



DELIVERABLE 2

CHEESE, TERRITORY & TOURISM: AN ACTION PLAN FOR EU RURAL REGIONS

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Cheese, Territory & Tourism: an action plan for EU rural regions

In response to the objectives of the TastyCheeseTour project and findings of the Tourist and Entrepreneurs survey results relating to the tourism activity integration within cheese production processes this action plan is proposed as an overarching structure for the implementation of new initiatives. Proposed actions have potential to benefit tourism activity in rural and remote regions in Europe, as well as provide added value to the existing plans and strategies of rural municipalities, regional tourism information centers and other interested parties with aim to advance economic and social progress in rural areas. It includes best practices on process development and provides the methodology to develop effective promotion, how to market cheese products in tourism distribution channels.

Key challenge is to support economic growth in the region that is also an important instrument in poverty reduction. However, it only leads to a general improvement in the standards of living and a reduction of poverty if there is an accompanying accountable structure to ensure redistribution of the profits. Thus supported tourism activity amongst cheese production, sales enterprises and events could play a distributor's role, as it attracts tourists to the more remote places in the regions and it gives direct economic impulse to other service and goods providers in the area. Proposed activities are offered with the aim to create opportunities, productive resources, capacity building for a variety of livelihoods, investments in education of rural entrepreneurs, etc. that would complement and boost domestic trade, exports and the overall economic growth. The current changes and reforms in the agro tourism sector driven by the demand for better services. Efficient, effective and accountable governance, and squeezed financial resources due to the rising debts provide a greater opportunity for multi stakeholder partnership and cooperation between and among government agencies, private sector and civil society organizations towards the institutionalization of innovative delivery of capacity-building, on-farm and off farm services for the rural community and visiting groups.

Rural tourism offers significant growth potential for the wider EU visitor economy. This Action Plan recognizes and develops the growth potential with the 'wise growth' principles. This includes creating richer experiences and increasing the appreciation of the landscape and its produce, which encourages behavior that is more responsible. Ultimately, businesses will draw on the best of the locality to meet visitor expectations, maximizing economic returns that stay within the area and support key rural assets, and do so in a way that is a benefit rather than a burden to the environment and resident community.



Vision and Strategic goals of the action plan

	Strategic goal	Desired Outcome
SHORT-TERM		
1.	Promote Entrepreneurship & Human Capital Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Entrepreneurial education and learning programmes will be instituted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developed training modules <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defining Agro Tourism and Food Culture 2. Product Development 3. Creating Tourism Itineraries 4. Sustainable Tourism ● Human capital development for SMEs will be enhanced especially in rural and remote regions ● Promote productivity, creativity and innovation through seminars, discussions and best practice share as key competitive advantage ● Enhance b2b collaboration
2.	Promote recognition of Cheese & Tourism activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diversified and modernized rural tourism products that generate business opportunities suited to local environments and communities all year round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased consumer awareness of products and experiences available in rural areas ● Developed joint recognition label ● Encouraged rural communities and economies to benefit from the value of rural tourism
LONG-TERM		
3.	Enhance Market Access and Internationalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support schemes for market access and integration into the wider tourism market will be further developed ● Collaboration of regional stakeholders will be promoted
4.	Enhance Policy and Regulatory Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inter and intra-governmental cooperation in terms of policy and regulation will be enhanced ● SMEs interests will be promoted and involvement in the decision-making processes will be enhanced ● Obtaining of permits and business related certification will be streamlined
5.	Increase Access to Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Financial inclusion and literacy will be promoted, and the ability of SMSs to engage in the financial system will be enhanced ● Information on access to finance will be gathered and distributed through third sector organizations and state and private sector institutions



Action plan and involved stakeholders

Strategic goal	Actions	Stakeholders
1.	Promote entrepreneurship education (improve management skills; develop enhanced understanding of relevant productivity measures)	Third Sector, Education centers, Local Government Improvement and Development institutions
1.	Enhance management, technical and marketing skills for representatives of rural and remote regions	Local Government Improvement and Development institutions, Third Sector
1.	Provide a platform to promote and facilitate Cheese producers participation in tourism activities	Tourism businesses; Cheese producers; Third Sector; Tourism Associations, Tourism information centers, TastyCheeseTour homepage
1.	Provided media training: Practical use of social tools (Instagram, etc.) for better education and messaging delivery efforts across the industry.	Third Sector, Education centers, Entrepreneurs
1.	Develop enhanced understanding of relevant productivity measures	Third Sector, Education centers, Local Government Improvement and Development institutions
1.	Enhance b2b collaboration	Entrepreneurs, Third Sector, Business support institutions
2.	Develop existing and new visitor activities and experiences that are less weather dependent, appeal to visitors throughout the year and reflect and support the local area	Tourism businesses; Cheese producers; Third Sector; Tourism Associations
2.	Develop traditional and new low impact and low carbon products and experiences in rural areas informed by consumer trends and behaviors	Tourism businesses; Cheese producers; Third Sector; Tourism Associations
2.	Identify best practice on the connection between planning and tourism at the local level, and community engagement in the planning process, to improve understanding and realize the growth opportunities.	Local Authorities; Local Government Improvement and Development institutions; Tourism Centers; Third Sector; Researchers
2.	Identify underutilized or redundant rural assets, support, and facilitate owners to realize their tourism potential (e.g. TastyCheeseTour Project).	Tourism Centers; Third Sector; Researchers; Municipalities



