

EXPANDING GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS FOR AGRI FOOD PRODUCTS IN ROMANIA

A.V. Cenușă^{1,2*}, F.H. Arion²

¹Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Bucharest, Romania

²University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Abstract

Quality systems represent a method of validating the quality of agri food products that have a particularity of belonging to a certain geographical area. They ensure that farmers and producers receive a fair profit for the qualities and characteristics of a particular product or its production method and provide clear information allowing consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions and increasing the credibility of the products. Romania has only 10 agri food products certified at European level in the last 11 years. Romanian products deserve to be valued to their maximum potential because they mainly represent a cultural heritage that must be preserved and promoted to its true worth. This research aimed to promote the concept of geographical indication to an essential group of institutions and people, empower the administration to provide quality services corresponding to an efficient geographic indication system and support Romanian producers to prepare the registration application and market and promote their own products. The results were obtained through exploratory research, SWOT analysis, bibliographic study and analysis and interpretation of relevant databases at national and European level. This study contributed to the fast and efficient identification of national agri food products with potential for certification, led the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to promote this tool as part of its rural development strategy and contributed to intensifying the dialogue between ministry employees, civil society and the private sector. Also, it created new connection platforms and local producer networks. One of the most important aspects was to make the ministry aware of bureaucratic blockages and to build practice-oriented solutions.

Key words: certified products, quality systems, origin specificity

INTRODUCTION

The Common Agricultural Policy promotes two main priorities, competitiveness and sustainability (DGAGRI, 2022). For these to be possible, member states must be in a similar stage of development in order to be able to even open the topic of competitiveness. In various fields, such as Geographical Indications, Romania finds itself on a lower level of development compared to other member states and there are some issues to be addressed in the effort to change that. The quality and diversity of the range of agri food products are the strong points of the economy, constituting a competitive advantage for producers (both in Romania and in the EU) and contributing substantially to the current cultural and gastronomic heritage (MADR, 2020).

Quality systems represent a method of validating the quality of agro-food products that have a specificity of belonging to a certain geographical area. The objective of the European Union was to use quality systems for producers by which they are rewarded for their efforts to produce a diversified range of quality products, while at the same time supporting the workforce and the rural economy (Commission, 2012), with beneficial social implications in disadvantaged areas, in mountainous areas and in outermost regions where the agricultural sector is an important part of the economy and where production costs are high.

Romania applies the protection system of the geographical names for agri-food products based on the EC Regulation no.1151/2012. There are eight products registered as Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) at the EU level: “Magiunul de Topoloveni”, “Novac afumat din Țara Bârsei”, “Scrumbie de Dunăre

*Corresponding author: andreeacenușa@gmail.com

The manuscript was received: 19.10.2022

Accepted for publication: 01.11.2022

afumată”, “Salam de Sibiu”, “Cârnați de Pleșcoi”, “Telemea de Sibiu”, “Cașcaval de Săveni” and “Salată cu icre de știucă de Tulcea” (AFIR, 2021). Three more are waiting for EU registration: “Placinta Dobrogeana”, “Pita de Pecica” and “Salinate de Turda”. Romania has only one Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) registered (“Salată tradițională cu icre de crap”) and also, one Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) registered (“Telemea de Ibănești”) (MADR, 2022). Romania is one of the countries to have very few Geographical Indications registered and there is a great potential and a real need for differentiation and collective strategies.

There is a great number of small family farms in Romania. Farm structures are being modernized through EU accession, but because of the lack of accessibility, farms situated in the hill and mountain areas received less information and funds. The rural areas from the Carpathian Mountains and their margins encounter real difficulties to capture financial support from the EU. Another issue is related to the seize of the farms, since micro farms under 1 hectare are excluded and small-scale farms (between 1 and 5 ha) are likely to consolidate. Regions and farms that conform most closely to EU rules (with a modern and marketable agriculture and the highest capital investments) have access to greater EU support, which in turn reinforces the polarization process (Policies, 2022).

In the same direction, smaller farmers started to developed resilience procedures (family economic autonomy through diversified production and local informal exchange systems, economic activities and international family links) against the fluctuations of Romanian national policies and markets, aiming to assure the subsistence of their family. Consequently, the European assistance objectives are not translated into reality, since EU funding is effectively directed towards a restricted type of farm. Therefore, there is a real need to take into account the high priority issue for rural families which is promoting on-farm diversification activities developed in the informal sphere of their own economic group (Labour, 2017).

Romanian agri food products deserve to be valued to their maximum potential

because they mainly represent a cultural inheritance that must be preserved and promoted to its true worth. The registration on voluntary quality systems of domestic agri food products has a role of major importance in preserving the traditional culture of food production specific to certain areas (Tanasă & Brumă, 2011).

