

CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF PROMOTING ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL GASTRONOMY

Smaranda Simoni¹, Flavia Teodoroiu², Mădălina-Lavinia Țală³
and Gabriela Țigu⁴

^{1) 2) 3) 4)} *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*

E-mail: tsmaranda@yahoo.com; E-mail: flavia.teodoroiu@ase.ro

E-mail: madalina.tala@com.ase.ro; E-mail: gabriela.tigu@ase.ro

Abstract

Romania has a gastronomic mosaic of great tourism potential, resulting from a millennial combination of natural, historical and socio-cultural factors. The Romanian cuisine is unique through the ingenuity of combining old peasant recipes with oriental, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian, and French-Austrian-Hungarian recipes. The Romanian cuisine contains ordinary, everyday food, and also festive dishes or dishes connected with Christian traditions. Romania currently has 558 certified traditional products, registered in NRTP, especially meat, dairy and bakery products. The certification of traditional products in the European Union has an important economic role, yet only three Romanian traditional products have received the European Commission certification (DOP and IGP). The purpose of this paper is to highlight the economic and cultural importance of promoting Romanian traditional food. The unquestionable value and quality of Romanian traditional products represent the premises for creating a brand recognized in Europe, by certifying and promoting them at gastronomic festivals and tourism fairs.

Keywords: Romania, gastronomy, traditional food, tourism potential, certified traditional product, promoting

JEL Classification: N33, N34, N53, N54, O52, Q15, Q18, Z32

Introduction

This study presents the Romanian gastronomy along the Romanian history, as it was influenced by a series of natural, historical and socio-cultural factors. Its distinctive features are the originality, the ingenuity of combining old peasant recipes (shepherd, fishing) with oriental, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian, and French-Austrian-Hungarian recipes. The Romanian cuisine contains ordinary, everyday food, and also festive dishes or dishes connected with Christian traditions (fasts, feasts). Each of Romania's historical regions (Muntenia, Oltenia, Dobruja, Moldavia, Bucovina, Transylvania, Maramureș, Crișana, Banat) has a well defined historical, socio-cultural, economic and gastronomic identity.

Promoting Romanian traditional cuisine and healthy food would bring significant benefits not only for the tourism industry by means of the economic growth generated by encouraging producers, but also for the education on a healthy diet. The unquestionable value and quality of Romanian traditional food represent the premises for creating a brand recognized in Europe, by certifying (in the National Register of Traditional Products or in the European categories DOP and IGP - DOOR) and promoting these products at gastronomic festivals and tourism fairs.

Research methodology

This paper aims at highlighting the economic and cultural importance of the gastronomic differences between the traditional products of the ethnographic regions in our country. There are nine such regions, each with well-defined features in terms of gastronomy. The study is based on researching the bibliographic sources mentioned therein: specialty books and papers, normative and legislative acts in the field, publications and information from the web pages of Romanian and European institutions with activities in this field (the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Tourism, the European Commission), further processed into pertinent conclusions. The data were processed using the computing functions of the application Microsoft Excel. Besides the literature review and the analysis of data referring to the evolution in number of the Romanian traditional products certified in the period 2014-2016, we considered necessary and appropriate to conduct a market research. Its purpose was to know better the Romanian traditional product market, from the perspective of producers and traders of such products.

For a better understanding of the Romanian traditional product market, and a better gastronomic differentiation between the ethnographic regions of our country, we conducted a market research based on a *structured interview*, addressed to the producers of traditional food, present at the Christmas fairs in Bucharest, during the period 3-27 December, 2015. The questionnaire included a total of 14 free-answer questions so that the respondents could mention their own comments on the issues raised in the questionnaire, but also to learn as much additional information about their activity. The sample of 17 people was carefully selected among the producers and traders present at the Christmas fairs in Bucharest.

The *objectives* of this market research were to identify: the regions the producers and traders came from; the main categories of products sold and the distribution of traditional foods; where the producers got the recipes of traditional products from; the average selling price of traditional products and the income earned by producers; how the producers promoted their traditional products; where and how the traditional products are sold; the buyer profile and the target group for Romanian traditional products.

