

LOCAL GASTRONOMIC POINTS - A SOLUTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM. CASE STUDY: BRAŞOV COUNTY

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Abstract: *Any tourist destination that wants to strengthen its competitive position through the development of gastronomic tourism must first identify its unique resources and capabilities, then proceed to concrete actions to protect and capitalize on them, by including them in the development strategy of tourism in that region. This paper represents a preliminary documentary research necessary for the action of creating a network of Local Gastronomic Points (LGP) in Braşov County in order to integrate gastronomy and tourism with a view to developing the local economy. The research method used was a qualitative one, considered appropriate for identifying the localities in Braşov County with the potential to develop LGP and their gastronomic resources.*

Key words: *gastronomy, gastronomic tourism, local gastronomic point.*

1. Introduction

Food and its associated field, gastronomy, has become an emerging topic in connection with tourism and leisure activities, due to its versatile adaptation, as a component of the local culture that tourists consume, a commodity that could be marketed to transmit sustainability, authenticity, as well as cultural and geographical characteristics of a tourism product (Frisvoll, Forbord and Blekesaune, 2016).

It is generally accepted that there is a strong relationship between tourism and gastronomy (Leng and Badarulzaman, 2014; Chang and Mak, 2018), a relationship that destinations can use to gain a competitive advantage (Mascarenhas and Gândara, 2015). In an increasingly competitive market, destinations are looking for unique attributes that can give them a competitive advantage. A tourist destination that wants to strengthen its competitive position by developing gastronomic tourism must first identify its unique

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resources, capabilities and availability of stakeholders, and then include them in a tourism development strategy. In addition, tourism strategies should not only be market-based strategies that focus on attracting and meeting tourism demand, but also product-based strategies that relate to existing resources in order to create sustainable tourism development (Horng and Tsai, 2012). A popular and promising attribute for a destination that can affect its competitiveness is gastronomy (Seyitoğlu and Ivanov, 2020). Thus, the integration of local gastronomy and tourism is a critical component of contemporary destination marketing strategies.

This paper is a preliminary documentary research necessary to implement one of the hard actions included in the Action Plan proposed by Braşov County Council within the ThreeT project (www.judbrasov.ro), aiming to improve a public policy tool to protect and highlight the natural potential and cultural heritage in different areas of the county. Thus, by creating a network of Local Gastronomic Points (LGP) in Braşov County, Braşov County Council aims to improve the local cultural heritage and support producers by creating "good taste" experiences in Braşov County. One of the activities necessary to create a cultural route of the local cuisine is to identify the areas with potential for the development of Local Gastronomic Points. This identification of the localities is the object of the present work and was the basis for the realization of a proposal of networks of Local Gastronomic Points for the initialization of a tourist route.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The relationship between tourism and gastronomy

Etymologically, the word *gastronomy* is derived from the Greek *gastros*, which means stomach and *gnomos*, which means knowledge or law. *Culinaria*, on the other hand, is a term often used in the context of gastronomy that describes the foods and dishes of a country or region, which give rise to the distinctive cuisine of the country or region (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). Although various terms are used in the literature, such as "culinary tourism", "gastronomic tourism", "gastro-tourism", "wine tourism", "food tourism" and "gourmet tourism", the most commonly used concept, "gastronomic tourism", is usually defined as pursuing a unique experience of eating and drinking (Kivela and Crotts, 2005).

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines gastronomic tourism as a type of tourism activity that is characterized by the visitor's experience with respect to food and related activities during the trip. In addition to authentic, traditional and / or innovative culinary experiences, gastronomic tourism may involve other related activities, such as visiting local producers, participating in food festivals and cooking classes (UNWTO and BCC, 2019).

Gastronomic tourism is the form of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourist is food and, although it may be unable to generate its own flow, it can add value to visiting a place, offering the opportunity to live an experience that brings tourists closer to the population visited (Berbel -Pineda et al., 2019). It is considered as a branch of cultural tourism in which visitors travel due to reasons related to the gastronomic practices of a specific locality (Henderson, 2009). It can be managed from attractions

such as regional cuisine, gastronomic events and the offer of different units of food and drinks, as well as routes and gastronomic circuits (Mascarenhas and Gândara, 2015).