This study aims to present a framework that promotes the concept of geographical indication to an essential group of institutions and people (suitable for the social and economic context), that empowers the administration to provide quality services corresponding to an efficient geographic indication system (evaluation of the application, permanent communication with the producers and development of an effective certification scheme) and that supports and encourages Romanian producers to prepare the registration application and market and promote their own products in compliance with consumer expectations.

In this sense, the study shall be able to contribute to the fast and efficient identification of national agri food products with potential for certification and to encourage as many producers as possible to use the quality scheme framework.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Scientific research is interpreted as creation activity, and creation as having scientific research as its support (CRĂCIUN, 2015). The study will be based on the part of exploratory research by experts (discussions with those interested actors from the public and private sector), SWOT analysis, bibliographic study and analysis and interpretation of relevant databases at national and European level.

This study is based on a series of activities performed by the core group of participants and trainees that were analyzed afterwards in order to elaborate relevant conclusions.

The activities referred to in this study were carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (co-financed by ADEPT Transilvania Foundation and AGRIDEA) during a period of three years until 2016, at which around 100 stakeholders (ministry experts, NGOs staff, producers and processors, certification bodies) participated at a variety

of activities with the sole purpose of exchanging information in order to create a simplified framework for producers, especially from disadvantaged areas as previously mentioned, to understand how to certify their products at EU level. The activities present the following preliminary results: the development of a guide to facilitate the certification process for producers, the certification of two Romanian agri-food products at the EU level (“Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată”, “Telemea de Sibiu”) and the creation of stakeholder networks for permanent communication between the parties.

The progress of the study shall be checked by the competent authority (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development). Feedbacks of experts and all partners involved are encouraged to be submitted in order to develop best practice reports and improve the current framework. Evaluation by an international independent expert is recommended at the end of the first period of implementation (interviews with the relevant stakeholders, investigation of the behavior of Romanian producers and consumer expectations regarding the quality policy, surveys).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results were elaborated based on the following list of activities performed:

1. Study trip in Switzerland for the core group in order to observe the practice and monitor their system (study trip organized for producers and processors actively engaged in one of the potential PDO products selected for analysis and certification and accreditation professionals who are dealing with PDO and PGIs certification in their daily professional life). The objective of this study trip was for participants to reflect on the typicality and characteristics of their products. It is also to draft a code of practices and a marketing strategy. This course was based on interactive methods and participative video, presentations in class by experts followed by discussions, case studies through field visits, restitutions, debriefings and class room discussions.

Below there are a series of pictures made during the trip, with the program, comments from participants, activities conducted and lessons that trainees learnt.

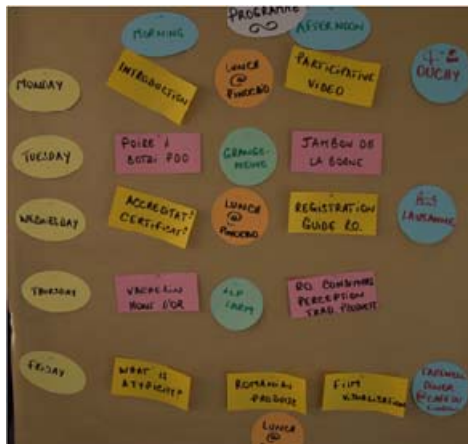


Figure 1: Panel with field trip program

In the figure from above there are various labels representing the planning of the trip by days, including the activities performed and the Swiss products analyzed: Jambon de la Borne - a smoked ham prepared in the Swiss canton of Fribourg, made with well-chilled fresh pork leg rubbed with salt, sugar, saltpeter, pepper, cloves, juniper and bay leaves (TasteAtlas, 2022), Poire à Botzi - a typical Fribourg variety and also the first Swiss fruit to benefit from an Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée label (AOP, 2015), Vacherin Mont-d'Or – a distinctive soft cheese specialty from the Vaud town of Jura, that has been produced by hand in the Vallée de Joux for over 100 years (Marketing, 2022).

In the figure below there are activities conducted listed by the participants: meetings with producers, discussions on quality schemes, popularize the concept of PGIs, seminars on typicity and certification bodies, meetings with the Romanian National Rural Development Network (RNDR) and learning about the concept of “terroir”. Among the activities, an exercise took place that involved a simulation of the documentation needed for the certification process application of 3 Romanian products: “Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată”, “Gem Săsesc de Rabarbar”, “Pită de Pecica”.