Results and Discussions

Romania's population was predominantly rural until the second half of the twentieth century: 88% rural population at the census of 1912, 68% in 1960, 50% in 1985 and 46% today (Simoni, 2015). Most Romanians were poor peasants, their main occupations being agriculture (crops and livestock), with additional local activities (depending on the natural environment) such as forestry, fishing, hunting, beekeeping. Industrialization and food industry, agricultural mechanization and urbanization came forward only after 1960, so until then everything, from clothing to food, was homemade with agricultural products from farms.

The traditional gastronomy was influenced by natural (landforms, climate, soils), historical and socio-economic factors. Poor and divided between empires, the Romanians came in contact with the traditions of other nations throughout history, so they took and then arranged in their own way countless dishes (Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Hungarian, Austrian, French, Russian, Hebrew, Polish, Serbian, Italian, etc.). The Romanian cuisine is unique through the ingenuity of combining old peasant recipes (shepherd, fishing) with oriental (southward), Polish, Russian and Ukrainian (northward), and French-Austrian-Hungarian (westward) recipes. The Romanian cuisine contains ordinary, everyday food, and also festive dishes or dishes connected with Christian traditions (fasts, feasts).

The gastronomic culture of the Romanian people inherited many culinary traditions since ancient times. Later, the Slavs made their contribution (7th-9th centuries), as well as the Hungarians, Szeklers and Saxons colonized by the Hungarian administration in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From the thirteenth century until the nineteenth century, the Romanian cuisine was strongly influenced by the Ottoman occupation, but also by the Greek, Arabic, Armenian and Byzantine cuisines. In the eighteenth century, the migrants of some neighboring ethnic groups also influenced the Romanian cuisine: Ukrainian in Maramureş, Lippovan in Northern Dobruja, Serbian, Austrian, German, Hungarian and Ukrainian in Banat. After the formation of the Romanian state in the second half of the nineteenth century and then in the early twentieth century, some luxury restaurants opened in major cities with Western (French, Italian, Austrian) dishes and cooks.

Each of Romania's historical regions (Muntenia, Oltenia, Dobruja, Moldavia, Bucovina, Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana, Banat) has a well defined historical, socio-cultural, economic and gastronomic identity. Among them, the historical regions Transylvania (including Crişana and Maramureş), Banat and Dobruja are characterized by a millennial, multicultural and inter-ethnic coexistence (Hungarians and Germans in Transylvania; Saxons, Hungarians, Serbs, Ukrainians, Czechs in Banat; Turks, Tartars, Russians-Lippovans in Dobruja), that marked the traditional cuisine.

Certifying Romanian traditional products

Under the current legislation (Order no. 724/1082/360/2013 on the certification of traditional products, Order no. 394/290/89/2014 on the certification of food products **obtained according to recognized Romanian recipes**), a *traditional product* is a food product produced on the national territory, using local raw materials, which has: no food additives in its composition, a traditional recipe, a manual production and / or processing, a traditional technological process, being different from other similar products of the same category. The traditionality of a product is recognized by *certifying* it according to the above mentioned legislation and enters in the *National Register of Traditional Products* (NRTP is a registry established and managed by the General Directorate of Food Industry of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, through its specialized department with responsibilities in traditional products). The traditional product must be labeled with the logo of traditional products. This *national logo* is the exclusive property of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (fig. no. 1). The stakeholders involved in strengthening the traditional products on the Romanian market are: the National Federation of Producers of Traditional Products and other specialized associations in the country; the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development through its specialized departments; the County Councils through specialized structures in agriculture; the National Authority for Customer Protection with its county offices for consumer protection; the Ministry of Health.



Figure no 1: The national logo on the labels of Romanian traditional products

Source: Order no. 724/1082/360/2013

In 2016, out of 558 traditional products certified and recorded in NRTP (tables no. 1, 2), the highest number is represented by the meat products (221 items, or 40% of total), followed by dairy products (125 products, that is 23% of total), bread and bakery products (85). There are 20 beverage products, 78 vegetable and fruit products (canned vegetables, jams), and 27 traditional fish products. By historical region (table no. 3), the most numerous certified traditional products come from Transylvania (285 products, that is 51% of total), followed by Maramureş (91 product, 16% of total) and Moldavia (53 products, 9.5% of total).

