



Article

Gastronomic Heritage of Făgăraș Land: A Worthwhile Sustainable Resource

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Abstract: The present study highlights the value of gastronomy and culinary practices in Făgăraș County as a dimension of the Intangible Cultural Heritage that can contribute to the sustainable development of the area. The field research carried out within an interdisciplinary project of the Transilvania University of Brașov pointed out the importance of the different “ciorbe” (sour soups) in the local gastronomy of Făgăraș County. Our groundwork found some traditional local soups and soup recipes. Starting from these results, the study stresses the opportunity to exploit this heritage resource through social entrepreneurship. To uphold this perspective, our study highlights that soups and sour soups are prepared with local ingredients, that women in the area are experienced and have the willingness to cook together. The tourist specificity of the area favors the creation of a local network between entrepreneurs from all over the country. The main contribution of the study derives from the fact that it presents arguments that show the generosity of gastronomy and culinary practices as a heritage resource, illustrating that a popular culinary product can grow and become a local brand.



Citation: Bolborici, A.-M.; Lupu, M.I.; Sorea, D.; Atudorei, I.A. Gastronomic Heritage of Făgăraș Land: A Worthwhile Sustainable Resource. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 1199. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031199>

Academic Editors: Baiba Rivza, Diana Foris and Maiga Kuzmetra

Received: 22 December 2021

Accepted: 19 January 2022

Published: 21 January 2022

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Keywords: intangible cultural heritage; gastronomy; soup; healthy nutrition; social entrepreneurship; Făgăraș Land

1. Introduction

Globalization promotes the principle of unity in diversity and the daily life shows that people have almost the same habits all over the world not just because they are connected by the internet and by social media channels, but also by their way of life and by consuming cultural products (the movies can be an example); people are also interested in tasting specific/local food or exotic dishes and also in preparing them. This is a simple way of realizing that people are experiencing today globalization in a simple, yet also positive way, while also helping them to improve their lifestyle and also the local communities to become visible to the entire world.

The aim of this article is to prove that in globalization, the gastronomy and culinary practices as a distinct dimension of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) are not just an important intangible heritage area (the tourist preferences for local gastronomic tours proves this), but they also represent an important factor for social entrepreneurship and could represent a sustainable source of income for locals in Făgăraș Land. We will try in this paper: (1) to highlight the importance given to the different “ciorba” (sour soup) in the local gastronomy of Făgăraș Land (Romania); through our research, we identified some traditional local recipes for soups and sour soups; (2) to highlight the potential for sustainable local development of this ICH gastronomic resource; we propose its capitalization through social entrepreneurship.

In traditional Romanian cuisine, the soup counts among the most popular dishes (made with meat, fish, or vegetables) and could be found in any kitchen in any region

of the country, traditional local cuisine offering a variety of soups everywhere you go. The cultural food model and traditional elements of food preferences that are specific to Romania are based on meat, so we can state it with a certainty that this feature represents the specificity of the Romanian food culture [1] (p. 2).

Romanian cuisine has managed over time to maintain its traditions, even if some dishes have been reinvented, but for decades, the taste of the traditional dishes was transmitted from generation to generation.

In this article, we present the cultural model of soup consumption as a defining dimension for the gastronomic component of the intangible cultural heritage of Făgăraș Land (Romania). Starting from this model, associated with sustainable food, we highlight the much wider potential for sustainable regional development of capitalizing on this heritage resource. We therefore highlight the generosity of gastronomy and culinary practices as a heritage resource: a common culinary product, but considered less prestigious by locals, can become defining as a local brand, at the heart of sustainable entrepreneurial interests. We point out, in this way, the protein-based character of this ICH resource and suggest, as an innovative approach, the shift of interest from the prestigious to the basic ones in its research and capitalization. Present cooking practices are potential treasures. We present and revive some ancient recipes for soups and sour soups, which are less costly, coming from a rural menu in southern Transylvania. We explain that these archaic recipes provide information about the history and way of being of the locals. We recommend giving value to these recipes through entrepreneurial initiatives that we consider successful for all actors engaged: entrepreneurs, locals, and buyers of soups and sour soups.

2. Gastronomy and Culinary Practices as an ICH Resource

Food has a broader meaning and plays an important role in almost every aspect of human existence, such as family, human interactions, festivals, and spiritual ceremonies. Preparing and eating foods can solidify social bonds, not just for families but for all people, no matter if they live in rural or urban areas, no matter if they are rich or poor. For tourists who are travelling all over the world, getting to know the local food and joining in with culinary traditions represents one of the best ways to enrich the various multicultural experiences of food and to enjoy life. Many aspects of socio-cultural contexts heavily influence the food choice; food is used to assign meaning to oneself, redefining food consumption behavior not only as a practical decision influenced by access, environment, and nutritional needs, but also one that is social, cultural, and psychological [2] (pp. 1–2).

Food and culture are interwoven [3]. Food culture is based on the territory's geographical location, climatic conditions, seasonal changes, soil type, water source, forest region, agriculture, and people's working practices, and has developed over time as mankind has progressed [4] (p. 2). The processes involved in preparing foods differ from a country to another, from a region to another, from one culture to another culture, and might appear as simple, but they often carry important social and cultural significance. Many of the recipes and dietary practices can transmit knowledge from one generation to the next. These are precious resources. The cultural and environmental context and local traditions had a powerful influence on food preparation all over the world.

In terms of the advantages of traditional food culture, traditional cuisine is designed based on seasonal changes after a thorough understanding of the interaction between man and the environment [4] (p. 2).

Nowadays, food practices in multicultural societies reflect everyday multiculturalism, multicultural social policies, and attitudes towards traditional healthy food practices; these factors are essential and need to be considered in terms of sustainability and creation of public health policies, as well as promotion of food culture [2] (p. 1). The local food trade, representing a growing movement, economically supports both farms that supply the local supply chain and communities [5].

At the international level, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization launched a multidisciplinary initiative called "Food for the Cities" in 2001, with the main

aim of addressing the challenges that urbanization posed to the urban and rural populations, as well as the environment, by establishing more sustainable and resilient food systems. According to the United Nations, the new concept of city region food systems (CRFS) encompasses a complex network of actors, processes, and relationships to do with food production, processing, marketing, and consumption that exist in a given geographical region, that includes urban centers and rural areas as well [6].