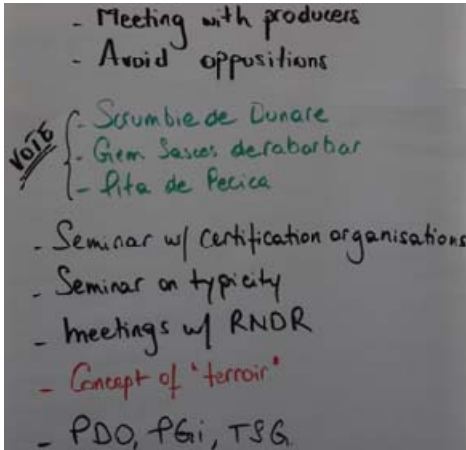


Figure 2: The activities participants conducted

The participative video process aimed to unite the group, act as vocational tool to lead a common reflection on PDOs and PGIs in Romania, act as communication tool between participants. The participants defined clearly the GI concept, presented advantages of PDO and PGI certification to improve local development (stated the benefits for producers, consumers and local communities), observed a good practice example with illustration of conditions for register and explained the collective aspect of Geographical Indication as Public Good.

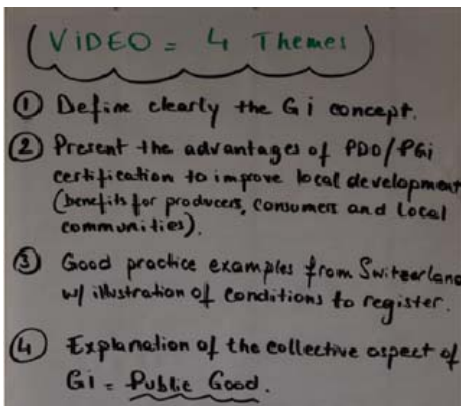


Figure 3: Participative video discussions

At the end of the study trip, the participants have understood and seen the points of typicality of different Swiss PDO products and how there are supervised, understood the Swiss

accreditation and certification system for PDOs in broad lines, seen examples and testimonies of contractual relations between producers groups and Certification bodies, seen examples of collective products organizations respecting the freedom of entrepreneurship and allowing strong individual brands, seen examples of strong synergies between the commercial use of PDOs and rural development through rural tourism.

2. One day capacity building workshop for administration and extension services

during which the participants decided the need to elaborate a registration guide and agreed upon a common definition of typicity - "the typicity is a characteristic of a food/ agricultural product through which it differentiates itself from other products from the same category" and upon the points of specificity - uniqueness (a well-defined tie to the geographical area) and specific character: production methods, processing process, climate, natural factors, human factors (MADR,2018).

The figure below represents the theme of the workshop.

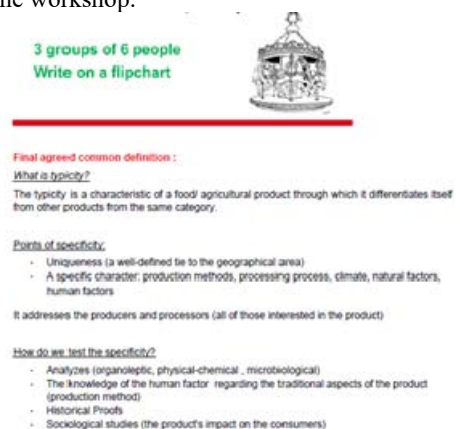


Figure 3: Workshop panel on typicity

At the end of the day, the experts expressed their conclusions and gains anonymously:

"The certitude that the GIs will have a future in Romania"

"The way through which a heterogeneous group can work together for achieving common goals"

"Knowledge"

“People (emails, etc.)”.

“Start finding, searching and fighting for our products, 1st : Brânză în coajă de brad”

“Meeting and hearing representatives of all stages of the process (producers, NGOs, certification bodies, accreditation body, consultants, institutions and public authorities)”.

“Expanding the knowledge base about PDO/PGI”

“The relationship we created among the group members”

“A nice experience, a better understanding of the need of development; good practice examples; the will to implement a quality scheme for the cold-pressed oils from Luna”

“A common experience for a group of different people”

“The joy of seeing people that are interested in the same aspects of the GI system; clarification of some GI aspects: specifications and inter-professional bodies”

“Experience; a valuable team; the multitude of possibilities existing in Romania, values that must be capitalized”

„A network of interested people”

„Personal relationships; Respect for others opinions; professional approach of a topic; Punctuality and focus on the objective; respect of the rules”.

3. Inventory of potential geographical indication products and selection of eligible products: during this workshop there were analyzed four products with certification potential (“Brânză de Bran în coajă de brad”, “Gem săsesc de rabarbăr”, “Scrumbie afumată de Delta Dunării”, “Pită de Pecica”), among which one has been successfully registered and certified (“Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată”) and another one finds itself on the waiting list for approval of certification (“Pită de Pecica”).

In the following figures there are presented the products specification outlines conducted and carried out by the participants at the workshop.

A. Brânză de Bran în coajă de brad:

Key words linked to the production process: traditional knowledge.

Key words linked to the final product: specific flavor and taste as a result of the fir bark and elasticity.