Different authors establish that gastronomy is one of the most important pillars on which the tourism sector is based (Özdemir and Seyitoglu, 2017). Mascarenhas and Gândara (2010) argue that the analysis of gastronomy in relation to tourism requires an understanding of various disciplines, allowing its adaptation to tourism. In many works, gastronomy is defined as the art of eating and drinking. In fact, it is an interdisciplinary branch of art and science that is directly related to chemistry, literature, biology, geology, history, music, philosophy, psychology, sociology, medicine, nutrition and agriculture (Pavlidis and Markantonatou, 2020).

Hall and Sharples (2003) argue that local cuisine brings value to the tourism industry in two ways, through the support provided by the sale of artisanal food to tourists and through the conservation and cultivation of landscapes. The progress of gastronomy in terms of tourism can also act as a quality badge for food-producing regions and localities (Telfer and Wall, 1996). According to Petrini (2003), gastronomic tourism offers development opportunities even to poor regions through a new agricultural model. This is done at the same time as it supports small local food producers and can strengthen their market position, unlike international and industrial food producers (Hjalager, 2010).

One of the aspects that is increasingly considered in tourism is the importance of local cuisine in choosing a tourist destination (López-Guzmán et al., 2017). Studies on culinary dishes, wines and gastronomy in general as determining elements of the so-called “tourist experience” are becoming more frequent (Harrington and Ottenbacher, 2010). Indeed, local gastronomy has become an important tourist resource (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016) and is now part of the cultural heritage of the geographical areas visited by tourists.

Regarding the fields of research with respect to the relationship between tourism and gastronomy, different authors have identified numerous research directions. Henderson (2009) presented three lines of research related to the relationship between tourism and gastronomy; namely, food - as a tourist product, food marketing to tourists and gastronomic tourism - as a tool of destination and general development. In turn, Cheng and Huang (2015) approached the relationship between tourism and gastronomy from four perspectives: culinary dishes - part of local culture; food - as a tourist attraction; food - as a tourist product and food - as a tourist experience.

Gastronomic tourism is considered to be crucial for a destination in that it can make the journey of tourists unique, can help a destination to shine and gain a good reputation among others, and show that the consumption of food and drink can have symbolic meanings besides the fact that it can contribute to the satisfaction of a physiological need (Caliskan, 2013).

Destinations around the world are now formulating strategies to develop the culinary identity of their territories and to promote proposals through which their gastronomy and its uniqueness can exert an important influence on the decisions of tourists to travel to that location and/or attract the profile of gastronomic tourists who want to experience the gastronomic culture of the places visited (UNTWO, 2020).

2.2. The concept of Local Gastronomic Point (LGP)

Research has shown that food and eating habits specific to a destination can attract both tourists looking for gastronomic experiences and those looking for authenticity and local specialties (Pesonen et al., 2011; Pavlidis and Markantonatou, 2020).

Given that gastronomic tourism refers to travelling for the personal experience of tasting local and authentic food, participation in culinary events and festivals and tasting local and international cuisine (Sharples and Hall, 2004) in order to promote a tourist destination through dishes and local culinary specialties, the concept of Local Gastronomic Point (LGP) was introduced in Romania by the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (ANSVSA) and the Ivan Patzaichin-Mila 23 Association.

According to the Guide of Good Practices of Hygiene and Culinary Production developed at the initiative and as a result of the steps of the Ivan Patzaichin-Mila 23 Association, LGPs are objectives represented by private kitchens, where food is prepared according to culinary recipes specific to the area, which are served directly to the final consumer. These objectives are found in rural family farms, animal farms, agricultural farms, sheepfolds, fishing shelters, apiaries, wineries, farms, trout farms, hunting grounds etc., where one or more activities related to primary production (milk production, egg production, honey production, poultry/ rabbit breeding, poultry/ rabbit slaughter on the farm, fishing, aquaculture, hunting, plant cultivation, etc.) (Ivan Patzaichin-Mila Association 23, 2019).