A survey conducted in 2016 on the residents of four European countries revealed a sufficiently high current demand for gastronomic heritage and a growing trend in the demand expressed in Romania (as well as Poland, but less pronounced in Latvia and Lithuania) [7] (p. 339).

The focus on healthy eating can be encouraged by revitalizing local food systems [8], organic marketing campaigns [9], governmental food education programs [10–12], and, not least, with the support of civil society [13]. Approaching agriculture, food, and health as a common goal is, in this context, an effective perspective on food policies [14].

The sustainability and resilience of food systems [15] are issues of interest in the context of these policies. Movements, practices, and messages to support “local food systems” are visible in opposition to globalized conventional food systems [16,17].

In Europe, retailers have implemented various nutrition initiatives, not as a simple business tactic, but as a long-term health and wellness strategy [18,19].

At the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), ratified in 2003 at the UNESCO General Conference, the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity includes artistic performances, festivals, social practices, oral heritage, and craftsmanship [20]. At the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) conference in 2012 [21], a distinct ICH field was introduced, namely gastronomy and culinary practices [22] (p. 364).

Lin, Marine-Roig and Llonch-Molina [23] lists 584 intangible world cultural heritage manifestations (distributed in 131 countries). Among these, 24 are world cultural heritage cases related to gastronomy (distributed in 33 countries); in terms of different geographic regions, Asia has the largest number, with 12 gastronomic heritage manifestations, and Europe has six. [23].

The period between 2016–2025 was declared the Nutrition Decade established also by the United Nations Work Programme; this initiative promotes healthy dietary practices and focuses on implementing country-specific plans for action to improve nutrition; it also proposes to implement strategies to support nutrition by assessment of dietary patterns and by identifying locally available foods [24].

Gastronomic heritage functions in society as a market good, whose role is expressed by the demand–supply balance, which can have a positive effect on the development of rural areas through the production of both goods and services, as it allows expanding food production and processing and by provision of rural tourism services; this context can also give opportunities for the social entrepreneurship of small and medium businesses that have received increasing importance in rural development [7].

Several studies in the US and Europe have identified that consumers appreciate local foods and consider their premium price justified by their origin. They also consider the ecological components, the quality of life, the environment, the enrichment of the local community, and the potential to promote social equity, besides the health benefits and the quality–price ratio [25].

By testing a conceptual model of local food consumption, Kim et al. (2009) apud [23] show which are the quantitative factors that affect local food consumption, mentioning five motivational factors: cultural experience, interpersonal relationship, enthusiasm, health concern, and sensory attraction.

3. Soup as a Popular Gastronomic Choice

Soup, a clear or dense liquid, is cooked with vegetables, meat, or fish, and also water, bouillon, or broth, and thickening or gelling agents [26,27].

Soup has been the food that people have been eating since ancient times. Coming back to the roots, the historians say that the earliest evidence of soup consumption dates back to the sixth millennium BC. They prepared the soup with hippo meat [28]. Archaeologists have discovered ceramic vessels from 5000 years ago that were used to store soups and sour soups. The technique of preparing the soup was simple, boiling together cereals, roots, vegetables, beans, and meat, and the resulted liquid was used for various purposes [29].

Soups and vegetable creams have gained popularity among consumers around the world because of the wide variety of raw ingredients (fruits, tubers, bulbs, leafy vegetables, and legumes) that are used in their preparation, are cheap and easy to cook, and can be kept at home, ready to eat. The soup can also be prepared with natural, ecological, vegan ingredients, in less invasive ways, capitalizing on new flavors and textures [30].

Soups cooked with fresh ingredients can be included in the healthy food category. Soup consumption helps manage body weight, is linked to a better score for added solid fats/alcohol/sugars, and an increased intake of dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals [31,32]. It has been largely acknowledged that soups represent a healthy source of nutrients and bioactive compounds that could help maintain the body's health and well-being [30,33].

Soups can also be viable gastronomic options, regardless of their beneficial effects. Trust in the traditional and in the power of plants, a convenient balance between preparation time and result, zero residues along with "healthy" characteristics represent the current food trends, according to the annual report on global food trends by the Market Intelligence Agency [34]; soups are in line with these trends.

According to Saff and Fink [35], chicken soup has long been considered as an extensive remedy for medical illnesses throughout recent history, without any side effects, and that it has been used to treat a variety of viral infections (pp. 1061–1062).

Using premium raw ingredients or with indications of origin, the preparation, the selection of ingredients, and the addition of new and exotic flavors, with a non-traditional texture and appearance, are ways to increase the value of soups and to transform soups into multiple gastronomic options for different people with various preferences [30].

Historians consider that the first evidence of soup consumption dates back to the sixth millennium BC. Historian John Ayto [36] argues that soup could be a postclassical Latin construct that took on a prehistoric Germanic root, *sup*, which later resulted in *suppa*, *soup*, and *soupe*.

In Sanskrit, the word *soup* has the meaning of food satiety [28]. In Romanian, for the related word, which is also *supa* (inarticulate *supă*), a Latin route of entry may be identified, from the neo-Greek word *σούπα*, through the Italian *suppa*, and the French word *soupe* [28].

The sour soup, *ciorba*, reached the table of the Romanians from the cauldrons and boilers of the Spahii troops of the Ottoman Empire. The preparation of the *ciorba* was linked to the image of the Ottoman military, as close to the tent of the chief of the Spahii regiments there was always the place where the best belly or mutton soups were made, flavored with mint, pepper, and fresh parsley. This type of stew is called *çorba* in Turkish, a word derived from the Arabic *šorba* (*šarâb*) [28].

The Ottoman conquests imposed the term on the conquered territories. The Greeks use it for the sour stew, with vegetables and meat, bearing the name of *τσορβάς* (*torbas*). They still prepare *tchorba toptsita* today, by first boiling some bones for the broth, in which minced beef (or mixed) meatballs are added, then soured with vinegar, and seasoned with hot paprika. The stew may still be found, bearing names derived from the Turkish word, in the Balkan cuisine, in Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, or Albania. Bulgarians, for example, cook *bob tchorba*, which means bean soup, and *shkembe tchorba*, meaning belly soup, flavored with garlic, bay leaf, and marjoram, on top of which cheese is grated [28].

