

## LOCAL GASTRONOMIC POINTS AS PART OF SUSTAINABLE AGRITOURISM AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF IT. CASE STUDY, SIBIU COUNTY, ROMANIA

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### Abstract

*The work highlights the importance of local gastronomic points (LGP) in the sustainable development of villages in the mountain area of Romania. The paper employed a quantitative and a qualitative analysis. In this paper there are presented the number of local gastronomic points established in the mountain area of Sibiu County, Romania, the number of local producers registered under the optional "mountain product" quality scheme and the number of tourist structures with accommodation function and their accommodation capacity, from the same localities. A case study of a local gastronomic point was carried out and an investigation was carried out regarding the knowledge of young people about local gastronomic points, respectively their role in the development of villages.*

**Key words:** local gastronomic point, local food, food tourism, rural household, rural development, youth, Sibiu County, Romania

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of a robust and resilient food system that works under all circumstances and is able to ensure access to a sufficient supply of affordable food for citizens. This pandemic has also made us extremely aware of the connection between health, ecosystems, supply chains, consumption patterns and the limits of the planet [5, 9, 33]. It is clear that we need to do much more to ensure the health of ourselves and the planet. The increasing frequency of droughts, floods, wildfires and new pests are a constant reminder that our food system is under threat and must become more sustainable and resilient [11, 15].

The "From Farm to Fork" strategy is a central element of the European Green Deal [13]. It addresses the challenges of sustainable food systems and emphasizes the inextricable links

between healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet [12].

Shifting to a sustainable food system can bring environmental, social and health benefits, generate economic gains and ensure that overcoming the crisis is equivalent to embarking on a sustainable trajectory. It represents a comprehensive new approach to how Europeans value the sustainability of food systems. It is an opportunity to improve lifestyles, health and the environment. Creating an enabling food environment that facilitates healthy and sustainable food choices will benefit consumers' health and quality of life and reduce health-related costs for society. People are paying more attention to environmental, health, social and ethical issues and, more than ever, are looking for value in food [2, 14, 17, 36].

Despite the urbanization of societies, people want to feel closer to the food they eat. They

want fresh, less processed and sustainably sourced food, and calls to shorten supply chains have intensified in recent years. Consumers should be able to choose sustainable food products, and all actors in the food chain should see this as a responsibility and an opportunity [16, 26, 34].

Supporting and promoting local producers are elements of major importance for the sustainable development of an area/region [10, 32].

Rural development expresses the set of actions aimed at improving the quality of life in rural areas, based on sustainable economic growth, which maintains the natural landscape and material and spiritual culture [29] of the village communities [27].

During the last years, gastronomy is perceived like one of the great opportunities to promote and strengthen special tourist destinations [22].

One of the targets provided by the Strategy for the development of the agri-food sector in Romania stipulates that by the end of 2030, the access of the rural population to basic services and infrastructure should be at least 80% of the levels of access in the urban environment registered at European. The development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas can generate additional income for farmers, reduce the rate of migration and create jobs [18].

In Romania, the establishment of local gastronomic points represents an opportunity for rural and gastronomic tourism enthusiasts. For this category of tourists, the authenticity of culinary experiences comes first, thus contributing to the development of the rural environment in a sustainable manner, by creating jobs, maintaining the cohesion of local communities and preserving culinary traditions, in harmony with nature.

Tourists are increasingly eager for unique experiences, direct contact with nature and the local community, culinary products obtained from a sustainable way, with an emphasis on animal welfare [21] and environmental protection [23].

Recently published works showed that local gastronomy and culinary practices as an integral part of the intangible human heritage,

have major contributions in the sustainable development of an area [7], being a means of promoting local identity and a source of knowledge [6, 24].

In Romania, for the recognition of the activity of LGPs as a type of food service specific to small peasant households, various organizations have contributed, such as: Ivan Patzaichin Association – Mila 23, National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority, National Agency of the Mountain Zone and "Gastro Local" National Network [1, 3, 4].

"Gastro Local" is a national program started in 2019 and represents the interests of the owners of local gastronomic points from various counties such as: Braşov, Covasna, Sibiu and Tulcea.