According to a statement of the Ivan Patzaichin-Mila 23 Association, this type of organization comes in support of those who produce basic food and want to provide public catering services in complete safety for the consumer, without owning tourist guest houses or other types of tourist units. The LGP is a facility for family-type units, which want to provide small-scale tourism (rural tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism).

A LGP must meet a number of general conditions in order to function. The first condition, given that these types of activities go beyond private consumption, is the need to obtain the veterinary registration document and for food safety (ANSVSA campaign brochure -LGP, 2017). LGP can operate in permanent or seasonal households, located on animal farms, sheepfolds, fish farms, fishing areas, agricultural farms, wineries, wine/ fruit farms, hunting grounds, boarding houses, monasteries etc. In contrast, a LGP cannot operate in the vicinity of polluting industrial units (which remove large amounts of dust, chemicals etc.) or areas with a high risk factor for food safety (landfills, leather processing units etc.) (Ivan Patzaichin-Mila Association 23, 2019).

Another condition that a LGP must meet is that the food be prepared only by the owner or his family members, and their health must be checked periodically (ANSVSA campaign brochure - LGP, 2017). The raw materials from which the food is prepared must come only from authorized sanitary-veterinary and food safety units, focusing on those local products, specific to the area where the gastronomic point operates. Regarding the menu within the LGP, it must be prepared and served on the same day, only by the owner and/ or his family members and it must contain at most two kinds of

soups / soups, two main courses and two desserts. The menu will be made using, as far as possible, traditional, authentic preparation techniques and in compliance with the rules of hygiene at the time of preparation.

A third condition that must be met by a LGP in order to be established is to be a form of legal organization, such as: authorized natural person, sole proprietorship (II), family business (FI) or limited liability company (SRL). Also, those who want to set up these LGPs must submit a file at the headquarters of the county DSVSA for obtaining the veterinary registration and for food safety, a file that must include: a sketch of the place of food production, a copy of the certificate ascertainment issued by the National Office of the Trade Register, or in the case of individual producers, a copy of the producer certificate issued by the mayor's office and a copy of the identity document. After this stage, the inspectors from the county DSVSA will make a visit to the food preparation place, in order to evaluate the unit, if it corresponds to the general norms for this type of activity, stipulated in Annex II, Chap. III of Reg. CE.852 / 2004.

The *Guide of Good Practices of Hygiene and Culinary Production* also sets out the general conditions to be met by buildings and annexes, storage areas, cooking (kitchens), serving areas, waste storage and machinery, utensils and household items. Thus, in order to avoid the risk of contamination, in particular by animals and pests, premises distributing food must be designed, located, cleaned and maintained in good working order, and work surfaces and those in contact with food must be easy to clean, disinfected and in good condition.

LGP must be equipped with hygienic washing and drying facilities and equipment, sanitary facilities and changing rooms and be provided with sufficient cold and hot drinking water, as well as adequate means and spaces for the storage and control of the conditions of adequate temperature of the food and spaces in which the food is cleaned in conditions of proper hygiene. If the unit verified by the DSVSA inspectors does not comply with the rules in force, the owner will be notified about the deficiencies found, as well as the deadlines for remediation.

LGP are more about the authenticity of the traditional/ local method of preparing those dishes, not the origin of the products and ingredients that are used in the preparation. Because, in practice, it is difficult for a household to obtain the status of authorized/ registered sanitary-veterinary unit and for food safety, they will prefer the supply from third parties (Rotaru, 2019).

The authorities are taking measures, slowly but surely, so that tourists can eat in Romania, as in Italy or Greece, in the homes of the locals, benefiting from decent prices and feeling the aroma of the places and the flavour of local goodies. According to the data presented on the website of the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (<http://www.ansvsa.ro/comunicare/campanii-ansvsa/puncte-gastronomice-locale/>), at national level, at the end of 2018, there were 12 registered LGPs. There are currently 24 LGPs registered and 8 LGPs are being in the process of final evaluation. 14 LGPs are already registered in the Danube Delta area.