The soup is present everywhere in Romania, from Muntenia to Moldova, from Banat to Dobrogea, or in Transylvania. "Each historical region has its specific gastronomy, which has been maintained, completed and enriched in terms of variety and quality through borrowing from the traditions of the other people it contacted or cohabited with." [37] (p. 736).

For example, in Muntenia, the beef, pork, and belly soup, as well as the soups prepared from poultry, but also from vegetables, are specific; the sour taste of the soups comes from borscht and for flavor larch is often used.

In Moldova it is customary to prepare the soup from mutton, turkey, goose, chicken, and also fish, beans, potatoes, carrots, onions, tomatoes, bell peppers, and to be topped with borscht; the best-known soups are the potato soup and the Moldovan borscht [29].

The soups from Banat are prepared from pork, beef, poultry, and fewer fish, with added sour cream or yoghurt, seasoned with tarragon or dill, and are enriched with homemade noodles or *rântaş* (which is prepared from flour hardened in oil and then quenched with broth); the specific soup in this area is the meatball soup [29].

In Dobrogea, fish, game, and mutton are used in food preparation, as well as poultry, veal, and pork; here the soup is soured with borscht, pickled cabbage brine, but also vinegar. Additionally, the most specific dishes of the region are the fish soup and belly soup.

The soups specific to the Transylvanian cuisine are different because they are more-greasier and are seasoned with egg yolks, sour cream, and flour; the specificity of these soups is the addition of the tarragon. The most representative soups for this area are the cabbage soup with sour cream, the pork or beef soup, the tarragon meat soup, or green bean soup [29].

4. Brief History of the Făgăraş Land

The Făgăraş Land area is a historical land in Transylvania composed of mountains and valleys, with its center being the medieval fortress of Făgăraş. The Făgăraş Voivodeship is mentioned in documents in 1222 as “*Terra Blachorum*”, one of the oldest Romanian state formations. Following the battle with the Hungarian army advancing south, the voivode Radu of the Făgăraş Land was forced to withdraw from the fortress of Făgăraş and crossed the mountains, together with some of his subjects [38].

The territory of Făgăraş Land was part of the Kingdom’s of Hungary or belonged to the voivodes of Wallachia, as a gift from the Hungarian king. In 1691, by the “*Diploma Leopoldinum*”, the Principality of Transylvania came under Austrian rule. The territorial-administrative reorganization imposed by Emperor Joseph II in 1782 allotted Saxon villages across the Olt River to Făgăraş County and imposed imperial officials in the administration. The county did not have a majority Romanian population, nor too much autonomy. In 1790, the Emperor resumed the administrative reform, under pressure from the representatives of the privileged nations. After 1848, Transylvania became a province “dependent on the Imperial Court in Vienna” [38] (p. 37), and in 1850, the Făgăraş district became part of the Sibiu Military District.

In 1865, after the dissolution of the old Diet, the new Diet of Transylvania voted for the union of the province with Hungary. In 1918, Transylvania became part of Romania. After the Second World War, in the Făgăraş Land, one of the strongest anti-communist resistance groups in the country was active, the Carpathian Făgăraş Group. This is still a sensitive issue for locals at the core of their definition of identity [39–41].

During the communist period, two large industrial plants were built in the area, in Făgăraş and at the foot of the mountain, in Victoria, and despite the opposition of the locals, the regime achieved the partial collectivization of agriculture. After 1989, the former owners regained possession of their agricultural lands, their administration being another challenge after almost half a century of occupational and mental transformations.

The factories provided jobs both for the inhabitants of Făgăraş municipality and for those from the communes and villages around Făgăraş, which we included in the research sample. During the post-1989 period, the factories privatized.

Privatization was not the best option, as over time it determined a reduction in production capacity and to the shutting down of factories. As a result, the population lost its job. Since they restructured and closed, the population was heavily affected, as there have been no other opportunities to cover the reintegration of the population into the

labor market. In this critical situation, people resorted to several solutions: emigration and capitalizing on opportunities in the area through slow attempts to develop tourism.

The region stands out for its leisure activities and cultural and historical heritage, thus being an ideal destination for an active mini-holiday [22]. The “country beyond the forests”, as this is what Făgăraș Land means, through its landscape, customs and traditions, and resources, offers a large variety of emotions and feelings, emanating a special romance and a state of well-being. The variety of inhabitants influenced the traditions and customs of Făgăraș Land, as well as those of Transylvania. The Saxons, the Hungarians, the Jews, and the Armenians lived in harmony here, influencing each other’s customs, culture, and traditions.

5. Materials and Methods

Duxbury, Garrett-Petts, & MacLennan define cultural mapping as “a systematic tool to involve communities in the identification and recording of local cultural assets, with the implication that this knowledge will then inform collective strategies, planning processes, or other initiatives” [42] (p. 2).

Cultural mapping aims to identify and catalogue the cultural values of communities in order to preserve and promote them. Cultural cartography is a tool for community development, to the merging of viable and strong local communities [43].

Encouraging local cultural expressions contributes to the growth of culture-related economic activities, although one major problem faced by the heritage preservation sector is the progressive disappearance of traditional skills and crafts, which cannot be renewed [44].

Between March 2018 and February 2019, Transilvania University of Brașov (Romania) carried out an interdisciplinary research project supported by its own funds, entitled CarPaTO. The name of the project was Intangible cultural heritage mapping of Făgăraș Land. Făgăraș Land is the historical name of the depression between the Olt River and the Făgăraș Mountains in the southern part of Transylvania (Romania). The team collected data from the communes of Beclean, Comăna, Drăguș, Hârseni, Lisa, Mândra, Părâu, Recea, Hoghiz, Sâmbata de Sus, Șercaia, Șinca, Șinca Nouă, Ucea, Viștea, and Voila (see the Figure 1). These are the communes from Făgăraș Land, in Brașov County. Part of the historical territory of Făgăraș Land currently belongs to the neighboring county, Sibiu, but the CarPaTO project aimed at mapping the Brașov part of the territory, as the beneficiary of the project was the Prefecture of Brașov County.



Figure 1. Făgăraș Land, in the south of Transylvania. Source: Wikipedia.

A team with expertise in sociology, social work, economics, music, food industry, and tourism from the Transilvania University of Braşov completed this project; this was a 16 member interdisciplinary team that joined to the members of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Department of Social Sciences and Communication that initiated this project.