Strategic goal	Actions	Stakeholders
2.	Utilize ‘attract and disperse’ marketing to encourage urban and rural connectivity to help deliver growth and spread the benefits of growth (particularly important to grow business tourism in rural areas).	Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Third Sector; Tourism Centers
2.	Partners at the local level to ensure that tourism businesses have access to skills, support and business advice in remote rural areas.	LEPs; Local Authorities; Third Sector
2.	Identify target markets with a propensity to purchase rural tourism products and target them through marketing communications.	Activity providers; LEPs; Local Authorities; Third Sector
2.	Identify routes to market that support rural businesses and communities (which are small and dispersed)	Tourism businesses; Cheese producers; Third Sector; Tourism Associations; Municipalities
2.	Review and build on available sources of rural tourism performance and trends data.	Activity providers; Tourism businesses; Local Authorities;
2.	Maintain TastyCheeseTour homepage as open community fostering collaboration and new initiative implementation tool	TastyCheeseTour team; Volunteers; Entrepreneurs; Third sector organizations
2.	Localization of Content & Data: Generating/collecting content & assist in telling local stories/branded messaging; Create templates for stories, messaging, content collection and marketing efforts	Third Sector; Tourism businesses; Cheese producers; Tourism Associations; Municipalities
3.	Increase information on regional and global market access and opportunities	Third Sector; Education centers; Local Government Improvement and Development institutions
3.	Enhance the use of e-commerce	Third Sector; Education centers; Entrepreneurs; Authorities in charge of business development
3.	Promote adoption of safety, work and tourism standards of quality to facilitate market access	Entrepreneurs; Tourism Associations; Authorities in charge of the tourism industry;
4.	Strengthen the coordination mechanism between public agencies responsible for SMEs, Cheese Producers and Tourism	Public agencies; Entrepreneurs; Tourism industry; Third sector
4.	Develop strategies to align national SMEs development and Tourism strategies with the regional strategies	Public agencies; Entrepreneurs; Tourism industry; Third sector



Strategic goal	Actions	Stakeholders
4.	Establish a sound system and streamline permit and registration to enable less costly and faster business formation and certification	Public agencies; Entrepreneurs; Tourism industry; Third sector
5.	Improve understanding and strengthen traditional financing infrastructure	Public agencies; Entrepreneurs; Tourism industry; Third sector; Education centers
5.	Improve policy environment and measures to foster alternative and non-traditional financing through increasing availability of diversified sources of private financing	Public agencies; Entrepreneurs; Tourism industry; Third sector; Education centers
5.	Enhance outreach to promote financial inclusion to increase access to both traditional and alternative financing	Public agencies; Entrepreneurs; Tourism industry; Third sector; Education centers

Action Plan Outcomes

These five areas of action are ambitious and made in general form as each country and region needs to implement different steps for the set strategic goals and to reach desired outcomes. And all stakeholders have different role through contribution to the action implementation - from awareness, to ambassadorship to actual leadership - where all will make a difference while stakeholders work together to build these foundational areas of development. These actions will pave the way for future action efforts designed to realize long-term vision for EU rural and agro tourism industry.

With these actions, we can envision that all EU regions will continue to be recognized as a environmentally concerned, people needs based union that is building an exceptional tourism industry while maintaining a high level of professionalism and environmental stewardship to protect the rich heritage of all the regions as well as create new experience.



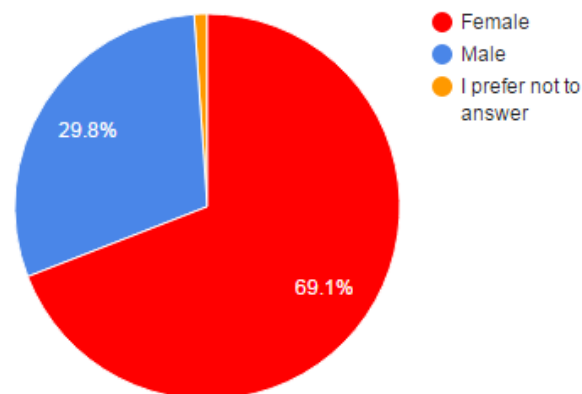
ANNEX I

Entrepreneur and tourist survey results related to tourism activity integration amongst cheese production related enterprises.

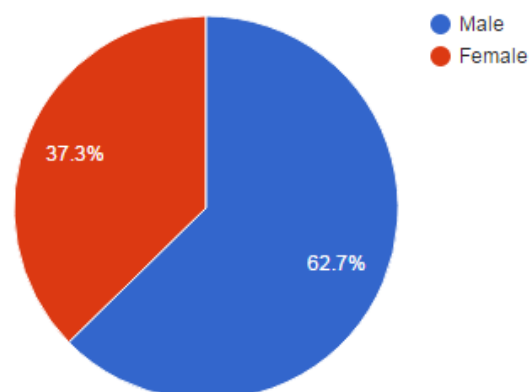
Surveys were carried out in six countries – Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Slovenia and Spain. In total, there were 150 fully answered surveys showing business sector respondent's opinion, 275 tourists were interviewed about the tourism activity integration amongst cheese production related enterprises, and cheese related events.