Figure 4: Product specification outlines for Brânză de Bran în coajă de brad

What was needed to go further in the process: motivation that could result from some market studies, a clear product definition (what type of milk is predominant, cow, sheep or mix), a clear definition of the geographical area and the applicant group, a clear definition of the technological process, the correct name of the product (Brânză de Bran, Brânză de Bran în coajă de brad, Brânză de Burduf de Bran în coajă de brad), the historicity and specificity proofs, identifying some financing sources.

B. Gem săsesc de rabarbăr:

Key words linked to the production process: geographical area- the Saxon Triangle, plants well-adapted to climate conditions, local rhizomes, historicity of the jam, production period: May-August, fresh raw material cultivated with no chemical additives.

What was needed to go further in the process: genetic analysis of the rhubarb, identifying all producers and processors-meeting with all stakeholders. During the meeting certain aspects needed clearing: justification of the geographical limits, the recipe that would be used by all and a scenario map in the next 5 years.



Figure 5: Product specification outlines for Gem săsesc de rabarbar

This product lacked the required specificities, the associative group and the proper motivation of the few producers to elaborate a plan for certification.

The following figure shows the representative that conducted the specifications.

C. Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată

Key words linked to the production process: the life span of the fish, fishing tools, catching techniques, production methods, connection with the area- the Danube's branches and up to Isaccea.

Key words linked to the final product: historical proof- G. Antipa "Pescăria și pescuitul" (Antipa, 1916), traditionalism - the industrialized valorization of the fish, study on types of scrumbie classification, production method, cold smoking with hardwood and the chemical composition of fresh/ smoked fish.

What was needed to go further in the process: a National Agency for Fisheries and Aquaculture study on the evaluating the fishing intensity during the past years and prognosis, certification costs to be covered, shift in mentality and encouraging associations.



Figure 6: Product specification outlines for Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată (certified)

D. Pită de Pecica (on the waiting list)

Key words linked to the production process: area (Nădlac, Seitin, Semlac, Pecica, Petreg, Iratos, Dorobanți, Felnac, Secusigiu), distribution (Arad, Hunedoara, Timiș, Bihor), traditionalism (from the historical evidence, the locality in which the family had an oven and produced Pita de Pecica), historical proof (the Pecica Commune's monograph from 1970 of Petre Ugliș of Pecica (Uglis, 1970); the recipe/ production method – since 1923 there was a baker that owned the oven).



Figure 7: Product specification outlines for Pita de Pecica

Key words linked to the final product: uniqueness (the connection between the product and the area), notoriety, the appreciation of the Romanian president during 1980- 1989 (supplying the president Nicolae Ceaușescu cabinet with Pecica bread on a weekly basis via airplane), the construction of the oven, the pre-heating technique used for the oven (strong pre-heating of the oven followed by a constant temperature after the bread is inserted in the oven).

What was needed to go further in the process: raw material (progressive increase of the cultivated areal used for wheat), financial support for certification and traceability, building traditional ovens (traditions for local development), estimation of economic data for the next 5 years, eliminating the blockages in the certification process of the product, new bread festival (yearly, first day after Saint Mary, dating back to 1951), packaging and labeling require extra costs, applicant group management (maintaining the cultural heritage; the managing of the traceability; promoting the local name).

The figure below shows the locations for the proposed products.

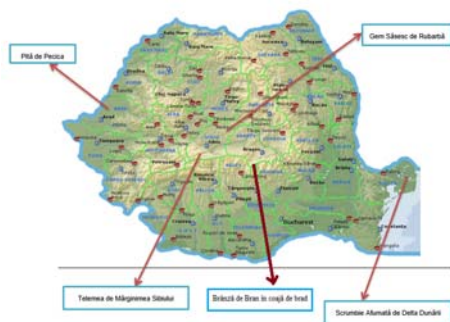


Figure 8: The location of the proposed products

The team has chosen “Telemea de Marginimea Sibiului” as an additional product, but it was already advanced in the qualification process and now it is certified under the name “Telemea de Sibiu”.

After the workshop held in Bucharest, MARD team launched efforts within the case of “Carnati de Plescoi”, which was blocked because of unsolved oppositions between the two main processors. MARD team went on

the field, met 7 producers and launched a discussion, including local authorities. They urged the processors to write a common code of practice and to present themselves with a common request and now the product benefits from certification.

4. Training for existing certification bodies on the certification of PDOs and PGIs was conducted. The workshop has allowed to meet and work with four interested certification bodies. During this workshop, which gathered 17 participants, the concept of control points and the link between product specification and certification has been deepened and a clarification has been made concerning the contractual relations between certification bodies and producer groups.

The workshop dedicated to Romanian Certification Bodies has addressed the issues of PDOs and PGIs certification. All accredited product certification bodies have been invited to attend. Four bodies have taken part, as well as the Romanian Association for Consumers Protection.