The sociologist members of the team went to the Făgăraş Land during June/July 2018 to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives of the local town halls, including travel information and promotion centers, about intangible historical resources. Thus, a provisional size inventory of heritage resources was made, and contacts for field research were established. From the localities included in the research universe, in the next stage of the project data about important events regarding specific cultural practices were collected. The data were collected using the interview technique, namely the semi-structured interview guide as the main data collection tool.

The guide to the semi-structured interviews conducted at this stage of the project followed the six ICH dimensions mentioned above: the initial UNESCO categories, i.e., artistic performances, festivals, social practices, oral heritage, craftsmanship, and the one added by the WTO, namely gastronomy and culinary practices.

The key questions in the interview guide contained inquiries about this last dimension: What does a local eat during a typical day? What is the traditional local holiday menu? Which are the dishes renown locally? (What do the housewives of the village boast about)? We conducted one or two interviews in each of the communes surveyed in the project. We thematically analyzed interviews.

In the next stage of the project, observations were made on specific cultural events and practices, semi-structured interviews with well-informed persons/locals were conducted, and audio and video recordings, and social artifacts were collected during the research internships (such as photographs and other social documents).

For each of the communes, mapping sheets based on the data collected during the field study were produced. We recorded the results of the interview processing on these forms, which correspond to the dimensions of intangible cultural heritage (we summarize the interviews). In drawing up the mapping sheets, the project team used the domain structuring of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) imposed by UNESCO [20] and the WTO [21]. The research report prepared at the end of the project is available on the university website [45].

We considered as resources of strategic interest the intangible cultural heritage resources assumed as representative by the local communities and/or which can be validated toward consolidating the community identity. Strategic resources have great potential to create community attachment, strengthening the sense of belonging and local pride. During field research, we identified the lads' group as the main ICH resource of strategic interest. Other important resources assumed by the locals were the local folk costume, the legends of the place, the folk music, and, from the gastronomic point of view, the pies from Făgăraş. In addition, the research highlighted two other resources that can be considered strategic because they have the potential of being exploited within the community: the impressive repertoire of romances in the area and, from a gastronomic point of view, soups and sour soups from Făgăraş Land.

The data collected during the field research on the topic of gastronomy and culinary practices were used to compile a collection of culinary recipes, the core of projected traditional cookbooks from Făgăraş Land. These data also represent the basis of the current article on the sustainable use of ICH local resources. We identified 12 main types of soups and sour soups (soups are sweet/sour soup—*ciorba*—is the term used in Romanian for sour soups in different ways) indicated by interviewees as traditional, with slight variations of recipes from one village to another.

The research is applicative by purpose, descriptive by the objectives that were established initially, and qualitative by methodology. The aim was to identify the local resources specific to Făgăraş Land that can contribute to its socio-economic development.

Based on their identification, the Braşov County Council (the one that commissioned the research) wanted to build its strategy for the development of the area by allocating resources and projects to support the entrepreneurial environment.

The objectives of the project were: 1. Mapping the intangible cultural heritage of Făgăraş Land-Braşov; 2. Identification of intangible cultural heritage resources of strategic interest for Făgăraş Land-Braşov; 3. Highlighting the priority directions for safeguarding and capitalizing on the intangible cultural heritage of Făgăraş Land-Braşov; and 4. Setting up a network of thematic cultural routes in the Făgăraş Land-Braşov.

We adhere to the view of other researchers who believe that “revitalizing economies by promoting the gastronomic heritage of countries as national identities is the major goal, because research can outline the key factors can offer governments and industries sustainable management prospects.” [23] (p. 19).

6. Results

6.1. What Is Characteristic of the Gastronomy of Făgăraş Land?

From a gastronomic point of view, Făgăraş Land has been recognized as the land of soups and cooked dishes. The food is hearty, rustic, and, last but not least, delicious. In the heart of the mountains, dishes, such as polenta with cheese and ridges of fried bacon, or fennel, deserve to be known. They embody a certain philosophy of life.

The long periods of fasting before Christmas and before Easter set a special rhythm in the life of many inhabitants of the region. They represent a unique opportunity to discover an amazing vegetarian cuisine through its variety. One dish characteristic of these periods is mashed beans, served with sliced red onions in oil with paprika or pickled in vinegar or brine.

The polenta is, in its turn, one dish specific to Romanian cuisine. In the Transylvanian area, some peasants mix corn flour with mashed potatoes, which gives the polenta a special taste. This variant of polenta goes very well with fish, mushrooms, meat, and sauce. They can also serve it with sour cream and white cheese. Baked with cheese and bacon, it is not only delicious but also nutritious enough to satisfy the farmer who works in the field.

Făgăraş Land is often named “the land of cheese”; all various types of local cheese (caş is curd, urdă is a soft cow cheese, telemea is cottage cheese) preserve the aromas of the plants on the mountain meadows.

Cabbage rolls are a classic dish of the Carpathian-Balkan cuisine. They consume this food in any season, in any situation. Some eat them hot, others prefer them cold. The Romanian version of the cabbage roll is served warm and wrapped in a wide range of leaves: fresh or pickled cabbage, vines, beets, loboda, or horseradish. By definition, cabbage rolls are a festive dish, but it may be prepared during fasting as well as its filling can be vegetarian.

Cozonac (sweet bread) is always present on holidays, anniversaries, or funerals. The taste difference of the cake is given not so much by the specificity of the region, but by the cook’s ability, the stability of the heat in the oven, and by the filling: walnut or poppy paste, raisins, or Turkish delight.

Cabbage rolls (sarmalele) and sweet bread (cozonacul) as festive dishes in Făgăraş County are prepared in every household on the occasion of major religious holidays or family events. They are also prepared for community events, such as “Village Days,” the patron saint of the church, the consecration of a new church, or the contribution of neighbors to wedding preparations in the village. At these community events, local women cook together. Interviews with local informants highlighted the festive atmosphere in which women’s joint work takes place, but also the fact that such mobilizations are rarer since many of the wedding parties take place in neighboring cities.

6.2. Soups and Sour Soups from the Făgăraş Land

In the villages of Făgăraş County, soup or sour soup is eaten daily. This is the must-have dish. The pot with soup or sour soup is always present in the kitchens in the area.

Sometimes, soups represent the core of the meal, even at dinner. By the middle of the 20th century, people delivered the pot of hot soup to the workers in the field. The commuters of communist Romania carried soup with them from home, from the village, at work in the city. Most times, during the food crisis of the 1980s, soup eaten with bread or cold polenta was the solution for breakfast. The saving solution of that time is a well-established culinary habit today. A bowl of soup or sour soup is still at hand in the villages of Făgăraș.

