
PhD THESIS

**Studies regarding the
Development of the
European Food Quality
Schemes in Romania**

(SUMMARY OF PhD. THESIS)

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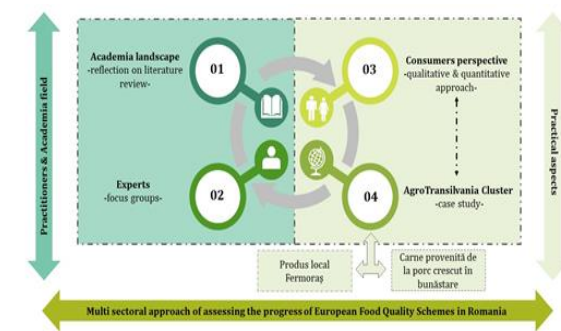
SUMMARY

Keywords: traditional products, voluntary certification, national regulations, cultural heritage.

The main goal of this research was to establish the groundwork for a wide framework for examining the overall effects of geographical indications and European Certification Schemes on Romanian society. The assessments were conducted using a top-to-bottom technique, with a focus on Romania.

The evaluation of academic research on the European Certification Schemes in Romania was the main purpose of this objective. It was also interesting to examine how Romanian professionals on the subject saw the matter, as well as how their actions over the years have any effect on society. A survey was designed to find out whether Romanian consumers were aware of GIs and interested in spending extra money on certified products. Are national certification programs preferred above those in Europe as a course of action? Romania, as an EU member, abides by EU law, which stipulates that each member state may create national certification scheme in accordance with EU law.

AgroTransilvania Cluster, an important actor in the agri-food industry, took the initiative to create optional certification programs. The voluntary schemes' functions are to speed up the certification process and to provide Romanian manufacturers more options when determining which certification, they want to pursue.



Research objectives Figure 1.

The present investigation adds to our understanding of the phenomenon under study and clarifies a number of variables affecting the certified products industry. The dynamics of the study were created to promote reflection among academics and the development of more sophisticated, integrated research processes. The research approach was multidisciplinary. It was considered that a combined evaluation of the interactions between the research undertaken and stakeholders could provide additional information on the relevant aspects in order to identify the most effective strategy addressing quality schemes. This research is divided into: a literature review section where the scientific background on the geographical indications was assessed, followed by the personal contribution section which is further separated into smaller units such as: material and methods chapters, results and discussions, conclusions and recommendations.

Section 1: Literature review. Geographical indications. Background and the current situation

Protected Designations of Origin (PDOs) and Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) are intended to preserve product names based on certain qualities resulting from their geographical origin within the regulatory system of the

European Union (EU). In order to register a PDO/PGI, producers and their collective organizations must submit an application proving the relationship between the product's quality characteristics and its geographical origin as well as a product specification (PS), which details the requirements that producers must observe in order to use the PDO/PGI mark. To date, the difference in the number of certified products across European member countries may be related to agricultural, cultural and potential gastronomic heritage, but it is also related to the measures implemented in order to support the producers.

By accessing the eAmbrosia section on EC website more precisely the EU geographical indications register, the data was collected in order to provide a current status regarding the number of agricultural food products and alcoholic beverages registered across European Union countries. Table. 1 contains statistical information related to the total number of quality-assured agricultural food products and alcoholic beverages from each country across the European Union. The data was extracted for products/ alcoholic beverages with the status "Registered" until 14th of February 2023.

As can be observed after completing the statistical interpretation of the data collected from eAmbrosia, the geographical distribution of certified food and alcoholic beverages is heavily concentrated towards Southern Europe in the Mediterranean countries. Italy and France stand out by sharing the first two positions in the top, followed by Spain, Portugal and Greece. The second conclusion is that when it comes to most registered marks, PGI and PDO are the main authentication schemes in terms of number of food products registered, followed by TSG with fewer products registered compared to PGIs or PDOs.