Table no. 1: The structure of the Romanian certified traditional products by historical region, in 2016

Historical region	Beve- rages	Meat products	Dairy products	Vege- tables, fruits	Bread and bakery products	Fish	Other	Total	Share of total (%)
Transylvania	2	127	66	24	57	9		285	51.08
Bucovina		7	5	5		1		18	3.23
Crişana	5		1	1	1			8	1.43
Maramureş	10	29	13	13	25		1	91	16.31
Moldavia	1	12	15	23	1	1		53	9.50
Muntenia		37	21	10	1	8	1	78	13.98
Oltenia	2	9		2				13	2.33
Dobruja						8		8	1.43
Banat			4					4	0.72
Total România	20	221	125	78	85	27	2	558	100
Share of total (%)	3.5	39.61	22.40	13.98	15.23	4.8	0.36	100	

Source: own processing of data from the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP), provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Table no. 2 The number, evolution and structure of Romanian certified traditional products, following Order no. 724/1082/360/2013 on the certification of traditional products

Categories of certified traditional products	2014	2015	2016	Total
Drinks	5	15		20
Meat products	117	79	25	221
Dairy products	78	46	1	125
Vegetables, fruits	44	13	21	78
Bread and bakery products	38	41	6	85
Fish	15	7	5	27
Other		2		2
Total	297	203	58	558

Source: own processing of data from the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP), provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Table no. 3: The number and evolution of Romanian certified traditional products, historical region, following Order no. 724/1082/360/2013 on the certification of traditional products

Historical region	2014	2015	2016	Total
Ardeal	129	132	24	285
Bucovina	8	5	5	18
Crișana	7		1	8
Maramureș	50	41		91
Moldavia	37	7	9	53
Muntenia	44	16	18	78
Oltenia	10	2	1	13
Dobruja	8			8
Banat	4			4
Total	297	203	58	558

Source: own processing of data from the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP), provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

The certifications of traditional products in the European Union, such as protected designation of origin (PDO Denominazione d'Origine Protetta - PDO) and protected geographical indication PGI (Indicazione Geografica Protetta - PGI) have an important economic role, through the add value to these products, the protection of intellectual property throughout the European Union, and the increased visibility for commercial purposes. Though Romania has 558 certified traditional products, only three of them received the European Commission certification:

- magiun de prune Topoloveni [Topoloveni plum marmalade] - PGI, from April 8, 2011;
- salam de Sibiu [Sibiu salami] - PGI, from February 19, 2016;
- telemea de Ibănești [Ibănești white cheese]- PDO, from March 15, 2016.

These three Romanian traditional products entered in the database of names and records (DOOR, European Commission, Agriculture and Rural Development), being posted on the

official website of the European Commission. Another product, *novacul afumat din Țara Bârsei* [smoked bighead carp of Bârsei region] is under the process of European certification. As Romania will have more certified products, the local food industry represented by small producers will have more to gain, while the consumer will buy a genuine product at a fair price.

Promoting Romanian traditional products

The best promotion of Romanian traditional cuisine is through the fairs and festivals of traditional products, that take place in different locations in Romania, during national and local holidays. They have become a good way to promote the image of the village or region they come from, attracting hundreds, sometimes thousands of tourists eager to know habits and traditions. The traditional gastronomic festivals and fairs stimulate cultural and rural tourism, by encouraging small producers and contributing to rural community development. This is why they are used more and more as instruments for regional and local economic growth (Felsenstein, Fleischer, 2003). These events dedicated to dishes are the materialization of culinary tourism, attracting many covetous all over the world. Romanian Ministry of Tourism promotes the Romanian traditional products, through the Gastronomic Calendar of Fairs and Festivals. There have been over 80 festivals and fairs of traditional food products, in the period 2014-2017 (Ministry of Tourism, 2014).

Our market research showed that the producers present at these gastronomic fairs came from all ethnographic regions of our country, especially from Muntenia (Bucharest, Calarași, Curtea de Argeș, Doftana Valley, Dâmbovița) and Transylvania (Brașov, Covasna, Sălaj), Moldavia (Bacău, Botoșani), Crișana (Oradea), Dobruja (Bărgan) and Oltenia (Craiova). We noticed significant differences between the appearance, presentation and category of marketed products, every region having its own distinctive elements. These fairs gathered producers all over our country with a large variety of traditional products, different between them and from mass produced food.