Most women in the area consider that the sour soup is not just a recipe. Sour soup is more than water, salt, vegetables, herbs, eggs, meat, and sour cream. What binds them together and seasons them is the spirit of this region, a spirit that lingers somewhere between the garden and the forest.

The field research carried out within the CarPaTO project highlighted some types of sour soup that the locals consider representative and traditional. It is, first of all, about tarragon soups.

Characteristic of Făgăraș Land, because of its tradition in potato cultivation, potato sour soup with smoked meat and tarragon is one of the most popular sour soups from the period following the autumn harvest, until late spring, when the potatoes are harvested and the meat removed from the smoking facility. The spice that makes this dish special is tarragon, or, as they called it in the area, *tarcan*. This is an aromatic plant that is cultivated in the gardens of the housewives from Făgăraș Land. It can be used fresh or preserved in vinegar.

Another sour soup characteristic of this area and seasoned with tarragon is bean soup. Before preparing the sour soup, the beans are soaked for a few good hours. Radu Anton Roman considered it “a pearl of both carnal and vegetable, a unique, absolute performance” [46] (p. 363). This sour soup can also be cooked in the fasting version if smoked meat may not be added.

Instead of potatoes or beans, *zdrențe* (literally, rags) can be used (fresh homemade pasta, shredded through a funnel). This is a less common type of tarragon-flavored sour soup, based on the same ingredients as the previous soups (onion, carrot, parsley, celery, smoked pork, cream, egg, and vinegar).

Even if in Făgăraș Land, sour soups are the most sought after, chicken soup remains the food of Sundays and holidays. Local housewives also prepare the soup with noodles or semolina dumplings. The one with dumplings has a special quality and requires great attention and skill in preparation. To get this, boiled water with chicken and vegetables are added to a large pot. When it boils, the foam is removed (not to disturb the broth). When the meat and vegetables are cooked, the soup is strained. Then, the dumplings are prepared by beating up the eggs, pouring the semolina gradually, mixing and then letting it simmer for five minutes; finally, the dumplings are added to the soup when it is boiling. At the end, a good handful of chopped parsley is added to the soup.

Another sour soup cooked often from late spring to autumn is bacon salad soup. It is a sour soup that could be eaten cold in the field during agricultural work. During the summer, green bean soup seasoned with thyme is often cooked in Făgăraș Land.

There are also larch-seasoned sour soups: lamb soup, prepared at Easter; meatball soup during the winter holidays; and, charged with the nostalgia of childhood, sour soup with mutton and *gogonele* (green tomatoes) from the threshing period, ready to be eaten together by the workers. The base of these sour soups is similar to those seasoned with tarragon.

Another sour soup associated with the winter period is the soup of *cârtaș* (a sausage made from minced pork entrails) with potatoes. When the soup is ready, the whole sausage is removed. Its role is only to give the specific taste of this winter sour soup, when in all households of Făgăraș Land traditional dishes prepared on the occasion of the pigs' slaughtering are cooked.

The last three types of soup are specific to the fasting period, being prepared especially during the four fasts of Orthodoxy. These are cumin soup, fasting noodle soup with pumpkin seeds, and noodles with *moare* (Romanian word for sour cabbage brine). During

Orthodox fasting it is not customary to cook with egg or dairy products. In the past (until the middle of the twentieth century, according to field information), housewives cleaned the cooking utensils thoroughly at the start of fasting in order not to leave any traces of animal products on them.

The way they used a few ingredients in the area in diverse gastronomic combinations reveals a long experience of alternating periods of well-being (richness) and penurious (of poverty and austerity). By simply adjusting the proportions, a modest soup with a few potatoes, meant to barely offput hunger, can turn into a very nourishing one, with a lot of cream and plenty of smoked meat. Pickled cabbage brine is also used to boil fasting noodles and meatballs. Besides the experience of the usefulness of adaptable recipes, inventiveness is important in preparing food with what is close at hand. “Have something to put on the dinner table” means in Făgăraș Land not to be embarrassed that you don’t have food and it means to satisfy the hunger of the family or the guests. Besides adaptability and inventiveness, soups (especially chicken soup) and local soups suggest the joy of eating, in fact enjoying the food, seasoned with aromatic herbs from the garden. The housewives of Făgăraș add, for example, a spoonful of rosehip jam to the bean soup, just for the sake of that “something” that is good, which makes the difference between a normal soup and their special soup. This joy of cooking in order to satisfy consumers could be the link between sustainable economic initiatives at the community level.

7. Discussion

The intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity [22] (p. 364).

The local peculiarities of these soups and sour soups represent a characteristic of ICH that can be capitalized in a sustainable way. The locals have some advantages that can be used in this direction.

Firstly, food culture identified in Făgăraș Land can be a solution for adopting eco-friendly practices and using natural resources to enrich the daily diet. The processing and preparation of ethnic foods do not only validate the creativity and treasure of food heritage of the local population, but also their incredible mastery in maintaining the existence of the ecosystem.

In the Făgăraș Land, soups are prepared with local ingredients, meats, and vegetables. The locals breed poultry (chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys), pigs, sheep, cows, and buffaloes in their own households. There are also several livestock farms in the area, and some meat processing companies. The inhabitants of Făgăraș Land cultivate cereals, potatoes, cabbage, beans, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables on their own lands or in agricultural associations. Every housewife has in the yard or garden a few bushes of herbs.

Secondly, the effort to prepare the soup (for sale) is insignificant. The soups are efficient to prepare in large quantities, the local tradition says that they are even tastier prepared in this way. They are also easy to market, in compliance with all sanitary regulations.

Thirdly, as the field research shows, the women from the villages of Făgăraș Land are used to and eager to cook together.

All these strengths capitalize on Făgăraș soups, as ICH resources, a sustainable local activity. We consider this appropriate to be developed in a social entrepreneurship regime, which also considers the trends of tourism development in the area.

7.1. Social Entrepreneurship, Suitable for Capitalizing on Local Cuisine

Rural development by strengthening the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of rural areas is one of the European priorities for 2022. At the European level, the Commission will launch new financial lines in 2022 under the InvestEU programme to

improve the access to funding in order to ensure that social economy will launch a new EU Social Economy Gateway in 2023 [47].