The objectives of this workshop were to discuss about the state of the art of the product certification process in Romania, the participants to understand the concept of control point and put it into practice, to adapt their practices and behaviors, to adapt the GI certification process to the Romanian context, to work on draft control plans for at least one potential Romanian GI and to be informed about the progress and GI chain analysis first results.

Corinne Couillerot, from REDD, expert in PDOs and PGIs certification as former certification body director was present for the two days, first to make a strong input on PDOs and PGIs certification and then to give her feedback to the different group exercises. The different topics which were presented were legal framework, accreditation, control and certification for GIs and infringements.

The participants mapped the institutional system for GI certification in Romania and the accreditation process was presented by RENAR representatives. The Swiss “Rye Bread of Valais” PDO was used to check the different control points and to understand this

concept and finally, participants were asked to extract the control points from the draft “Telemea de Sibiu” code of practices. This final exercise has really shown that what stands in a code of practices has to be controllable and that all stakeholders have to make an effort to simplify and lighten the actual code of practices.

5. Workshop to strengthen the registration procedure in Romania: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has put its efforts in revising its registration guide and managing the PDOs and PGIs registration requests. There is now a positive dynamic and a dialogue among institutional and professional stakeholders around the PDO and PGI theme. As far as the producers and the economic stakeholders are concerned, they have pursued their dialogue with the ministry.

There has been elaborated an internal document “MARD registration guide and suggestions” based on the brainstorming concluded during this workshop.

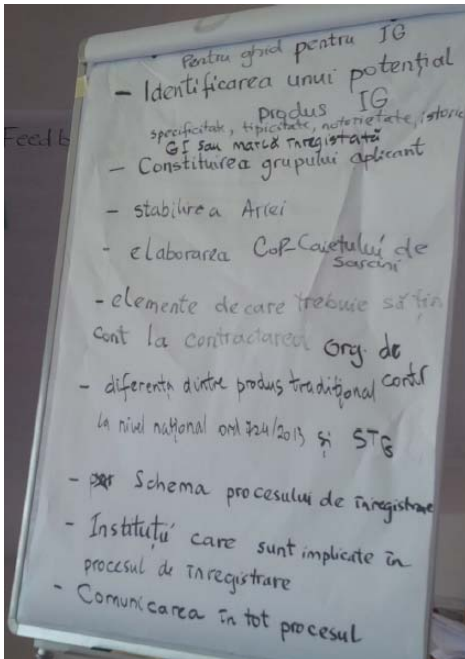


Figure 9: Brainstorming for the registration guide

The figure shows the ideas debated for the elaboration of the guide: identifying products

with certification potential (notoriety, typicality, history, specificity, area), building the applicant group characteristics, elaborating the specifications, elements that must be taken into account when contracting the certification body, explaining the differences between traditional products at the national level and Guaranteed Traditional Specialties, development of the scheme of the registration process, creating a list of institutions involved in the registration process, ways of communicating with producers and supporting them.

The document resulted is named “GUIDELINES FOR APPLICANTS PREPARING PGI/PDO AND STG REGISTRATION REQUESTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH EU REGULATION 1151/2012 (GHIDUL SOLICITANȚILOR CARE PREGĂTESC CERERI DE ÎNREGISTRARE A IGP/DOP ȘI STG ÎN CONFORMITATE CU REGULAMENTUL UE 1151/2012)” and has the following structure:

1. Definitions and objectives
 - 1.1 Protected Designation of Origin
 - 1.2 Protected Geographical Indication
 - 1.3 Guaranteed Traditional Specialty
 - 1.4 What are quality systems?
 - 1.5 Purpose and advantages of registration protection
 - 1.6 EU legislation
 - 1.7 National legislation
2. The role of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
3. Documentation for the registration of a PDO, PGI, STG
 - 3.1 Application for registration to acquire protection
 - 3.2 The association act of the applicant group
 - 3.3 Specifications
 - 3.4 The single document
 - 3.5 Data, documents, bibliographic references related to the product for which registration is desired
 - 3.6 Socioeconomic data
 - 3.7 Copy of the contract concluded with a certification body
 - 3.8 Other data and information from which the opportunity to acquire protection can be derived.
4. Procedure for verification of registration requests

4.1 National verification

4.2 European Verification

4.3 Verification of compliance with the specifications

6. Geographical indication chain analysis of several potential geographical indication products supply chains and identification of strategic groups (was developed the final product selection, the realization of the GI chain analysis and the organization of two workshops in Bucharest, gathering 40 participants in total, both representatives of potential GI groups and stakeholders of the GI institutional frame - Accreditation Office, certification bodies; the first one was more a general introduction whereas the second one had a focus on PDOs and PGIs certification issues).