2.3. The role of gastronomic routes in a tourist destination

The development of tourism in a destination also depends on the gastronomic heritage and local products. The recent history of the development of global tourism is full of nominally sustainable models and clearly unsustainable actions, but the idea is not to create a new non-discriminatory pressure on the culinary heritage, but to capitalize on it rationally, considering sustainability issues. The creation of gastronomic routes is not about a new "tourist" gastronomy, the creation of new offers or the expansion of the existing ones. It is not about creating a gastronomy in order to attract, but rather about attracting visitors who, along the gastronomic route, should participate in the cultural reality of the destination, well explained and interpreted, through the kitchen, local products and all the services and activities that surround them (UNWTO, 2012).

Within the Guidelines for the Development of Gastronomy Tourism (UNWTO and BCC, 2019) a series of recommendations and considerations are proposed regarding the creation of gastronomic routes for the development of gastronomic tourism within a tourist destination. Thus, a first proposal is the use of technology that can provide support for gastronomic tourism products. Some examples of this are: self-guided tours (by creating leaflets and mobile applications) with gastronomic themes to encourage visitors to explore the countryside and spend time locally, augmented reality by recreating scenes showing the production and/ or harvesting of gastronomic products, mobile apps can help visitors find a local restaurant or food market etc. Also, in the context of gastronomic routes, UNWTO proposes the generation of geographical or thematic gastronomic routes (dishes, products, people, agricultural landscapes etc.) that can contribute to the socio-economic development of the region as a whole, helping distribute tourist flows, strengthening the local economy and improving the territorial balance.

3. Methodology

The research method used to identify the localities in Braşov County with the potential to develop LGPs was a qualitative one: the case study. The rationale for selecting this approach is that it allowed an in-depth analysis of situations and individuals, and enabled relationships to be fully explored (Page et al., 2017).

The case study is a survey that focuses on the description, understanding, prediction, and/ or control of the individual (e.g., process, person, household, organization, group, industry, culture or nationality). A case study is an empirical investigation that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not obvious (Woodside, 2010). Of all the qualitative methods, the case study is the least limited to a theoretical substratum or norms and rules of approach. This is justified by the uniqueness of each case, whether it is a person or a collective entity (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 2004).

The main localities with potential to develop LGP in Braşov County were identified through the platform created at the initiative of journalist Ada Ţeicu, PlatFerma (<https://platferma.ro/harta-fermelor-romania/>). PlatFerma is a real platform through

which small farmers are promoted. Ada Țeicu is a strong representative in the Romanian online that has millions of online readers of articles written on different platforms, and this approach is the soul project in which she has been investing her hopes and efforts since 2017. The map shows the places in the country where the farms are divided by counties and included in nine categories (Fish and fish preparations, Dairy products and cheeses, Berries and culture, Vegetables, fruits, cereals, Aromatic plants, Honey and bee products, Mixed farms, Sweets, pickles, oils, juices, Meat and meat products), which include the elements of a diverse, delicious, local diet.

The main reason why the seven localities in Brașov county were chosen was their location within the county, in the northeast, because through this paper we aim to create a route that will develop tourism in areas with less intense tourist activity.

4. Results

Thus, a first locality in Brașov County is Sânpetru. In Sânpetru commune, in 2013, the agricultural enterprise La Borcan was established by Lucian Dragomir. The La Borcan agricultural enterprise has fairytale features for gourmets in love with traditional agriculture. The diversity reflected in the fan of vegetables, the attention to detail that make up the life cycles of plants and the confidence with which Lucian talks about his choices as a responsible farmer recommends him for tasting. Since 2017, Lucian has also had a certificate confirming the conversion to organic farming, so he uses only certified organic seeds. Also, in their entirety, La Borcan fertilizers are 100% organic, and the vast majority of them are of a vegetable nature, made from compost obtained from vegetable waste that accumulates during previous production cycles. The culture of La Borcan farm consists of: tomatoes, bell peppers, kapia peppers, hot peppers, carrots, beans, peas, spinach, zucchini, eggplant, onions, radishes, salad, cucumbers, kale, pokchoi (a type of Chinese cabbage), mangold, greens and spices: dill, parsley, basil, coriander, thyme. In autumn, pickles and jams are offered for sale.

