

# Chapter 11

## Cheese Tourism: A Pathway to Sustainable Rural Development

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### ABSTRACT

*This section examines the role of cheese tourism in sustainable rural development. Cheese tourism is seen as a component of gastronomy tourism, which includes milk production, cheese making and cheese activities. This type of tourism is important in terms of economic diversity, protection of cultural heritage and promotion of rural areas. In this chapter, firstly, the concept of sustainable rural development is explained, the history of cheese and cheese tourism is briefly summarized and the role of cheese tourism in sustainable rural development is evaluated. The promotion and marketing of cheese tourism and the opportunities and challenges of cheese tourism are also included in this book chapter. Interviews were conducted with cheese producers, sellers, local governments, and cooperatives in the Pınarbaşı district of Kayseri province, which is famous for its cheese, using a questionnaire developed based on information obtained from relevant literature. Based on this case study, several recommendations are offered to the relevant stakeholders.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cheese tourism constitutes a specialized aspect of gastronomic tourism, involving visits to regions engaged in milk production, cheese-making, cheese festivals, restaurants, or dedicated establishments. The primary objective is to engage in cheese-related activities, including tasting and learning about the cheese-making process. The perceived value of cheese is heavily influenced by factors such as its region of origin, producer, and protected designation of origin labels. This perception varies depending on the distance between the region of origin and the consumers' residence (Marcoz, Melewar, & Dennis, 2014).

Recognized as a potential driver for sustainable rural development, cheese tourism has demonstrated success through activities such as cheese-tasting events and tours of cheese-producing factories (Folgado-Fernández, Di-Clemente, & Hernández-Mogollón, 2019; Ermolaev, Yashalova, & Ruban, 2019). The growth of cheese tourism aligns with the promotion of local cultural aspects, fostering community bonds

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and contributing to the emergence of an innovative tourism category (Fusté-Forné, 2016a; Fusté-Forné, 2020b). Particularly, the distinctive seasonal foodscapes of specific regions, including World Heritage sites, serve as significant draws for cheese tourism, providing visitors with unique and memorable experiences (Fusté-Forné, 2016b). Overall, cheese tourism represents a specialized form of tourism that intertwines cultural, geographical, and gastronomic elements, offering opportunities for local economic development and the promotion of regional identity.

Rural and natural regions are acknowledged as reservoirs of genuine and sustainable economic progress, and the utilization of cheese as a resource in tourism aids in sustainability by endorsing rural ways of life and integrating traditions, heritage, and natural landscapes (Fusté-Forné, 2020b). Additionally, cheese production has been recognized as a factor that facilitates the integration of eco- and rural tourism development across diverse global regions, emphasizing its potential for fostering sustainable rural development. Research has delved into numerous destinations worldwide, including Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, France, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, and Spain, underlining the worldwide significance of cheese tourism in contributing to sustainable rural development (Fusté-Forné, 2020a). Furthermore, characteristics such as artisanal production, historical and cultural significance, and an aesthetically pleasing protected landscape have been identified as factors contributing to the attractiveness of cheese tourism in rural areas, stimulating economic and sustainable development (Fusté-Forné, 2015).

The increasing interest in local food and the growing visitor numbers, both local travelers and international tourists, have created demands for locally produced foods, benefiting regional development and contributing to the sustainability of rural areas (Fusté-Forné, 2016b). Moreover, the cultural, economic, and tourist significance of food tourism practices has led to an upswing in research focusing on the intersection of food tourism and sustainable rural development (Fusté-Forné, 2019). Both academics and practitioners have extensively worked towards understanding how food products are transformed into tourism attractions, highlighting the potential of cheese tourism in contributing to sustainable rural development (Fusté-Forné, 2021).

In summary, cheese tourism positively contributes to sustainable rural development by capitalizing on the cultural, economic, and environmental assets of rural areas, nurturing community ties, and championing local traditions and heritage. The global relevance of cheese tourism in various destinations underscores its potential as a driver for sustainable rural development.

Within the framework of the above-mentioned background, sustainable rural development will be explained in this book chapter. Then, cheese tourism will be evaluated within the framework of sustainable rural development. Finally, the contribution of Uzunyayla Çerkes Cheese, registered by Kayseri Pınarbaşı Municipality, to sustainable rural development will be evaluated within the framework of a case study. Within the framework of this case study, interviews will be held with stakeholders such as local people and municipalities and reported.

## **SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Sustainable rural development is seen as a crucial element in promoting balanced growth that encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Ristic, Despotovic, & Dimitrijevic, 2020). Sustainable rural development, with its multifaceted approach, ensures the transmission of natural resources to future generations while simultaneously enabling the long-term welfare of rural communities

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