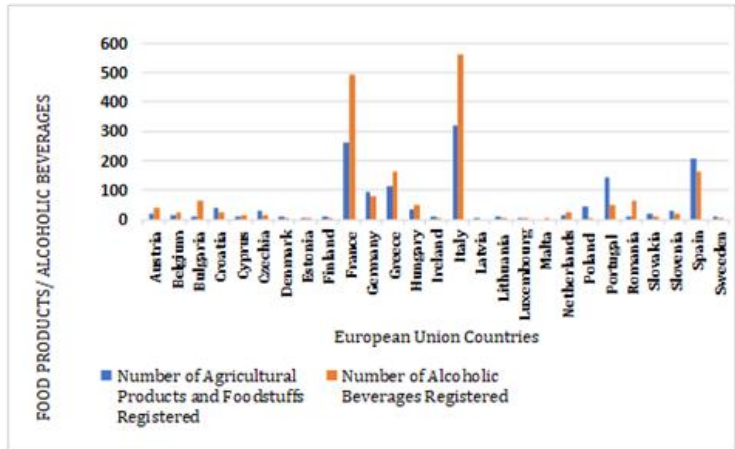
Table 1.

Country	Number of Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs Registered		Number of Alcoholic Beverages Registered		
	PDO/PGI	TSG	PDO/PGI	GI	TSG
			Wine	Spirit Drinks	Beers
Austria	16	3	28	10	0
Belgium	16	0	10	10	5
Bulgaria	3	6	54	12	0
Croatia	38	0	18	6	0
Cyprus	10	0	11	2	0
Czechia	30	1	13	0	0
Denmark	8	0	5	0	0
Estonia	1	0	0	1	0
Finland	8	3	0	2	1
France	260	2	438	53	0
Germany	93	0	45	36	0
Greece	115	0	147	15	0
Hungary	31	2	38	13	0
Ireland	8	0	0	3	0
Italy	315	4	526	34	0
Latvia	4	3	0	0	0
Lithuania	8	2	0	7	0
Luxembourg	2	0	1	0	0
Malta	0	0	3	0	0
Netherlands	11	4	19	5	0
Poland	34	10	0	2	0
Portugal	143	2	40	11	0
Romania	9	1	53	9	0
Slovakia	15	3	9	1	0
Slovenia	24	4	17	4	0
Spain	203	2	143	19	0
Sweden	10	0	0	3	0
TOTAL	1399	52	1618	258	6

Number of agricultural products and alcoholic beverages registered

Lastly, in the European Union there is a higher trend towards certification of alcoholic beverages, especially wines, compared to agricultural food products. In the following graphical representation, Figure. 2, it can be seen that even in

the Mediterranean countries alcoholic beverages make up a higher number of certifications. The same situation applies to Romania.



The number of Agricultural Products compared to the number of Alcoholic Beverages Registered until February 14,2023 Figure.2

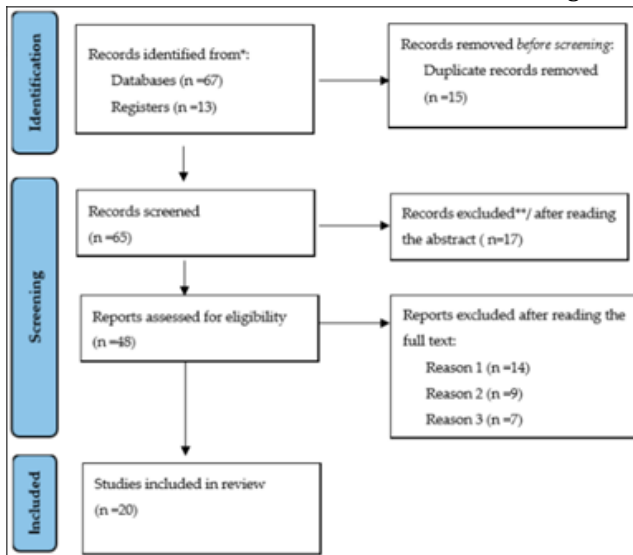
Section 2: Personal Contributions (Material and Methods, Results and Conclusions and Recommendation).