The network supports producers with consultancy for authorization and promotion. At the same time, this is a way of creating a community synergy and a model of rural socialization around the gastronomic act. Through LGPs, visitors can serve a meal with traditional Romanian products at local households, in the area where they are spending their vacation, in a rustic atmosphere, but in compliance with the hygiene rules, imposed by law.

The development of rural mountain areas in Romania based on Gastro Local programs will lead both to an increase in the number of products from rural and mountain areas, registered as recipes or established products of the regions and the country, as well as to the expansion of the market and the competitiveness of traditional Romanian dishes [3].

The objectives of the work are:

1. Identification of the settlements in the mountain area of Sibiu County where local gastronomic points operate, the number of tourist accommodation structures in these rural areas and their accommodation capacity;
2. Realization of a case study regarding a local gastronomic point;
3. Providing an insight into young people's knowledge and perception of local gastronomic spots and the role they can play in the development of mountain villages.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A multiple methodology was used to develop the paper:

1. Specialized literature was consulted, and data was collected from the relevant public authorities in Romania regarding the operation of local gastronomic points, tourist structures with classified accommodation and producers registered under the "mountain product" quality scheme.

2. The research method also used to identify the localities in Sibiu County with opened LGPs and to describe those activities was a qualitative one: an explanatory case study [8]. Such an approach to describing the activity of this type of public catering unit operating in a peasant household allows for an in-depth analysis of the farmer's motivation and the attractiveness for tourists. The case study emphasizes the description and understanding of cases. Thus, a current phenomenon is investigated in a real context.

3. In order to analyse young people's perception of LGPs and their role, quantitative research was carried out. Thus, a questionnaire was developed in Google Forms that was distributed online between October 1st and October 25th, 2022. The questionnaire consisted of 19 items, and was structured in: socio-demographic data, preferences regarding culinary preparations consumed during vacations; the frequency of serving meals in public catering establishments; knowledge about the operation of LGPs (how to inform about LGPs; aspects related to the quality of services in LGPs; the budget allocated for serving meals in a LGP; the interest in purchasing local products from LGPs; the role of LGPs in rural development). The responses were synthesized and statistically processed using Excel, v. 365 Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, United States. To measure the intensity of agreement regarding some items, a 5-point Likert scale was used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### The concept of Local Gastronomic Point

The National Rural Development Program 2014-2022 provides for the support of those agritourism activities that lead to responsible tourism, biodiversity conservation and income generation for village residents [19].

The development of rural communities and local tourism can also be achieved by establishing Local Gastronomic Points in Romanian villages. In them, you can eat dishes made from local products obtained according to traditional, authentic methods. Thus, the products from the peasant household, from the local community, are better valued, the meal is served in an authentic setting, and the village becomes a place for socialization and cultural communion.

The Local Gastronomic Point represents an effective way of capitalizing on products from the peasant household in family-type public catering units, considering the specifics of each touristic area/region with known gastronomic traditions. Unlike restaurants or guesthouses, local gastronomic points offer tourists the opportunity to benefit from traditional, local dishes, produced and served directly by family members in their own household, respecting legal hygiene requirements, without affecting the health of consumers [25].

These Local Gastronomic Points fit perfectly with the strategy of the European Union - "From the farm to the consumer". The essence of LGP is to bring the raw material from the household, from the local community and from the neighbouring communities to the tourists' plates. All products are very close to what local specificity means. The establishment of local gastronomic points in the communes in the mountain area represents another form of valorisation of the products of the mountain household through short food chains [31].

Starting in 2021, The Mountain Area Agency offers free courses and consultancy to all people interested in opening a local gastronomic point. According to the data provided by the agency, more than 2,000 course completion certificates were issued, and between 2018-2021, 171 LGP were established nationally [25] (Figure 1).