Focusing on supporting the well-being of the community through opportunities and benefits, social entrepreneurship is appropriate for sustainable development [48]. Linked to social and community values, social entrepreneurship is a powerful vehicle of local identity [49]. Its holistic character [49,50] allows the use of local social networks, necessary for successful regional development [51]. Local Action Group (LAG), “a consortium of public and private partners whose aim is to promote local development” [50] (p. 6) can be a type of effective interface in managing the interests of all the parties involved in capitalizing on ICH. In Făgăraş Land, there are two LAGs with a rural specificity in the territory of Braşov County, the Valea Sâmbetei Microregion and the East of Făgăraş Land.

According to the research conducted by Iancu, Popescu and Popescu in 2020 apud [52], the most attractive areas in Romania for establishing a social business are Bucharest, Cluj, Timişoara, Iaşi, and Braşov; the authors point out that rural areas have a much greater potential for the development of social affairs.

In this context, Făgăraş Land is an area that belongs to Braşov County, it is less developed considering the problems it faces caused by the lack of social infrastructure, and also jobs. For this reason, capitalizing on the potential offered by social entrepreneurship means an extraordinary opportunity for the economic development of the rural area of Făgăraş Land.

Heritage tourism is a segment of cultural tourism [53], which highlights “immaterial heritage elements, such as music, dance, language, religion, foodways and cuisine, artistic traditions, and festivals” [54] (p. 3). By exploiting traditional processes and practices [55], heritage tourism stimulates community development [49]. Cultural heritage content is disseminated by members of local communities [49].

Tourism social entrepreneurship (TSE) could be an appropriate and sustainable way to manage ICH. TSE catalyzes host communities, boosts the local economy, creates sustainable livelihoods, and educates local tourism actors [48]. TSE maximizes the benefits and minimizes the costs of tourism to the host communities [48], TSE mobilizes local resources [56], strengthens and uses local social networks to support regional economic interactions [51]. The tourism approach favored by the TSE is holistic [48–50]. Social entrepreneurs are “agents of change” that orchestrate sustainable community development [57].

In Făgăraş Land, TSE can encourage and support the operation of the local food systems, in which it is essential to cultivate agricultural products and to develop animal husbandry to support each other and to strengthen local initiatives to capitalize on production. Currently, the interest in local food is considerable at the global level.

In North America, there is a growing interest in local food systems, and both consumers and farmers engaged in local/alternative food production are critical and resilient to the dominant agri-food system, with many farmers engaging in sustainable practices because of their own values of a deep commitment to the principles of food [17].

Another example is offered by Polish SMEs engaged to produce local food of animal origin (meat, dairy products, fish, eggs, and game), which have good customer relations, but are still looking for a suitable business model from which the digitization of their activities could become a part [58].

For small and medium-sized family farms in the province of Málaga (southern Spain), short supply chains appear as a potential option in terms of prices, economic profit, and social recognition [59].

Exploiting local food resources with the support of TSEs is useful, as it supports some tasks of the individual producers. Supporting separate product supply chains would be pricey in Făgăraş Land and in Spain, and it would be a big challenge. Those interested need technical skills (know-how), psychosocial skills, financial (investment), communication, and conflict management; they must be at the same time producers, distributors, sellers, advertisers, and public relations experts [59]. The ability to use online technology is an

essential resource in TSE as the appetite of young generations is to take all the information they need online [60–62].

However, a mandatory condition is the digitalization of the demand and supply aspects referring to a gastronomic heritage that contributes to integrating small farms and semi-subsistence farms into economic activity, which, in turn, can promote the vitality and viability of the rural space [7].

The valorization of the local agri-food resources in tourism in TSE regime represents a variant of streamlining the efforts of the local producers with the valorization of the local gastronomy as an ICH resource. Gastronomy tourism is a type of tourism activity characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling, including authentic, traditional, and/or innovative culinary experiences [23]. The local culinary offer is a determining factor in choosing agro-tourism destinations [63].

Promoting local food in the media, identifying and promoting priority products for certain regions, and also valuing the socio-demographic dimension of buying local products are ways to make local food more competitive [25].

The socio-economic vitality of rural areas needs local employment beyond agriculture, such as micro-business, small and medium-sized enterprises, and crafts and artisan activities, where cultural and social traditions play a significant role; based on small businesses in rural areas, gastronomic tourism emerges, and gastronomic cultural products can be consumed on the spot on farms and subjected to local rural services [44].

This also can contribute to the value of cultural heritage as a phenomenon and is able to promote the expansion of economic multifunctionality of small agricultural holdings to maintain the viability of rural areas as an important public life arena under modern circumstances [44].

7.2. The Women from Făgăraș Land Want to Cook Together

We presented above, within the analysis of the results of the research in the CarPaTO project, the availability of women from the villages of Făgăraș Land to cook together. This availability is a TSE resource. In fact, gastronomic events, such as brunch, have appeared in the area, highlighting the local culinary specificity. Figures 2 and 3 are photographs from the most recent event of this type, organized in Veneția de Jos (Părău village), held in summer 2021, an event that was promoted online [64,65]. The photos come from the collection of Ms. Biță Aurelia, one of the CarPaTO informants with whom the members of the project team developed a longer collaboration.



Figure 2. Brunch organized in 2021, in Veneția de Jos. At the end of the dinner table is the soup pot. Source: Ms. Aurelia Biță collection.



Figure 3. The same event. Source: Ms. Aurelia Biță collection.

At brunch, the main gastronomic products were cheese, meat snacks, and pies. Soup was a by-product.

However, soups and sour soups can be used in separate TSE initiatives. The only reference to brunch is to indicate the availability of women in the area to cook together for many people.

In this context, the preparation and marketing of local-specific soups could be a sustainable source of income for locals, especially for local women and especially in the communes of Făgăraș Land where employment is low. In some of them, the unemployment rate was considerably high in September 2021: 13.4% in Lisa, 10% in Comăna, 7.5% in Recea, and in others it was low [66].

However, given that losing jobs because of the privatization of factories in the area occurred many years ago and unemployment benefits are granted in Romania for a limited period only, the unemployment rate does not reflect the need and availability of locals for such economic initiatives, for example to capitalize on the local gastronomic tradition.