7. Workshop for each selected products with the producers on the specificity and characteristics of the product, as well as geographical zone of production. There were established 4 products to be supported throughout their registration process. The team has proceeded to the analysis of 4 products' systems through field visits: "Gem Săsesc de Rabarbar" (30 producers and household processors – mainly women - , one semi-industrial processor), "Telemea de Sibiu" (around 80 producers, among which 40 are in the geographical area – women are responsible with the cheese processing), "Pita de Pecica" (the supply chain analysis is still going on and will determine the exact number of producers and processors involved)" and "Scrumbie afumată de Delta Dunării" (500 fishermen and one main processor – fishermen are mostly men and the processing company employs mainly women). The participants of the workshop (representatives of different GI supply chains and agricultural stakeholders) have voted for the products for which, they thought, had the best potential.

8. Consumer surveys in relevant consumer areas: the marketing aspect has started to be examined with the preparation of a consumer and market survey for the selected products. The University of Political Sciences of Bucharest has been identified as a good

subcontractor for the management of the qualitative consumer survey. The University of Political Sciences of Bucharest as well as the Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest have met alongside ministry experts to implement a qualitative consumer survey on PDOs, PGIs and traditional products, due to their proven competencies in focus group implementation as well as their high level of expertise in the field of Romanian traditional products. The survey is property of the private sector, was financed by ADEPT Transilvania Foundation and co-financed by AGRIDEA and it was not published nor revealed to the participants. Only the conclusions were debated and no report was made.

A SWOT analysis of the study was conducted in order to scale its importance:

- The strengths identified were external funding, ministry level participants, variety of stakeholders, access to any type of materials, well designed program and activities, long-term collaboration and non-EU participants.

- In terms of weaknesses, the expected impacts of the registration could have been identified beforehand and get recalled, few solid and sustainable certification bodies, few participants from each category, the results of the study trip and training could have been presented too late for the conclusions.

- The opportunities presented were in terms of linking the stakeholders and creating new connection platforms and local producer networks, certifying new products, exchanging knowledge with other states, identifying the administrative blockages, promoting the concept of geographical indication, developing market study on traditional products in Romania, supporting the administration to provide quality services corresponding to an efficient geographic indication system, encouraging Romanian producers to submit applications for certification and making changes in legislation for certification process.

- There were some threats identified that could compromise the study, such as lack of involvement from the stakeholders, conflicts arisen at the administration level for

attribution of roles in the PDO/PGI system, producers not motivated to gather and work on a registration case study, the identified changes not formally communicated and disseminated, low participation level, lessons not shared by all the stakeholders, the disappearance of certification bodies or producers over the years, the only products included in the study could be large scale farming system products, producers may disagree on one or several points of the code of practices and this fact hinders further achievements.

DISCUSSIONS - OBJECTIVES OUTCOMES

A. Outcome of promoting the concept of geographical indication to an essential group of institutions and people (suitable for the social and economic context):

1. The key stakeholders communicated and cooperated to effectively implement the legal framework.

2. Thirty-five persons have been exposed to other states PDO /PGI system (Switzerland) and are aware of the Strength and Weaknesses.

Outputs for outcome:

1. The core group (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, National Office of Traditional and Ecological Products, Certification bodies from Romania and producers) is now aware of the possible and needed changes for the geographical indication system in Romania due to the fact that specific changes within the system were identified and discussed (it was concluded a study trip report highlighting the lessons learned for geographical indications in Romania and debriefings with the trainees after their participation at the training in the form of interviews and/or meetings).

Romanian administration, extension services and relevant producer associations are now introduced to the concept of geographical indication and the Romanian institutional system. They expressed their needs for support in this scope (the roles of the different stakeholders within the Romanian geographical indication institutional system were discussed and

clarified and videos on the lessons learned and expectations for geographical indications in Romania were provided to participants).

B. Outcome of empowering the administration to provide quality services corresponding to an efficient geographic indication system (evaluation of the application, permanent communication with the producers and development of an effective certification scheme):

1. The stakeholders can use the improved registration and certification procedure in Romania.

2. Governmental and private stakeholders adopted best practices from Switzerland to the Romania situation.

3. The Romanian Accreditation Body applied the appropriate tools, and has sufficient resources to certify PDO and PGI products.

Outputs for outcome:

1. The efficiency of the institutional framework for the protection of geographical indications, including the registration procedure is strengthened (the registration procedure is adjusted and tested at ministry level, there were elaborated guidance documents for the registration of PDO and PGI in Romania). MARD is now active and reactive regarding PDOs and PGIs registration requests. Its role was clearly presented to producers and agricultural advisors. MARD role consist of receiving registrations applications, managing the opposition procedure and examining different important points of the registration requests. The employees also made field visits to potential PDOs producers groups and local authorities in order to inform about the registration process and potential (in terms of expected impacts). A large audience is now aware of this tool and has a clear picture of the different registration steps. During this period, the number of producers aware of the registration procedure has made a significant increase.