In Hărman there is a family farm, Hărman Farm, managed by the Mureșan family. The farm has an area of about 5000 square meters where various animals (chickens, ducks, guinea fowl, quails, rabbits and goats) are raised and various vegetables (onions, carrots, tomatoes, peppers) are grown. The products offered are: chicken eggs, duck eggs, quail eggs, and meat, goat's milk, goat's cheese with greens, goat's milk and occasionally spreadable cheese and goat's milk butter, all made entirely from goat's milk. Goat pemmican is also offered. Hărman Farm was born from the desire to put natural and fresh products on the table. The owners make deliveries to customers' homes, twice a week.

In the village of Măieruș in Brașov County, there is a goat sheepfold at the edge of the Bogății Forest. Muntean Farm is the place where you can find milk and goat cheeses, fresh air and humanity when guests visit the sheepfold. The Muntean family takes care of 242 goats of the local breed, mixed with Carpathian and Banat White. The milk is milked manually in the morning and in the evening by Alina and her father, Nicu, and its transformation into goat cheese falls on the mother, Melania.

In Augustin commune, Braşov county, in 2012, Adrian Nicolae materialized his desire to live a healthy life and run a production and consultancy business with goji berries and shrubs that colour the field during the ripening period. Among the products available at Goji Plantation Podeele Mici, we mention: fresh goji berries (in August, when ripened), dried goji berries and tea leaves, goji mix with honey, goji honey cream, goji powder, sea buckthorn, honey, goji syrups, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, fir buds. The goji plantation made by Adrian Nicolae is the first in Braşov that covers two hectares, and the authorized nursery is certified organic. Also, the activity of the plantation is represented by an online store selling goji products. In 2019, the plantation management achieved the performance of homologating the first Romanian variety of Goji "KRONSTADT", a very productive and resistant variety. The entire activity was extended in Codlea, Braşov County in 2019, in order to increase the production capacity to 100,000 goji plants. Also in Codlea, the most efficient goji plantation in the country was established on this occasion, with an area of 2.5 ha, as a cultivation model for all business collaborators. The plantation was carried out using the latest recommendations and ecological technologies recommended by specialists.

Căţean Farm is located in Rotbav, Braşov County. The three brothers started several years ago, with 30 sheep and a cow - animals inherited from their grandparents. Now they have over 1,000 sheep, from the Țurcană and Țigaie breeds, and they have 80 cows from the Bălțată Românească breed. George Căţean claims that the farm is an integrated one, in other words, the farm produces all the raw materials (milk and meat, especially), which are then processed and marketed by the three brothers. Also, they do not make common products, but with added value, an aspect that positioned them very well and created a solid financial base and development power.

As a result of participating in various events and competitions organized for their business segment, the farm obtained in 2015 a gold star - the equivalent of a Michelin star, awarded by the Quality Institute of Brussels (ITQI), and in 2020, obtained the title of Best Sheep's Cheese in Raw Milk, from the International Test Award, in Italy and, also this year, Căţean Farm became an eco farm. In 2013, they managed to enter the largest supermarket in the city of Braşov, respectively Carrefour, with their products. Now, also within the same chain of stores, they are in Bucharest and in Ploieşti. In total, the cheeses of the Căţean family are in four supermarkets in the country. Nine types of certified Romanian traditional cheese are produced on the farm: bellows cheese (packed in fir shell, sheepskin or pork bladder), sheep's milk (fresh or matured for 6 months), smoked curd (from cow's milk), sweet urda, fresh mutton curd, matured mutton cheese. Sheep meat products are also prepared: smoked pemmican, smoked sausages or mutton.