7.3. Făgăraș Land Boarding Houses, as Partners in TSE Initiatives

The lack of jobs determined the emigration of the inhabitants of Făgăraș Land, permanent or temporary. In the last five years, many people have emigrated from the Făgăraș communes located in Brașov County. The total number of permanent emigrants from Făgăraș Land in the period 2016–2020 is 168 [67].

However, during the qualitative interviews, the interviewees from Făgăraș Land explained to us that those who emigrated temporarily returned with significant financial resources. Some of them have built boarding houses in order to have a source of income and move back to Romania. The graph below (Figure 4) shows the growth of the number of boarding houses in Făgăraș Land in the last 30 years [68] as it was evidenced that there has been demand at the regional level.

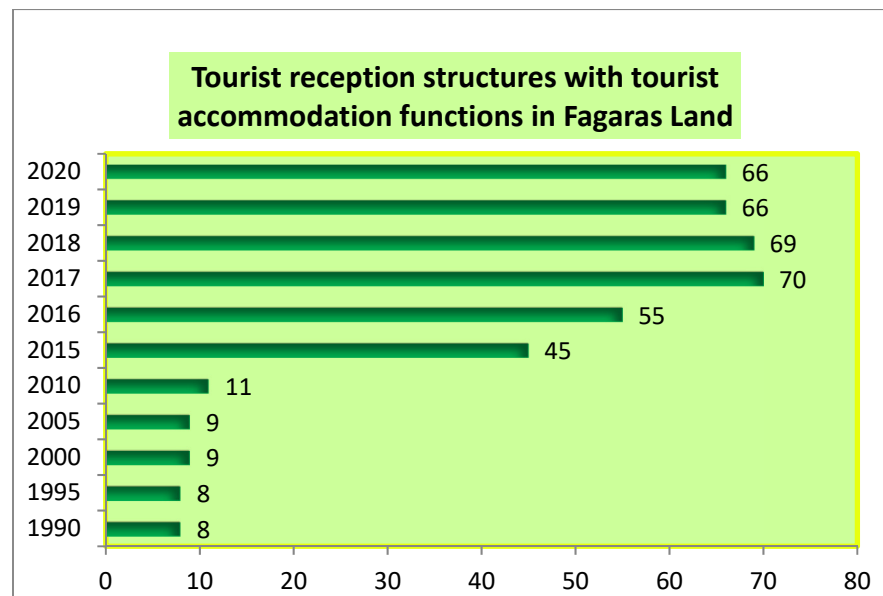


Figure 4. Evolution of the number of accommodation units in Făgăraș Land in the last 30 years [68].

The number of tourists in Brașov County showed an upward trend until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic [69], as shown in Figure 5. The influence of the pandemic of COVID-19, which influenced consumer behavior both during the lockdown period and after its completion, can explain the significant decrease in tourists accommodated in 2020. However, according to official data from the County Directorate of Statistics, Brașov attracts almost three million tourists annually [70]. The research conducted by Kim et al. (2009) also provided the key factors (such as gastronomy, heritage, identity, tourism, and hospitality) responsible for choosing a tourist destination [23].

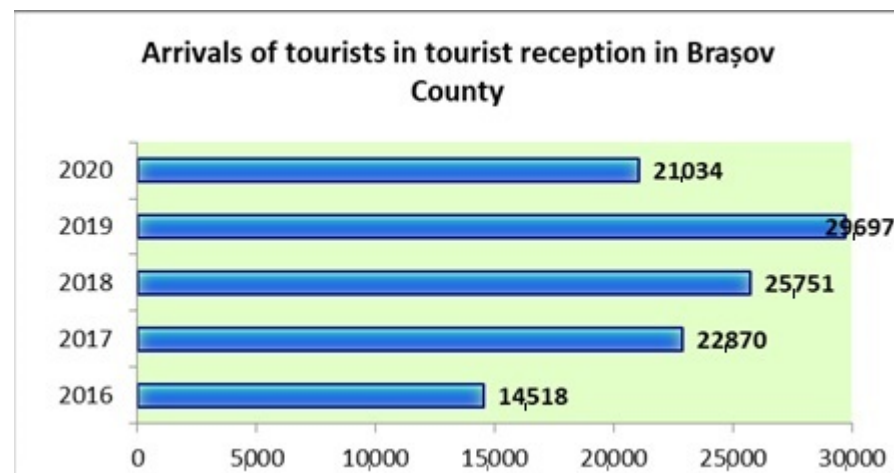


Figure 5. The evolution of the number of accommodated tourists, Romanians, and foreigners in Brașov County during the 2016–2020 period [69].

Făgăraș Land is attractive from a tourist point of view because of its location at the foot of the Făgăraș Mountains. Transfăgărașan, the spectacular road built during the communist period of Romania in order to connect Transylvania to Wallachia over the mountain, starts from Făgăraș Land.

It shaped this area as a center of Orthodox spiritual life, around the old monasteries and those rebuilt on the sites of places of worship demolished or burned by Austrian General Adolf Nikolaus von Bukow in the 18th century.

Many villages in the Land of Făgăraș have local museums exhibiting art collections; the “Gheorghe Radocea” exhibition in Bucium village, for example, has icons on glass, old ceramic, old peasant furniture, pieces of fleece from several ethnographic zones, and various fabrics.

Brâncoveanu Castle from Sâmbăta de Sus, the Orthodox Monastery from Sâmbăta de Sus, where one can also visit the Fountain of Father Arsenie Boca; the Sâmbăta Chalet and the famous Lipizzan horses farm, the Ruins of the Black Water Fortress, Urlea Chalet, Greek-Catholic Church of Pojorta, and the Lisa and Breaza Holiday Villages are all worth visiting.

In this context, we can only welcome initiatives to promote local gastronomy. Such initiatives capitalize on both natural resources and human resources, as we have shown above.

The boarding houses in this area could have an important role in terms of the development of the local gastronomy of Făgăraș Land; following the research in the area, we found that the guest houses included in their menu some soups and sour soups made according to traditional recipes, which confirms that this determines the tourist attraction considering the specificity of the area. Therefore, food is one important factor that affects the cultural experience. There are basically two or three local soups and broths, offered besides those found in the menus of any restaurant in Transylvania, and this happens only in the big boarding houses in Făgăraș Land, being also cooked for tourists.