Respondents' profile: the majority of respondents can be grouped into two equally large groups of persons aged 25 to 44 years and 45 to 64 years. Similar division of tourist and entrepreneur respondents can be noticed in the age group 45 to 64 years which also is the largest respondent group in total. It can also be explained by the fact that they have the highest average income etc. Gender distribution structure is similar but difference can be noticed in the dominant gender – amongst tourist respondents the majority are female respondents, but amongst the entrepreneurs, the majority are male.

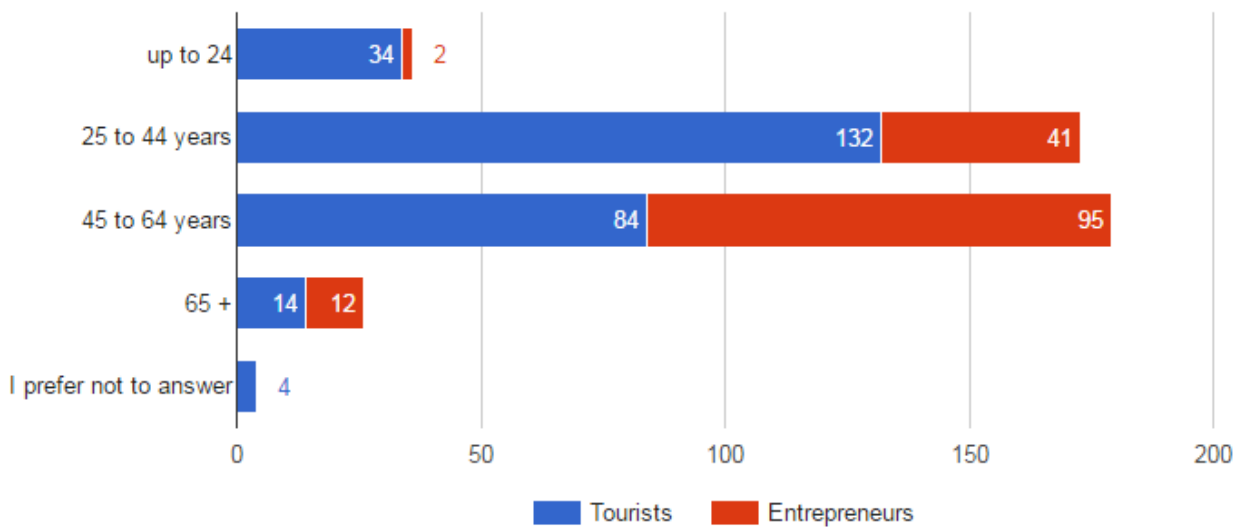
Gender (Tourists)



Gender (Entrepreneurs)