The cheeses from the farm are made from raw milk, according to local recipes, with traditional wooden utensils, but also using new technologies, while fresh and fragrant milk, flower pastures and traditional recipes are the essential components of the products from Ferma Căţean.

Homorod Apple Orchard cultivates and offers Romanian apples for sale, tasty and natural from the varieties Pionier (summer) and Florina (winter). Neculai-Pelei Maria owns the company Livamer Fruct SRL, founded in 2017, which deals with the production

and distribution of apples from the old orchard of Homorod commune. In 2018, his family's apples arrived in the Carrefour Hypermarket in Braşov, but also in the Selgros chain of stores from all over the country.

In conclusion, considering the presentation of the localities with potential to develop LGP in Braşov County according to the research conducted, a network of LGP in Braşov County can be created in order to promote the tourist destination through local culinary preparations and specialties. In this sense, the map presented in figure 1 was devised.

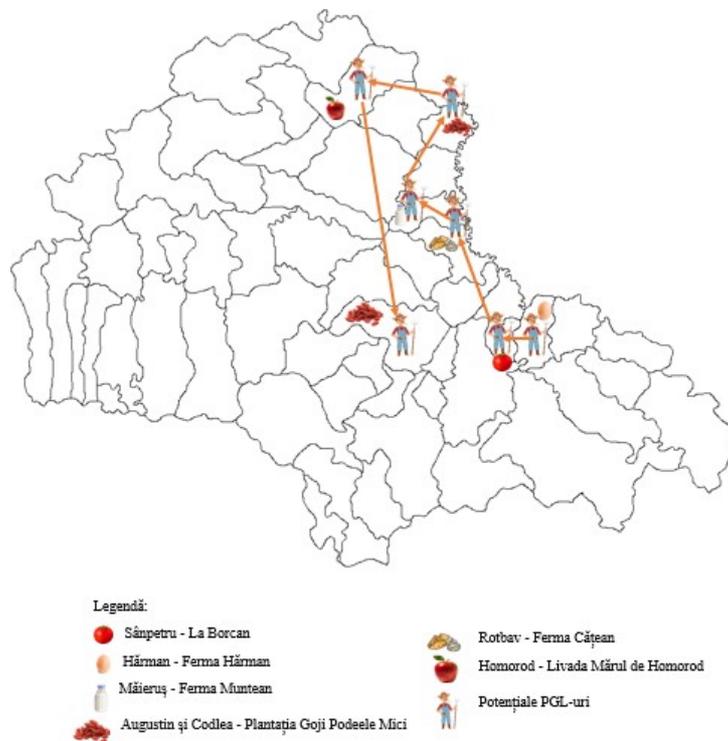


Fig. 1. *Map Network of Local Gastronomic Points in Braşov County*

In Figure 1, a potential network of LGPs at the level of Braşov county is presented, which considers the enhancement of the local gastronomic mix, the capitalization of mountain products and the development of gastronomic tourism at the county level. It is also aimed at the unitary promotion of these LGP and their integration in the tourist offer of the county.

5. Conclusions

In many places in Europe, there are various local initiatives to foster regional development through culinary heritage (Bonow and Rytönen, 2012). For example, in the city of Burgos in Spain, the commune of Fermo in the Marche region, Italy, the city of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat in Spain (Sirše, 2015). In many countries, food and beverage

festivals, as well as the routes of various food products are transformed into tourist attractions for certain segments of tourists (Lee and Acordia, 2011). Events and attractions associated with gastronomic tourism regularly present local specialties and traditions, entertain visitors and contribute to learning experiences or a better understanding of the destination (Bonow and Rytönen, 2012). In Romania, in order to capitalize on the strong link between gastronomy and tourism, the concept of Local Gastronomic Point (LGP) was introduced by the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (ANSVSA) and the Ivan Patzaichin-Mila 23 Association. To be successful, such an initiative requires collaboration between the public and private sectors, as well as educating residents to join and be involved in supporting these activities. Future research needs to be undertaken to analyse the capabilities and availability of collaboration, as well as to identify ways to promote these LGP networks in target markets.

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