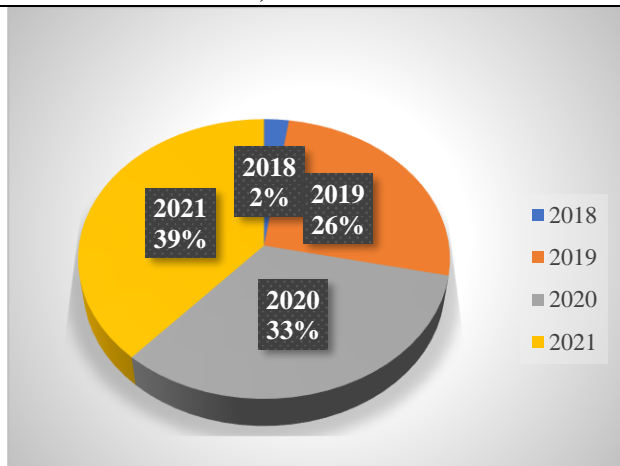


Fig. 1. Number of existing of LGP at the national level, between 2018-2021

Source: Own design.

Out of the total of 65 LGPs established at the national level in 2021, 48 operate in the mountain area, which demonstrates the interest of farmers in this area to capitalize on their products directly to tourists.

Table 1 Rural localities from Sibiu county with Local gastronomic points, touristic structures and local producers on "Mountain product" quality schema

Localities	No of LGP	No of producers on Mountain product schema	No of turistic structures	No of rooms	No of Places
Alămor	1	0	0	0	0
Alma Vii	1	0	1	5	10
Bradu	2	2	2	13	27
Cârțișoara	1	1	38	423	990
Cisnădioara	2	2	15	102	217
Colun	1	0	1	2	4
Cristian	1	1	16	98	210
Gura Râului	2	0	32	223	480
Jina	1	1	3	14	26
Nucet	1	0	1	5	11
Râu Sadului	2	1	8	65	194
Sadu	2	5	7	48	101
Șeica Mare	1	0	1	7	14
Total	18	13	125	1,005	2,284

Source: own calculation based on "Mountain product" platforme, and Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism [1, 20].

**The Local Gastronomic Points in the mountain area of Sibiu County, the**

**number of touristic structures in the localities where there are LGPs and their accommodation capacity**

In Sibiu County, 20 LGPs were established between 2018-2022, in localities such as: Gura Râului, Cisnădioara, Sadu, Cristian, Cârțișoara, Colun, Bradu, Alămor, Alma Vii, Șeica Mare, Râu Sadului, Nucet, Cisnădie, Jina and Mediaș [35].

The evolution of Local Gastronomic Points in Sibiu County between 2018 and 2022 is presented in Figure 2.

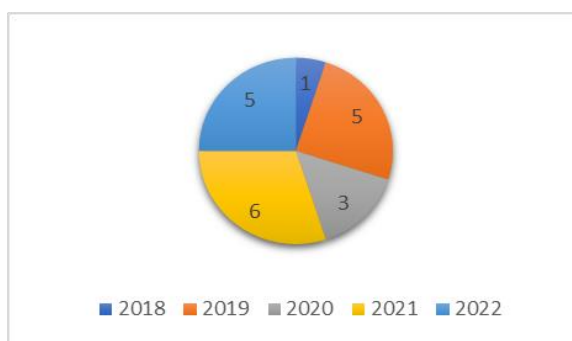


Fig. 2. The number of LGP established per year in Sibiu County between the years 2018-2021

Source: Own design.

In the rural localities of Sibiu County, 18 LGPs are registered as of 2022, out of the total of 20 existing in the entire county. In the same localities, 13 local producers are also registered who market their products under the "mountain product" quality scheme. They sell dairy products from cows, sheep and buffalo milk, fruits and vegetables, honey, canned vegetables and fruits. Table 1 shows the rural localities in Sibiu County where local gastronomic points operate, the number of classified tourist structures existing in these localities and their accommodation capacity.

It is noted that there is only one locality where, although there is a LGP, there are no classified tourist structures.

In the rural localities of Sibiu County where there are LGPs, 125 tourist structures are registered. In such localities where there is demand for rural tourism, LGPs have emerged as a necessity for tourists and an opportunity for farmers to directly capitalize on their produce and create short food supply chains. Most tourist structures operate in the localities of Cârțișoara (38) and Gura Râului (32).