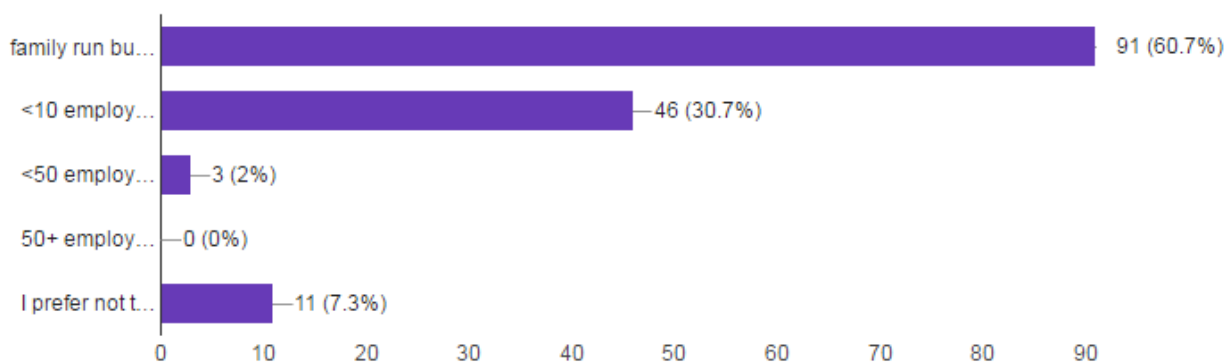


Age of Respondents: Tourists and Entrepreneurs

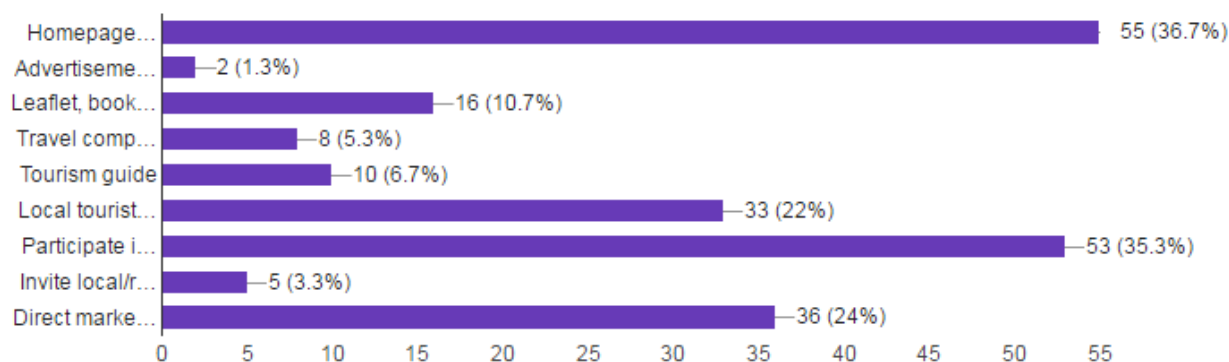


Profile of entrepreneurs: 52% of surveyed entrepreneurs knows two to three languages, but 48% know only one, which is their native language. Big difference can be noticed between regions, for example in Italy, most entrepreneurs know only one language, but in country like Latvia 100% have marked, they know two or three languages, which can be explained with history of the country and size of the country. Most of the surveyed entrepreneurs represent family run businesses and they mostly are local producers who in most cases advertise their products through homepage and social networks (36.7%) and participation in the tourism fairs and events (35.3%). Common product distribution channel and promotion of the cheese related activities are also direct marketing to businesses (shops, restaurants, guesthouses etc.).

Size of the enterprise you represent: (150 responses)

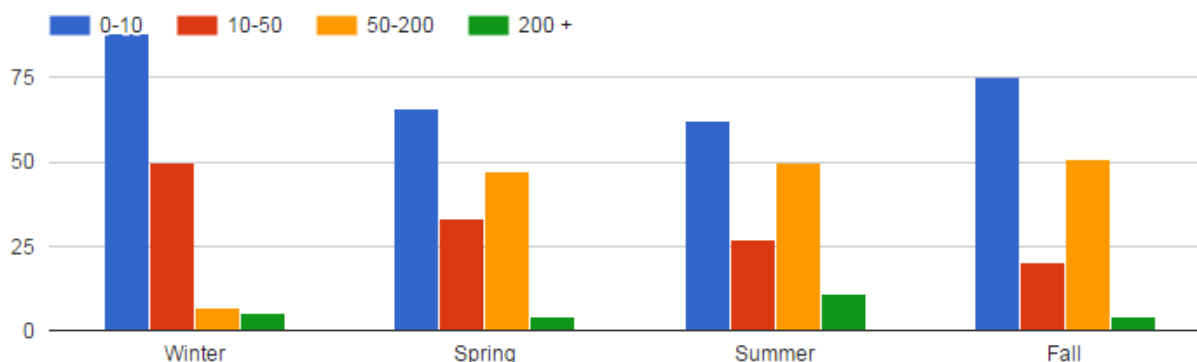


How do you advertise about your cheese-related event or object? (150 responses)



Most visitors visit the enterprises during the summer season, which can be explained with the highest tourism rate during that season. Season with the least visitors are winter followed with spring. It can be explained by the location of the surveyed entrepreneurs' enterprises remote placement in the regions. An overwhelming majority of the entrepreneurs have stated they are willing to increase number of the visitors. From 150 respondents 125 (83.3 %) have stated they are willing to increase the number of visitors and only 25 (16.7%) would not be interested in new visitors attraction. Most common reasons for the lack of willingness to attract new visitors are: lack of time; it is difficult to organize in frame of food processing due to food safety requirements; lack of foreign language knowledge to serve international tourists and others.

How much tourists per month visit your object/buy products (approximately)?



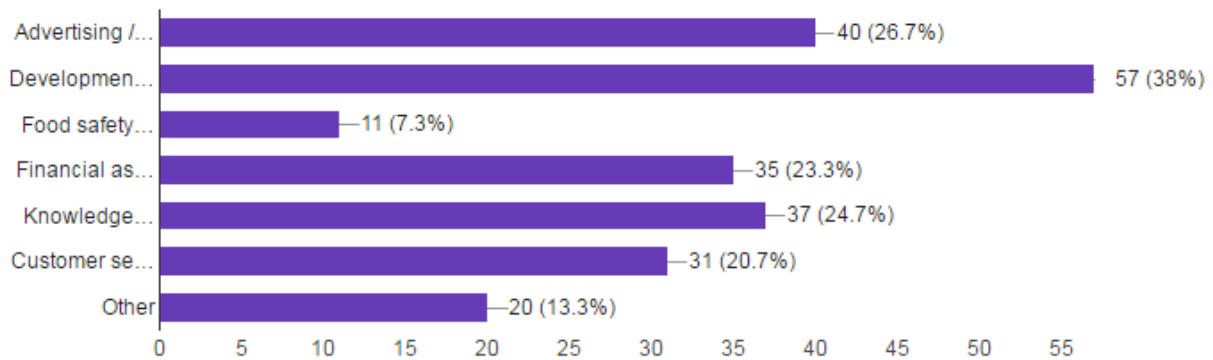
For the tourism activity integration, new activity creation and service improvement entrepreneurs most needs skills and knowledge in “Development of “cheese story” for their product and tourism activity” (38 %), “Advertising / Marketing/promotion in social networks and similar” (26.7 %), “Knowledge of languages” (24.7 %), “Financial aspects” (23.3 %), “Customer service (what facilities and preparations are necessary, how to organize visits on site)” 20.7% and others. To address all these needs following training modules will be offered to the entrepreneurs in all the project partner organizations and represented regions: Defining Agro Tourism and Food Culture,



Product Development, Creating Tourism Itineraries, Sustainable Tourism as well as consulting on the available courses on language training and financial aspects will be provided according to the offer available in the region.