Most producers sold meat products (traditional sausages, chop, bacon, trout sausages, pig head cheese, pork rind, etc.), dairy products (cheese, sheep cheese, salty sheep cheese, etc.), and also cooked food (trout "zacuscă", meat balls in cabbage leaves, pan-fried cubed pork, cheese pie, beans with pork, etc.). There were also many producers of jam and honey, syrups and sweets (pine syrup, acacia honey, etc.). The best-selling products at the fair were: the plum jam, the acacia and rape honey, the berry and sweet quince jam, the pine syrup and bakery products (traditional pies, "cozonac" brioche and Dobos cake). In addition to the above mentioned producers, we questioned a producer of traditional alcoholic beverages (sour cherry spirit "vișinată", "palincă" and "țuică" spirits, and wine). We noticed the significant differences between the traditional products coming from different historical regions.

An interesting aspect revealed by the research was the recipe of each product. Eight of the respondents knew the recipe from their grandparents, three from their parents, one from the village elders, and another one replied that he took the recipes from some very old cookbooks. Three of the respondents gave evasive answers or did not know (but they were only sellers of those products). Given that almost all manufacturers took the recipes from "father to son" or from external sources with long experience, we can understand why these products are so individualized and specific to certain regions.

Another objective of this research was to find out if the producers of Romanian traditional food manage to get sufficient earnings to carry their activities in good conditions, and if

they make profit. Most of those surveyed responded that they manage to survive from one year to another, but it is necessary to carry out other activities to have a decent living. Here are some sample answers: "We work hard, but the money is very few, so we cannot get rich. There is little profit and we have to reinvest it."; "It is a seasonal activity. It's hard to say. I must have another activity"; "It is difficult... I also work abroad"; "The profit is little, but enough to carry on and keep our children in school.". As a business with low production and minimum investment, the profit cannot be high, and the manufacturers are aware of that. The prices of traditional products were higher than in stores, but the producers did not lack customers.

Regarding the promotion of Romanian traditional food, most manufacturers promoted their products especially at fairs and festivals, and very few of them on the internet. A limited number of producers (five respondents) had their own shop to sell their products. Only one respondent said that he used promotion with flyers and banners. Here is a sample answer: "fairs, face to face with the customer, this is the best way."

The interview showed no specific pattern of the buyer. Traditional products are purchased by both Romanian and foreign people, of all ages, and the prices are for all pockets. Most manufacturers answered that they did not have a certain target group, their products being for everybody, Romanian or foreign, young or old. There were also several different answers, such as: "...all those who appreciate our products, those who value quality, foreigners especially", "I target young people, to send them the idea of living and eating healthy, against Coca-Cola", "...people with higher incomes, who care about quality and taste."

Conclusions

As a result of the rich history of our country, the gastronomic culture is very diverse, all nine ethnographic regions standing out through their own traditional food, each product having its own peculiarities (recipe, traditional ingredients, traditional production techniques, traditional instruments, etc.). The Romanian traditional products are classified into several categories, depending on the ingredients: vegetables and fruits, meat and meat products, milk and dairy products, bread and bakery products, fish products and beverages.

The literature review and our market research led us to the conclusion that traditional gastronomic festivals and fairs have a great impact on cultural and rural tourism, encouraging small producers and developing the respective rural community. By promoting traditional food in gastronomic festivals and fairs, Romania could create a brand recognized internationally. In our country, there is still a strong connection between food and places of origin, and this is a great advantage that authorities should use more to promote Romania. Many industrialized and globalized countries have lost touch with history, local agricultural products and traditional food, but Romania still has it. Most Romanian still prefer to eat traditional dishes, which are very proud of.

The main purpose of this study was to highlight the economic and cultural importance of the gastronomic differences in the historical regions of our country. The literature review and our market research revealed that our country has a great diversity of traditional products, giving individuality for each region. The number of certified traditional products varies from one year to another, from one region to another, and from one category to another. By supporting better the producers and by promoting better these traditional products domestically and internationally, the market of these products could grow considerably, leading to economic growth and tourism sustainable development.

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