 24 hours a day. Local residents and NGOs play a key role in the frying process (volunteers), but local governments, NGOs and volunteers from the surrounding communities also come to make pancakes, thus strengthening regional relations.

The social and community function of the festival is strengthened by the fact that the pancakes are not priced; consumers can put their donations for the pancakes in the honesty box. Thus, those who have limited financial means to consume expensive meals can also try the pancakes. The proceeds are used to organize camps for local children. Many people consider the honesty box a good idea. However, based on our research findings, it is also a major source of conflict for consumers and organizers, pancake makers. One interviewee who had previously participated in making pancakes highlighted that in the past the consumers needed to be reminded that donations were collected in the honesty box, so after asking for several pan-

cakes they should not leave without donating or giving only a symbolic amount. In his opinion, this has changed in recent years, most are now donating enough. According to one of the local visitors - a couple with young children, who seemed to be in a more modest financial situation - it is inconvenient for them that people at the pancake tent look at how much each person puts into the honesty box. They have also heard of harsh comments made to parents whose children have repeatedly been eating pancakes for free. In addition, a seemingly affluent middle-aged couple pointed out that one great advantage of the festival is that the pancakes are free. In their opinion, the honesty box is a great initiative, however, as outlined above, it has a limited social function, so it might be more favourable for both sides to ask for a fixed, symbolic sum for the pancakes. This opinion is supported by another respondent who would rather pay for pancakes than having to queue.

Cultural programmes play a prominent role at the festival, as is usually the case at rural and urban gastronomic festivals. The music programmes of the Hungarian stars performing at the Pancake Festival attract visitors from the area, while amateur performers from local and neighbouring villages also have the opportunity to perform. Due to the long duration of the festival, a large number of performers are needed, which is also partly solved by the recruitment of volunteers. Performers from other cities entertain the audience every day, mainly with folk dance, modern dance and folk songs, and some of them make pancakes. Several visitors mentioned that they came to the festival to see the performers from their own town. Most of them were satisfied with the programmes offered, they thought that these kinds of shows suited to such a village event, however, there were those who found such programmes boring. According to some, although the programmes change from year to year, their quality is generally similar; and according to one interviewee, the quality of the programmes is not matched with the quality of the festival, so the programmes should be improved: 'This event is not organized for the first time, and an event with such a great history should be better matched with the programmes offered' (Visitor 18). On the main days, the more famous performers give concerts at the festival, however, this year, most people complained that the main performers were less know Hungarian stars. In previous years, the organizers of the festival have invited prominent celebrities to perform, which attracted huge audiences according to many returning visitors. Presumably this year, the financial resources available to the organizers were more modest, which allowed them to invite performers only with a lesser reputation.

According to the interviewees, the organizers of the festival strive to ensure that people of all ages find the right activity in the programme range, and they also arrange for the entertainment of smaller children with handicraft programmes and a jumping castle. Children's programmes are free, which many parents have considered an advantage. So parents and grandparents with small children are happy to come to the festival because children can have a fun time at the event without the parents being financially burdened, and they can also let the kids play in the festival area. However, the jumping castle was set up only on Saturday, so families arriving on Friday complained that there was no play area for children. There was a smaller presence of older children, teenagers, and young adults at the festival, but we did not even notice any programmes that would have attracted people around the ages of 12-20. It was clear that the majority of visitors from this age group were bored and were tapping on their phones, which is typical of this generation anyway.

Each year, the festival features a pancake dance which was created by one of the organizers. It can be danced together, which strengthens community participation. The pancake dance was highlighted by many visitors. The pancake dance song is played from time to time and anyone can come to dance to the choreography, which is considered a very entertaining and special community activity. In addition, those who take part in the dance participate in a prize draw where they can win products from the exhibitors and nearby producers, or even a trip to Greece. However, there has been a slight change in the dance compared to recent years that does not appeal to all visitors. In rural gastronomic festivals, one can observe that they tend to create rituals and symbols after a while. These are usually unique prizes and tributes, chants and anthems or community activities. Their role is to make the event unique and enhance its celebration vibes (Pusztai, 2003, 2007).