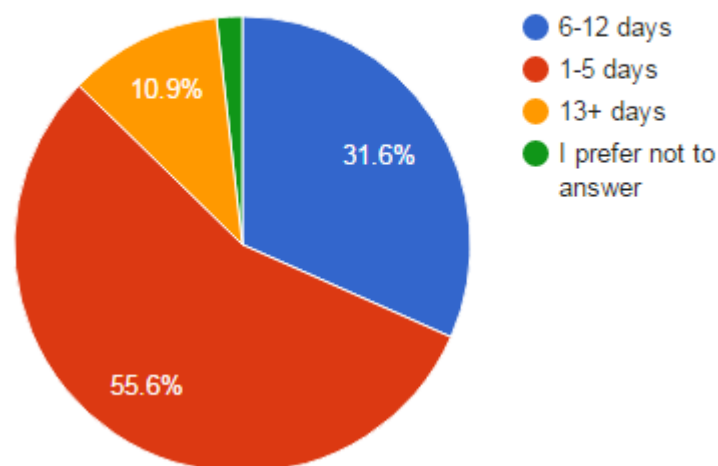
What knowledge do you lack for offering your cheese-related event or object?

(150 responses)

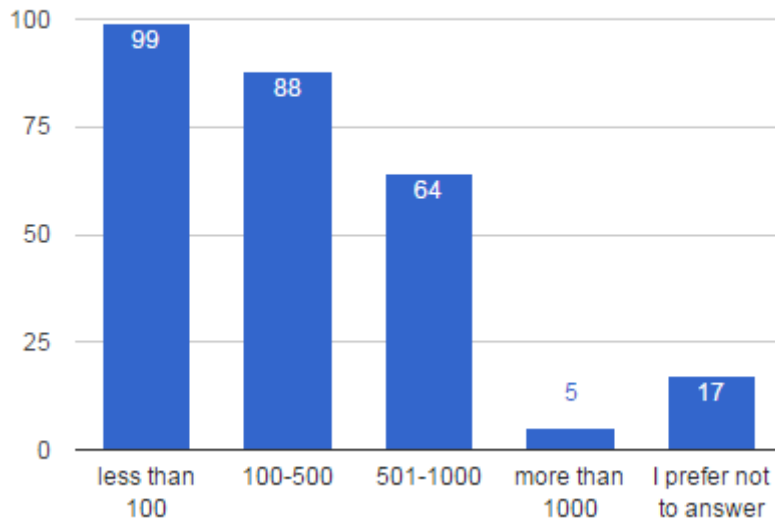


Concerning tourism offer, based on the tourist answers developed itineraries and tourism offer should be based on the short trips, as majority of the visitors goes on the short trips which are 1 to 5 days long (55.6 %), and then longer the duration of the journey than smaller the share of the respondents who represent the group, i.e., 31.6 % duration of the journey is 6 to 12 days, 10.9 % duration of the journey is 13 and more day. According to the priority of the journeys with short duration also the amount of planned expenditure on the tourism activities are marked less than 100 EUR which was marked from mostly tourists traveling in their own country as well as describing one or two day journeys. Older tourists with higher monthly income also tended to have higher expenditure regardless of the duration of the journey.

Count of How many days tourists plan to stay in the region

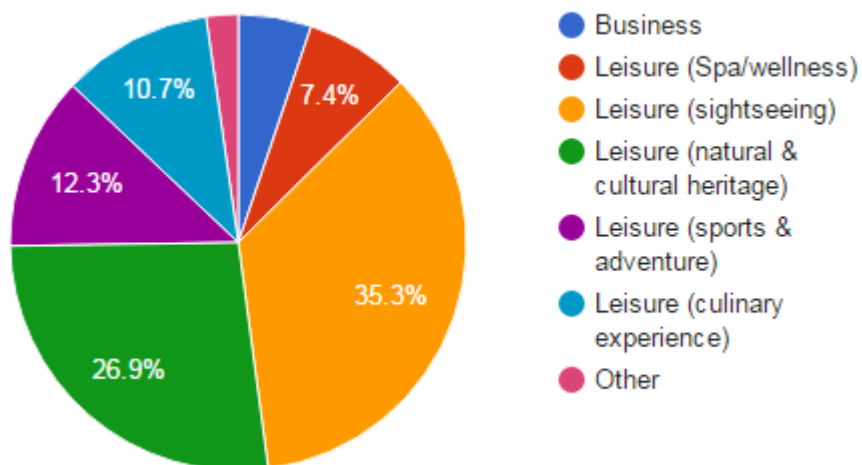


Count of How much tourists plan to spend during the stay (in EUR, approximately)