2. Certifications bodies know better how to certify PDOs and PGIs in a more flexible way, suitable for each product because of their different particularities (the concept of control points is understood and put into

practice and a control framework was developed). One representative of a certification body and one representative of RENAR took part to the study trip organized. Half a day was entirely be devoted to certification and accreditation.

C. Outcome of supporting and encouraging Romanian producers to prepare the registration application and market and promote their own products in compliance with consumer expectations:

1. Producer groups have identified the different types of stakeholders to work with and have consulted them during the registration processes.

2. Stakeholders are aware of the economic situation of their supply chain (strategic groups, threats and opportunities) through market research and chain analysis presentation and sharing process.

3. Supply chain stakeholders and institutional actors exchanged and found tradeoffs on eligibility criteria and registration process through discussion during the workshops and after.

4. Producers went through a successful collective action: roles within the producers group are clearly identified: who was the group and registration leader, who was the external support, who was the group facilitator.

Outputs for outcome:

1. Products with certification potential were identified and their production and market strategy was analyzed (several traditional and economically relevant products were identified, communicated and ready for geographical indication certification, relevant information on potential geographical indication products in Romania was collected and documented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 50 producers have participated in their geographical indication products chain analysis). The follow up activities consisted in elaborating an inventory fiche for around 10 products in Romania and selection reports, elaborating a geographical indication chain analysis report for the selected reports, including mapping of the different product chains and elaborating workshop

documentation for the participants at the study. Through the different workshops and meetings which were organised all around Romania, interested producers know who they can contact for support or question (certification bodies, MARD). The registration guide indicated possible contacts for support.

The team had focused on the analysis of the GI production and commercialization for the 4 selected products. The results were presented to concerned producers or local action groups. Their reactions and comments have allowed the team to modify and fine tune the chain analysis for “Pita de Pecica”. MARD has made direct backstopping to help the stakeholders progressing in their qualification strategy. They visited the bakers of the “Pita de Pecica” in Pecica together with the local action group representative to clarify different issues regarding the code of practices such as the traditional characteristics of the ovens and the origin of the flour.

The team also visited the demanding group for “Scrumbie afumată de Delta Dunării” to work with them on their code of practice and to visit different stakeholders of the production.

The product “Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată” has been successfully certified in 2018 and “Telemea Sibiu” has been certified in 2019.

Additionally, the ministry has welcomed a student from the Master on Food Identity from the Ecole Supérieure d’Agriculture in Angers, France to make his Master Thesis on the “Analysis of the Supply chain of Branza de Burduf in fir bark in order to help the group of producers to get a Geographical Indication”. The results of his thesis have been presented and discussed with the producers and with MARD employees in order to present what is the actual production situation and which are the main challenges.

2. Producers of the selected products defined the specificity and characteristics of their product (the geographical indication chain stakeholders have worked out the specific points which constitute their product specificity, elaborated a draft of code of practices for the new products with certification potential, a list of non-negotiable

points in the product making process was elaborated, the geographic zone of production was defined in the most concealed way possible, a common wording was adopted in order to facilitate the process, a simplified market study on the selected products was developed and it was elaborated a workshop document testifying that producers were informed about the market study results and invited to take a stand). The consumer study has shown that traditional products are highly regarded in Romania, as they constitute the symbolic link with an archaic rural world that is considered threatened. Consumers understand the difference between traditional dishes and traditional products and have a rich repertoire of products, where fish and bakery products are underrepresented. This study has also shown that food certifications are familiar to consumers as a whole, but are not extremely differentiated. Products displaying a certification are typically associated with a higher degree of quality. The PGI and brands with a widely known place of production are not differentiated by the surveyed consumers. The first producer owning a PGI label in Romania (“Magiun de Topoloveni”) played an important role in paving the road to notoriety for the label. Wines are also a close reference that consumers use to infer the meaning of certifications of origin in general or PGI in particular. This consumer survey has highlighted the need for a more systematic awareness campaign in order to educate consumers regarding the meanings and value of different food certifications.

The most important lesson learnt was the long-lasting aspect of this qualification and registration process. If the applicant group is given all the necessary information and guidance through the registration process, the group will most likely follow its own path, but it needs an external facilitator and, above all, time.

The study has also shown that there is an emulation between the different products in their qualification process progress, which is very positive. This shall be maintained by an informal network and by a social media group.

CONCLUSIONS

The study brought a new perspective to Romanian stakeholders, especially since the best practices model was presented by Swiss authorities, Switzerland not being one of the EU member states, and this brings added value to the decision making process in Romania and helps and supports the modern thinking needed in order to create a simplified framework for producers. It contributed to the fast and efficient identification of national agri food products with potential for certification and will possibly encourage as many producers as possible to use the quality scheme framework in the future.