So, the festival offers a variety of programme options to our visitors, that is why we explored the reasons why visitors come to the festival. Most people came to the event to eat pancakes, and they argued that the pancakes were better there than at home; and they were free, which is also an advantage. Other interviewees came to the festival to participate in the frying process, and there were high school students who came with their entire class for the same purpose. Meeting and relaxing with friends and acquaintances as well as entertaining children were also important motivations. While others, especially those attending the festival for the first time this year, attended the event because they had heard about it and were curious about it. In addition, the fact that the event has been held for the 13th year is viewed by visitors as a guarantee of good quality. However, there were also some who had not heard of the festival, they were in travelling through the town and wondered what was going on. Some of them came from further afield. Others simply attended the event because they considered it a pastime, and most of them also attended the programmes on offer. Most of the tourists received what they had expected from the event, their goals were met and they were expecting a standard similar to what this village event gave them. Parents and grandparents coming with their small children mainly from the city particularly enjoyed the peaceful village atmosphere. A young couple from the city was a little more dissatisfied, expecting the Pancake Festival to have more pancake stalls and more special pancakes on offer. In comparison, they said they could only consume at a pancake tent, where they did not even want to queue because of the long line. Indeed, the long line at the pancake tent is a problem every year, which shows that the festival has capacity problems. This was criticized by several visitors and it was noted that the festival had already outgrown itself.

Based on our interview results, we found that the vast majority of tourists were satisfied with the event, with only a few negatives comments. Nevertheless, they are eager to attend the event because of its friendly atmosphere. Most of the problems were identified by local residents through interviews both during and after the festival. Some local residents have objected to the change in the pancake making routine, which essentially involves local residents, because 'the atmosphere was a little different in the past. I think we have lost a lot of little points where we could have better contact with people' (Locals 1). Based on this, the communal pancake making activity of families and friends is in the process of being transformed into a specialized process to serve the needs of visitors. However, the desire of local residents to get involved in the frying and stuffing process is diminishing. Still, there is a need for more manpower during the festival, which is why the organizers are inviting and recruiting pancake making teams from the surrounding towns. This further diminishes the desire of locals to participate, as some disagree with the fact that the number of non-local people involved in the pancake making process is larger than that of the locals. The length of the event may also be a source of concern, as some locals say the five-day festival is too long for them. Locals who take part in the process feel burdened, while others find the five-day event to be disturbing. In addition, according to some visitors, the length of the event has a negative impact on the programmes offered as well as the frying. A further problem is that the former community event for locals has been transformed into a larger-scale event that attracts visitors from the surrounding area. Many people have the feeling that the festival is no longer about them, local people. In addition, some locals are already burdened by the event because of the number of things to do, as well as the length. Nevertheless, most of our interviewees believe that the sense of pride of the locals has been improved. Because most people are proud that strangers know their place of residence, their festival, and it is a sensation for them that tourists are curious about them. In addition, social responsibility should be emphasized because, for example, some local residents often join the pancake making process just to help their peers.

Findings

Most of these problems are not seen by the tourists, and the vast majority of them think that villagers need an event like this to be able to relax in their own village once a year, after a lot of work. Only a few tourists think that this event can be very stressful for the locals. We suggest that local residents be offered discounts as opposed to tourists - for example, making some paid services free- to stop them from losing interest in the event.

Based on the opinion of the interviewees, shortening the event can be put forward as a suggestion. If the resources were used for fewer days, performers of higher-quality could be invited; having more pancake stalls at the same time would reduce waiting time for the pancakes; and the organizers would be less tired by the end of the festival.

Based on the range of possibilities the festival offered, we recommend that more food sellers that sell something other than pancakes participate in the event, as the available snack bar supply in this respect was rather limited and was criticized by some visitors. There were some handicraft vendors in the festival area, however, not all the stalls available were occupied, which was not aesthetically pleasing; and the visitors would also have needed more. According to some visitors, a carousel or a dodgem would be nice at the event. In our opinion, despite increasing the range of the festival's programme offers, this is inadvisable because the space available for this is scarce; also, these activities are more expensive, which would undermine the social function of the event to provide more free or cheap programmes for poorer visitors. The programmes of the event should be extended to young people, as, according to our experience, visitors between the ages of 12 and 20 were bored at the festival. In our opinion, this could be achieved by extending the range of interactive games and activities, for which we have seen the initiative, however, it is not yet satisfactory.

Some visitors have come up with a proposal for better marketing, but we disagree with that, because our experience is that the festival is already pushing its capacity limits, therefore it cannot effectively serve more visitors. In addition, we recommend that pancakes be priced, a fixed, symbolic sum to avoid the resulting conflicts, Thus, even queuing could be shortened, which is detrimental to the festival experience. We also recommend reforming the range of pancake offer and introducing some new specialties.

According to our results, festival organizers face great challenges as they have to meet the changing needs of visitors despite their limited capacity. Most of the visitors said there would be a need for further development of the festival, and not only settle for the fact that the organizers have achieved a high standard over the years even though it is only a village gastro festival; something new would be needed for the event. However, it is a common experience that visitors, despite demanding change, are often reluctant to the change; which further complicates the work of festival organizers.

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