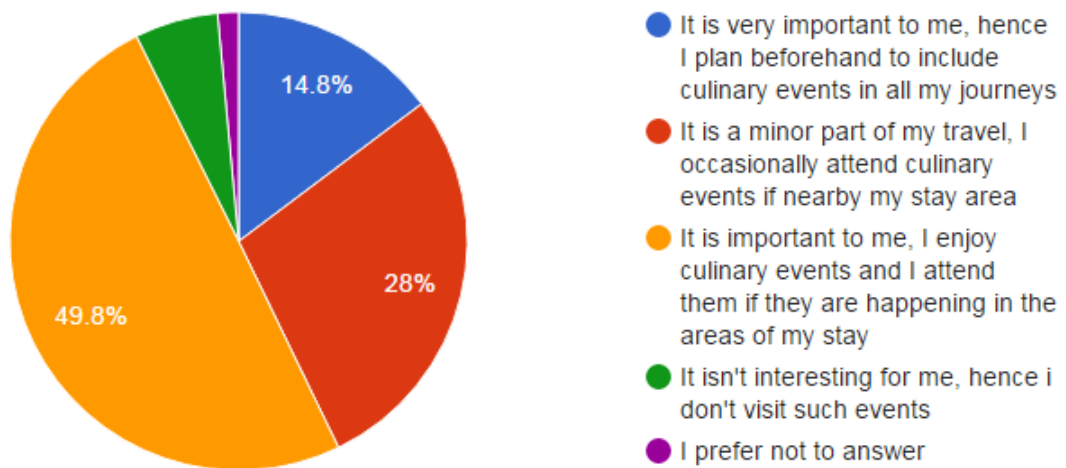
Main reasons for choosing travel destination are leisure oriented. Most chosen reason is leisure activities related to the sightseeing in the region (35.3 %), second is leisure connected with the natural and cultural heritage (26.9 %) followed by active leisure objects and events related to sports and adventure (12.3 %). Among all the reasons for the visiting the region 49.8 % of respondents have marked “It is important to me, I enjoy culinary events and I attend them if they are happening in the areas of my stay” and 28% marked “It is a minor part of my travel; I occasionally attend culinary events if nearby my stay area”. So it can be concluded that most important aspect that new cheese related tourism objects should be created in nearby area of other tourism object which attracts tourists to the region or promoted in such way that they could be easily reached. Only 14.8 % of respondents find culinary events and objects important to them and hence they plan beforehand to include such events in all their journeys.

Reasons for visiting the region



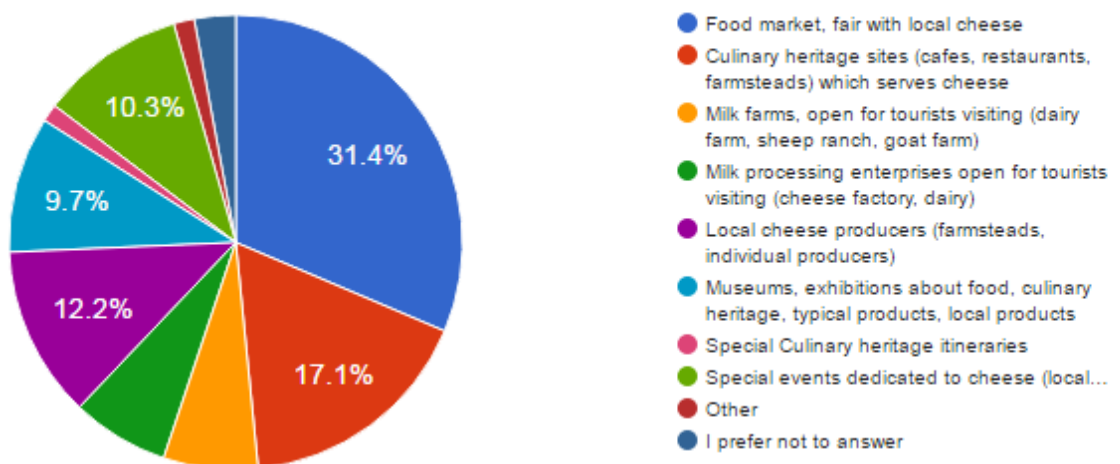
These all characteristics of the traveler's preferences must be taken into account when creating joint itineraries, most popular reasons for visiting the region should be included in the newly created routes helping to attract travelers to the cheese related tourism objects as part of the joint tourism offer within the region. As most travelers do not plan on purpose to include culinary events and object into their travel plan, but most of them enjoy visiting such places and events if happening in nearby area of their stay it must be taken into account with blending various objects and different kind of activities through joint itineraries giving chance to get to know wide spectrum of regions cultural, environmental and social characteristics and unique experience.