Introducing local recipes to the menu is useful for strengthening the local brand and for imposing soups as a brand in itself. However, the considerable number of boarding houses in the area can also support TSE initiatives to exploit soups as an ICH resource. TSE entrepreneurs could develop partnerships with large boarding houses, which are authorized to prepare food for tourists, so that TSE's gastronomic activities can be carried out in compliance with all public catering regulations.

Partnerships could be developed with the many other accommodation-only guest-houses. For their tourists, soups may be offered as an alternative to self-catering or dining in large boarding houses. The offer of an authentic local soup can be tempting, either brought to the guest house or bought nearby.

Additionally, points of sale for Făgăraș soups can be opened near the tourist attraction sites in Făgăraș, the city that represents the historical center of the area, and in Brașov, the administrative center of the Brașov County, where the eastern part of Făgăraș Land, researched in the CarPaTO project, is located. The popularity of gastronomic tourism is growing [71–73], tourists' intention to consume local food can support the sustainable development of sustainable tourism and local communities [74–76]. This initiative could also open sales points near other tourist attractions in the area, while their proximity to localities being an advantage for the efficiency of the supply distribution chain. With an excellent marketing strategy and an appropriate policy for registering local products with a geographical indication, the soups could contribute to the transformation of Făgăraș Land into a branded tourist destination. Such effects of local gastronomy regarding other tourist destinations were also reported [72,76,77].

7.4. Soups and Sour Soups from Făgăraș Land as a Friendly Gastronomic Option

Last but not least, this initiative could open soup selling points near the Orthodox monasteries in Făgăraș Land. Starting with the Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery, around which a new climatic resort has developed, the many monasteries of the area, with their histories of persecution, demolition, and reconstruction, are included in the routes of a flourishing religious tourism.

A hot soup is an attractive gastronomic option for the Romanian pilgrim. The fact that most soups may be prepared in both the lacto-vegetarian and fasting versions is an additional reason to credit the success of their marketing.

This strategy might develop further as soup shops could be open in the cities of the county near schools, or, in partnership with the latter, even inside them. Additionally, in areas with a concentration of urban institutions and in business centers, purchased soup could be a solution for the midday meal of employees. Street food is a favorite of the busy

contemporaries because of its fast serving [73], it is also a significant and available source of energy and protein [76]. A lively street with food truck areas and market areas for local producers creates a feeling of home for the locals and could support the revitalization of the city center [78]. Soup selling points could also open near stations and bus stations in the county towns. The parking lots for TIR trucks along the major road arteries that cross the county are also suitable places where warm soups or sour soups can be appreciated.

All these suggestions for the use of soup as a local ICH resource in the center of the traditional significance associated with it, namely the feeling of familiar, safe, and at home. The soup belongs to what Lévi-Strauss [79] calls “end-of-life kitchen, made for intimate use and intended for a small and closed group” (p. 22). It is this connotation of the soup that makes its offer as a handy product an efficient TSE activity.

Any of these directions of economic capitalization of the traditional Făgăraș soups that we suggested, and all together highlight the potential for sustainable development of the local gastronomy. Such strategies would develop the social entrepreneurs and extend the gastronomic heritage concept along with the other ideas presented above, giving a chance to revive this wonderful area.

8. Conclusions

Being a part of gastronomic tourism and/or as simple street food, Făgăraș soups and sour soups could be a source of multiple benefits for locals. Social entrepreneurship developed for the supply of local ingredients, their preparation, and marketing would increase employment in the area and help support local communities. The emerging brand would strengthen the sense of belonging to the community.

Revaluing old traditional recipes could be a successful business idea for locals, including the young people in the area, as an alternative to their large-scale work abroad. ICH could thus capitalize as a sustainable resource on the gastronomy of Făgăraș Land, through its soups.

Because Făgăraș County has a significant touristic potential, the contribution brought by the local gastronomic practices of preparing the soup and other dishes can ensure its growth. Therefore, on one hand, the soup, and on the other hand, the other specific dishes, can contribute to an entire chain of regional development by encouraging the cultivation of the ingredients in the household because they may be capitalized on by being included in the tourist menus.

In this way, local producers, boarding house owners, restaurant owners, pensioners, traders who sell products around tourist attractions, housewives who prepare jams and can sell them, honey producers, entrepreneurs who can develop businesses for cleaning and ironing of linen in boarding houses, and those who accompany tourists on mountain trails may be involved. Based on our research, we can rely on the potential of intangible heritage as a factor that enhances local identity and supports sustainable tourism.

We appreciate that the Făgăraș Land area can be included on the national and even international map of cultural, creative, and relaxing events because, as we have shown, the area has a huge potential and not by chance was declared the tourist destination of 2020 by Romanian tourism bloggers.

In this way, it would be possible to support local producers and develop a series of social contribution projects that would strengthen to the sustainable development of Făgăraș Land.

As a limitation of this study, we must mention first of all that it has not been an investigation that has included rigorous research about the opinion of local entrepreneurs and their willingness to associate and collaborate with other local economic actors.

Another limitation is that we conducted the research only in the part of Făgăraș Land which belongs to Brașov County. This approach was due to the conditions in the CarPaTO project. We consider that the research of the entire area, which has unitary historical and ethnographic characteristics, would have been more relevant.

Overcoming limitations sets future research directions. We plan as future research the study of the perspective of the entrepreneurs from Făgăraş Land regarding the capitalization of local soups and broths, but also of the other representative culinary preparations in TSE regime.

We also propose to extend the study to the area of Făgăraş Land which belongs to Sibiu County. An exploratory research on the opportunity to develop a local system for distributing interested tourists as “table guests” in local households would also be useful. The interests of tourists and their desire to dine at home with locals, the expectations of both parties in relation to this experience, and the perception of personal security seem right to be studied in this context.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; methodology, A.-M.B., D.S. and I.A.A.; validation, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; investigation, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; data curation, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; writing—original draft preparation, A.-M.B. and D.S.; writing—review and editing, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; visualization, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; supervision, A.-M.B., M.I.L., D.S. and I.A.A.; project administration, D.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by Universitatea Transilvania din Braşov, grant number 1815/15.02.2018, Grants for interdisciplinary teams programme.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The final CarPaTO research report is available on the university website: <https://www.unitbv.ro/cercetare/rezultatele-cercetarii/burse-si-granturi-unitbv/rapoarte-de-cercetare.html> (accessed on 18 December 2021).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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