### Case study – The local gastronomic point "Cămara Chivuței"

The Local Gastronomic Point "Cămara Chivuței" in Sadu commune was established at the end of 2020, as a necessity to satisfy the increasing demand of tourists visiting the area, for local products and gastronomy. During the Covid 19 pandemic, there was a growing demand for tourist services in the countryside, where tourists felt safer compared to large urban agglomerations. For the Veștemean family, the decision to establish a Local Gastronomic Point came naturally, as a way of diversifying the production activity of canned fruit and vegetables for which it holds sanitary-veterinary and food safety registration. In this way, the opportunity was created to make better use of own products registered under the "mountain product" quality scheme, through the preparations specific to the area, offered to tourists who cross its threshold, eager for an authentic gastronomic experience [25].



Photo 1. Entrance to LGP "Cămara Chivuței", Sadu village, Sibiu County, Romania [28]

Source: Original (2021).

The analyzed LGP is an example of good practice by which both own products and those of local producers of dairy, meat, bakery or honey products are highlighted and a proof of the fact that the gastronomic experience offered constitutes a point of tourist attraction in the area and better utilization of local resources.

The owner of the LGP declared that she is a chef by profession, she established this family food unit out of the desire to capitalize on her own raw material and to respond to the requests of tourists staying in tourist structures in the area where food services are not offered.

Photos 1-3 show aspects of the local gastronomic point "Cămara Chivuței" Sadu Village, Sibiu County.

In addition to the services of offering meals to tourists, the owners have numerous requests to sell home-made preserves, both from tourists and from Romanians in the country or those settled abroad.



Photo 2. General aspects from the local gastronomic point "Cămara Chivuței", Sadu Village, Sibiu County, Romania [28]

Source: Original (2021).

To promote the services and products offered, the Veștemean family has a page on social networks and takes phone orders, with direct delivery of products to the consumer's door or via courier services to customers in the country.

By directly exploiting the fresh products obtained in the households of the mountain area and offering fresh dishes, cooked slowly, according to traditional recipes, the local gastronomic points contribute to the development of sustainable tourism.



Photo 3. The cellar of the local gastronomic point "Cămara Chivuției", Sadu Village, Sibiu County, Romania [28]

Source: Original (2022).



Photo 4. Tasting products at the local gastronomic point "Cămara Chivuției", Sadu Village, Sibiu County, Romania [28]

Source: Original (2022).

The success of the business of rural entrepreneurs depends on their ecological attitude and willingness to integrate sustainability into their current business, as well as their willingness to share their traditional knowledge and lifestyle with tourists [30].

### Young people's perception of local gastronomic points and their role in the sustainable development of villages in the mountain area

The questionnaire was completed by 103 people. The presentation of the socio-demographic data of the respondents is presented in Table 2. The average age of the respondents is 24.5 years. 75.73% of respondents are women, 52.4% live in rural

areas. A share of 88.34% of the respondents' families have an average monthly household income below 7,500 lei, and in 79.61% of the cases, the families are made up of 2 to 4 people.

Table 2. Data on respondents

Specification		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	25	24.27
	Female	78	75.73
	Total	103	100
Domicile	Urban	49	47.57
	Rural	54	52.43
	Total	103	100
Age (years)	18-30	91	88.35
	31-40	4	3.88
	Above 40	8	7.77
	Total	103	100
Family income	Below 2,500 lei	23	22.33
	2,501-5,000	43	41.74
	5,001-7,500	25	24.27
	7,501-10,000	6	5.83
	Above 10,001	6	5.83
	Total	103	100
Persons in household	1	4	3.88
	2-4	82	79.61
	5-6	12	11.65
	Above 6	5	4.86
	Total	103	

Source: own calculation.

### The type of preferred cuisine, the habit of serving meals outside the household

The respondents expressed their preferences regarding the culinary preparations consumed during the holidays spent in the rural environment as follows: 67% traditional, locally specific dishes, 18.4% international cuisine dishes, 9.7% fast food, respectively, 4.9% others. More than half (52.4 %) of the respondents stated that they serve the meal occasionally in a public catering establishment, while 25.2 % usually serve the meal outside the household often or very often.

Only 38.8% of young people said that they used to participate in gastronomic events such as culinary festivals, fairs or brunches.

### Knowledge of local gastronomic points and the perception of their role in the development of villages

76.2% of the respondents believe that they know what a local gastronomic point is, although only 32% correctly identified the 12-seat capacity of such a public catering establishment.