Importance of culinary event and object inclusion in the travel plans

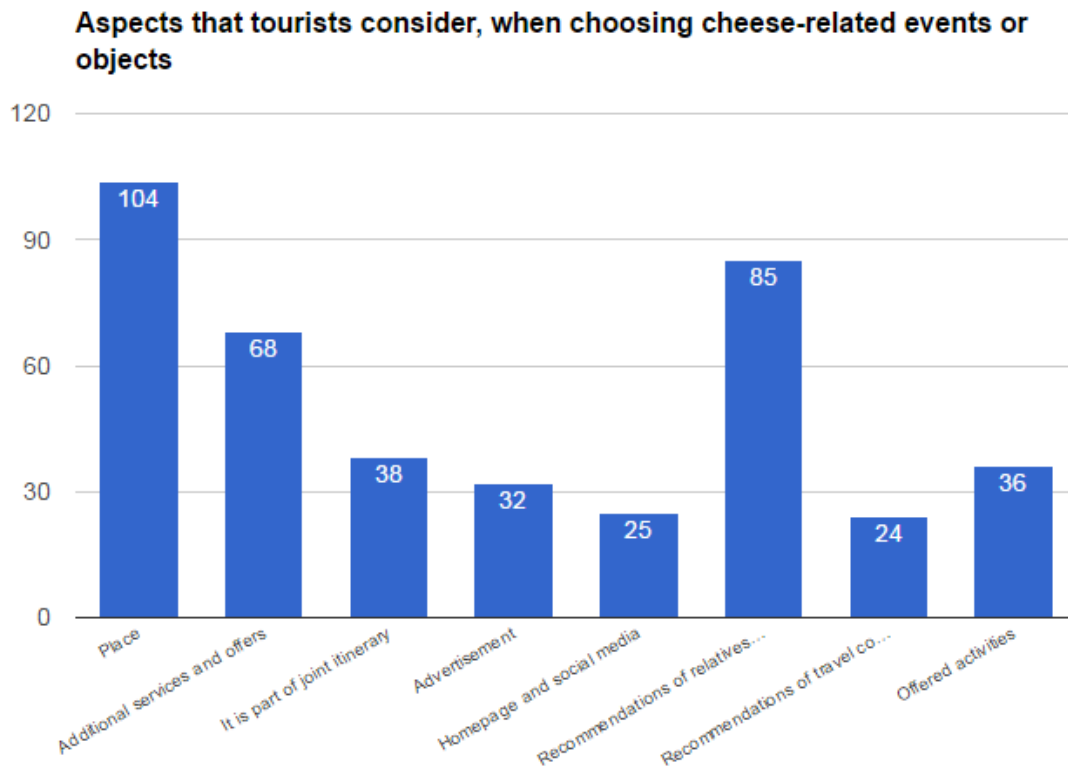


Most popular cheese-related events and objects amongst the surveyed tourists are food markets and fairs with local cheeses. Followed by culinary heritage sites which serves cheese, local cheese producers – farmsteads, individual producers and special events dedicated to cheese, for example local product's celebration, harvest festivals, cheese fests etc.).

What cheese-related events or objects tourist has visited during his travel



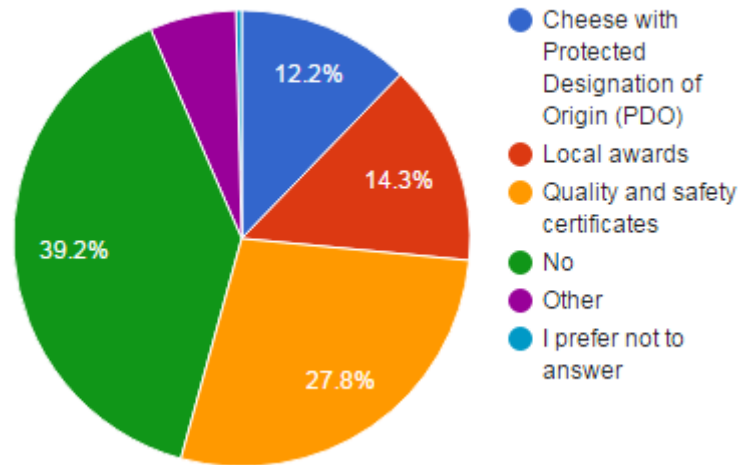
When choosing events and objects to visit tourists consider the place of the cheese-related event and object. Important are recommendations of the relatives and when choosing place to visit additional services and offers available in the tourism object and/ or event are taken into account, for example offer for activities with children, sightseeing, rest places, accommodation, etc.). As high as the fourth most important aspect for choosing cheese related event or object is that these objects are part of the joint itinerary.