The study led the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to promote this tool as part of its rural development strategy and contributed to intensifying the dialogue between ministry employees, civil society (through NGOs) and the private sector (through agricultural representatives and processing companies).

The activities performed also allowed the ministry to develop an assessment network to address the certification aspects of Geographical Indications and to resolve issues in the registration process. One of the most important aspects was to make the ministry aware of bureaucratic blockages and to build practice-oriented solutions. The workshops organized allowed the ministry employees to have a better overview of the Geographical Indication.

Although a GI network has clearly been launched and if GIs have been identified and supported, the main challenge lied in the participatory aspects of the events. Indeed, in different cases, the initiative for product valorisation and GI registration is carried out by a leader (association president, Local Action Groups) and the producers themselves often have a low, if not no knowledge nor information on the on-going initiative.

Considering the historical background when during the communist era the people were forced to be part of associations, the mistrust in such collective activities is somehow understandable. It is crucial to continue and open the dialogue with those interested in getting a collective certification

and explain the benefits they can attain after the certification.

Future prospects for research linked to this study are determining a legislative framework for: creating and implementing national policies to improve the quality of certified agri-food products, detecting funding programs for informing consumers and promoting certified products, informing consumers about the advantages of consuming certified agri-food products in accordance with quality schemes established at the European and national level and the establishment of national strategic objectives that will change Romania's status as a subsistence producer helped by European Union financing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been carried out without the involvement of the participants in the activities organized and undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, co-financed by the ADEPT Transilvania Foundation and AGRIDEA. Around 100 people were present and involved during the activities (ministry experts, NGOs representatives, producers and processors, certification bodies) without whom these achievements would not have been possible.

REFERENCES

1. AFIR. (2021). *All certified and attested products* (Romanian). Retrieved from afir.ro: <https://cpac.afir.info/ToateProdusele>
2. Antipa, G. (1916). "The fishery and fishing in Romania" (Romanian)
3. AOP, P. à. (2015). *Terroir Fribourg*. Retrieved from Fribourg region: <https://www.fribourgregion.ch/en/la-gruyere/local-products/poire-a-botzi-aop/>
4. Commission, E. (2012). *Geographical indications and quality schemes explained*. Retrieved from agriculture.ec.europa.eu: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/geographical-indications-and-quality-schemes/geographical-indications-and-quality-schemes-explained_en
5. CRĂCIUN, C. (2015). *Research methods and techniques* (Romanian). Retrieved from intermaster.geo.unibuc.ro/: http://intermaster.geo.unibuc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/9.-Craciun-Cerasella_Metode.pdf
6. DGAGRI. (2022). *The common agricultural policy at a glance*. Retrieved from AGRICULTURE.EC.EUROPA.EU: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-glance_en
7. Labour, G. O. (2017). *Understanding the drivers of rural vulnerability*. Retrieved from ilo.org: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_568736.pdf
8. MADR. (2018). *Common internal report for workshop*. Bucharest.
9. MADR. (2020). *The benefits of registering products on national and European quality schemes (Romanian)*. Retrieved from madr.ro: <https://www.madr.ro/docs/ind-alimentara/2020/beneficii-inregistrare-pe-scheme-de-calitate-nat-si-europene-prod-agroalimentare.pdf>
10. MADR. (2022). *Agri food products (Romanian)*. Retrieved from madr.ro: <https://www.madr.ro/industrie-alimentara/sisteme-de-calitate-europene-si-indicatii-geografice/produse-agricole-si-alimentare.html>
11. Marketing, S. C. (2022). *Vacherin Mont-d'Or AOP*. Retrieved from cheeses from switzerland: <https://www.cheesesfromswitzerland.com/en/cheese-varieties/range/vacherin-mont-dor-aop>
12. Policies, D.-G. f. (2022, april). *The Future of the European Farming Model - Socio-economic and territorial implications of the decline in the number of farms and farmers in the EU*. Retrieved from europarl.europa.eu: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etude/s/STUD/2022/699620/IPOL_STU\(2022\)699620_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etude/s/STUD/2022/699620/IPOL_STU(2022)699620_EN.pdf)
13. Tanasă, L., & Brumă, I. S. (2011). *PROMOTION OF TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS IN THE NORTH-EAST DEVELOPMENT REGION (Romanian)*. Retrieved from research gate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304020432_PROMOVAREA_PRODUSELOR_AGROALIMENTARE_TRADITIONALE_ROMANESTI_IN_REGIUNEA_DE_DEZVOLTARE_NORD-EST
14. Tasteatlas. (2022). *Jambon de la Borne*. Retrieved from taste atlas: <https://www.tasteatlas.com/jambon-de-la-borne>
15. Uglis, P. (1970). *Monograph of the City of Pecica (Romanian)*. Pecica.