At the same time, 61.2% of young people stated that they had served a meal at a local gastronomic point in Sibiu County. As expected, for young people the most important source of information on LGPs is relatives/friends (41.8%), followed by social networks (22.8%).

In the opinion of young people, the most important aspects on which the success of a LGP activity depends are: its appearance (82.5% considering it to be important or very important), the price of the dishes (85.4% of the respondents believe that it decisively influences the decision to serve the meal in a LGP) and the attitude of the staff (97.1 % of respondents stated that it influences their decision to serve a meal in a LGP).

The frequency of the answers received regarding the importance of the general appearance of a LGP for the success of the activity is shown in Figure 3. The average value of the answers obtained was 4.117, which shows that for young people the traditional appearance, specific to the area, increases the attractiveness of the LGP.

The willingness to pay for a meal at a local gastronomic point is between 51 and 100 lei/person in the case of 56.3% of the answers, under 50 lei/person in the case of 20.4% of the answers and over 101 lei/person in the case of 23.3% of the respondents. (Exchange rate: 1 Euro = 4.9134 lei)

The importance that young people consider LGPs have is given by the fact that they are perceived as an additional source of income for farmers (92.2%) and contribute to the sustainable development of rural tourism and villages (96.1% ).

There is a need for better promotion of the activity of local gastronomic points, especially among young tourists. O mai bună promovare a conceptului de punct gastronomic local conduce la conservarea și promovarea produselor locale, gastronomiei locale, susține agricultura tradițională și cultura locală.

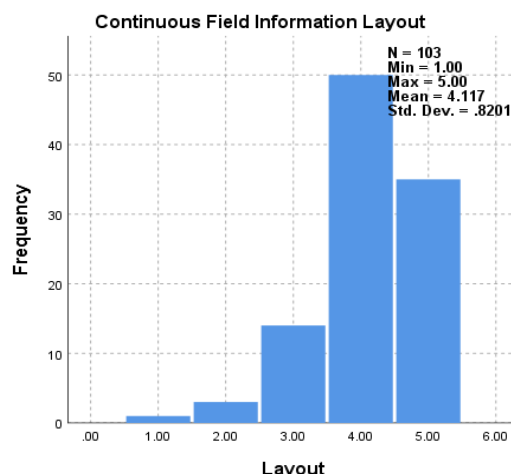


Fig. 3. The importance of the LGP aspect in the view of young people

Source: own design.

When leaving local gastronomic points, 77.7% of those surveyed want to buy products from farmers. These products are: bread and bakery products (70.87%), fresh fruit and vegetables (68.93%), meat preparations (67.96%), milk preparations (62.13%), jam, syrup and honey (61.16%), cooked food (54.36%), preserves and pickles (33%) and eggs (32.03%).

## CONCLUSIONS

The diversification of agricultural activity in a rural household by establishing Local Gastronomic Points represents a new opportunity, worthy of consideration by the inhabitants of rural areas.

The activity carried out by local gastronomic points contributes to the development of the rural environment in a sustainable manner by creating jobs, maintaining the cohesion of local communities and preserving culinary traditions, in harmony with nature. This creates a sustainable link between agriculture and tourism.

Local gastronomic traditions and local culinary preparations contribute to completing the image of a rural tourist destination. Gastronomic tourism highlights local and national identity, which can be amplified by organizing gastronomic events in the countryside.

The Local Gastronomic Points, on the one hand, represent an essential factor in attracting tourists to the area, and on the other hand, they can be found among the solutions to many of the local development and environmental problems.

Tourists who dine at a local gastronomic point want to have a local gastronomic experience and get to know the lifestyle of the farmers who carry out such an activity. In this way they can know the local and regional cultural diversity.

We believe that in the future the families of farmers in the mountain area who have authorized a local gastronomic point should be supported to diversify their activity and obtain the right to accommodate tourists in 3-5 rooms. In general, in the houses of farmers in the mountain area there is surplus accommodation space that could be introduced into the agritouristic circuit. For such an accommodation activity, complementary to the agricultural activity of the mountain household and that of providing public food services at the local gastronomic point, classification should not be necessary.

A better promotion of the concept of a local gastronomic point leads to the preservation and promotion of local products, local gastronomy, supports traditional agriculture, a certain lifestyle and local culture.

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