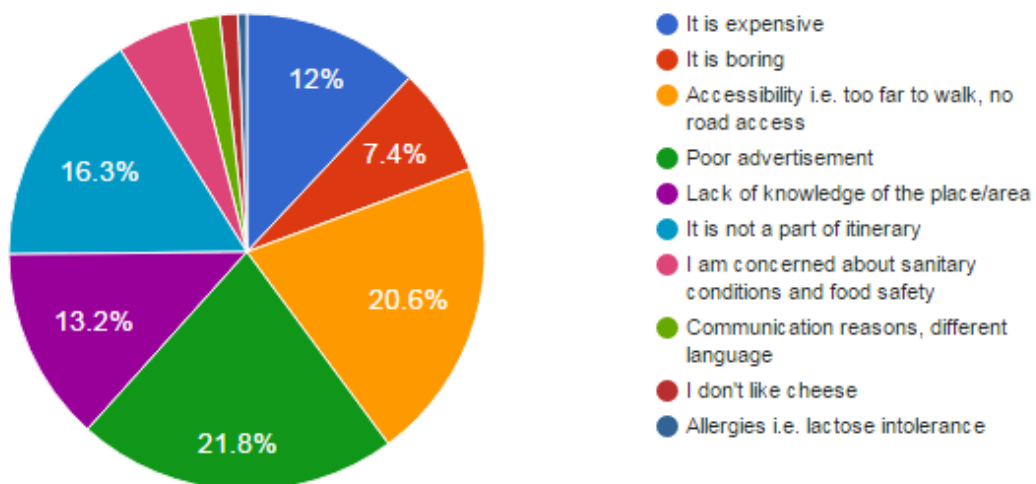
As many entrepreneurs are concerned with the certification process of their production line and tourism activity from the tourist point of view it is not such important aspect. Majority, 39.2 % gives no importance to the certification of the place, production processes etcetera. Almost one-third (27.8 %) are concerned with the quality and safety certification. 14.3 % pays attention to the local awards given to the product and place. Cheese with protected designation of origin are appreciated only by 12.2 % which is similar share to the tourists to whom culinary events and objects are very important (14.8 %) and they plan them beforehand to include in the travel plans.



Importance of the certification (tourist opinion)



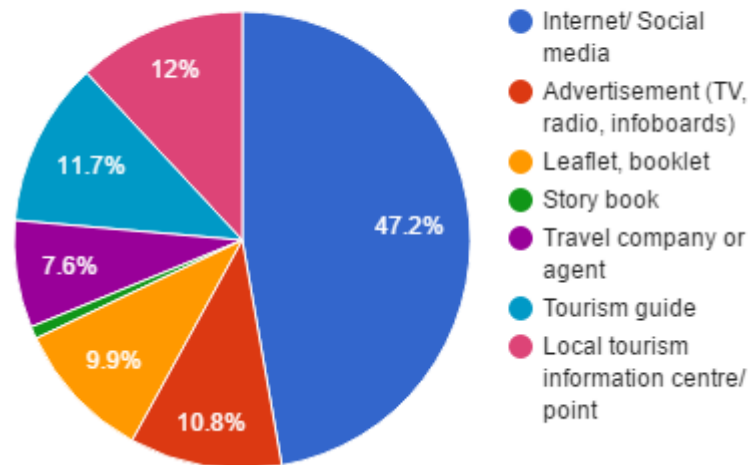
Reasons for choosing not to visit cheese related events and/or objects



Poor advertisement is one of the first reasons why tourist do not visit cheese related events and/or objects, in total 21.8 % of respondents. With just 1 % less respondents have pointed out importance of accessibility as one of the reasons for choosing not to visit the cheese related site. Issue of such places not being part of an itinerary is reason number three for not choosing such objects and/ or events. When choosing to visit cheese-related events and objects tourists in one out of two cases find information about the event on internet and social media sites (47.2 %). Other sources of information have similarly equal share: 12 % find event related information in local tourism information centers and tourism information points, 11.7% from tourism guide, 10.8 % gather information from advertisements on TV, radio and info boards, 9.9% from leaflets and booklets and 7.6 % from travel companies or travel agent.

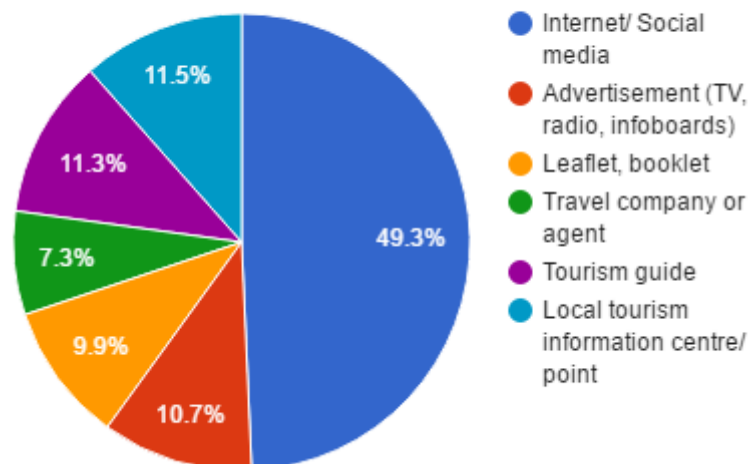


Where tourists find information about cheese-related event or object



Almost equal proportions can be seen when analyzing tourist preferences for the source of information where they would like to find information about cheese-related activities, events and objects in the region.

Tourist preferences for the source of information on the cheese-related events or objects



All of the above stated findings will be included in the action plan and will help to develop training programme according to the entrepreneurs’ needs and tourist preferences. Tasty Cheese Tour project team will try to help increase amount of the cheese related events and objects on the internet and social media as well as promote such activity creation and promotion through various sources of information distribution channels.