Chapter 1: Reflection on the Scientific Literature Review on European Food Quality Schemes in Romania

Keywords like "food labels in Romania" or "geographical indications in Romania" were used during the search procedure. These particular words had to be present in the papers' titles, abstracts, and keyword section. For consideration, articles have to include empirical evidence and/or analysis. The search was restricted to English-related studies. The study covered all agricultural and food items with geographic indications, including wine and alcoholic beverages. Services, non-agricultural goods, and food were not included in the research.

The four-phase flow chart in the PRISMA guidelines outlines the selection, evaluation, and inclusion standards for the resources under review. Databases and records were gathered, and

duplicates were then eliminated. The materials for the screening procedure were first chosen based on their abstracts, and then the records were excluded or included, as shown in Figure 3.



The selection procedure was aided by the use of the PRISMA flow chart as a tool Figure 3.

* Instead of reporting the total number across all databases and registers, the number of records found was reported separately from each database or registry searched.

** Humans were included in the recordings, and no automated technologies were used in the procedure.

Reason 1: multi-subject strategy.

Reason 2: a different research hypothesis.

Reason 3: The findings have no bearing on the current study.

Chapter 2: Focus Group Meetings

The survey called “Romanian consumers knowledge and willingness to pay a higher price for certified products” distributed on the online platforms, was the major source of information for the focus group meetings. Some of the questions,

and the answers that respondents gave to those particular questions, were transcribed and used as a key-interest points for discussion in the focus group meetings. The topics were transcribed 10 days later after the survey was distributed online, on 25th of June, 2023. Taking into account the answers that the respondents have given until that date, the following topics of discussion arose:

- The meetings have started with a brief introduction into the context of the research and also the purpose of the focus group was explained.
- Secondly, there was a short presentation of each participant at the meeting- the presentation included the educational background, current activities or workplace and previous projects/ research projects in which the participant was involved.

There must pointed out that most of the participants have already completed the survey, and they were familiar with the subject of the conversation (were taken into account the answers received until 25th of June, 2023- 10 days later after the distribution of the survey on the online platforms). It must be emphasized that the questionnaire's answers were exclusively preliminary, so we cannot presume that the ones that were addressed in the focus group serve as the questionnaire's definitive responses. There was taken care that all participants have given their consent and confirmation that they agreed to audio record the session. There were 4 sessions online (Google meet platform) of the focus group meetings as follows:

Focus Group meeting: 30.06.2023

Host: PhD student Cristina Chifor- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Moderator: professor Felix Arion, PhD- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Guests: G1: Rural Development Research Platform/ Romanian Academy - Iasi branch.

G2: Romanian Academy - Institute of Agrarian Economy-
Bucharest

G3: TUV AUSTRIA Romania

Focus Group meeting: 05.07.2023

Host: PhD student Cristina Chifor- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Moderator: professor Felix Arion, PhD- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Guests:

G4: Scoala Doctorala de Economie si Administrarea Afacerilor
Iasi

G5: Universitatea De Stiintele Vietii Ion Ionescu de la Brad Iasi

G6: USV Iasi

Focus Group meeting 06.07.2023

Host: PhD student Cristina Chifor- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Moderator: professor Felix Arion, PhD- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Guests:

G7: Academia Romana Filiala Cluj/ Slow Food

G8: Academia Romana Filiala Iasi/ Rural Development Research
Platform

G9: USV Iasi

Focus Group meeting 07.07.2023

Host: PhD student Cristina Chifor- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Moderator: professor Felix Arion, PhD- USAMV CLUJ-NAPOCA

Guests:

G10: president of the APAR

Focus Groups Proposals:

- a) The creation of a database where products can be found categorized by the quality characteristics/selection criteria that each consumer is looking for in a food product. While there are many requirements from consumers, they are also all unique requirements based on how each consumer views quality and what characteristics are significant to him. Using the three pillars of environmental, economic, and social wellbeing

as a foundation, we propose the concept of sustainable product labelling.

- b) The information found in the electronic system can also be addressed in the form of a QR CODE, which allows the consumer to learn more about the history of the certified product (the type of certification, the organization that granted the certification, and the history of the verifications undertaken). This coding system is easily readable by a terminal, such as a phone or tablet, and it has a section dedicated to producers where they can display their information related to certified products.

Chapter 3: Survey on the Romanian consumers knowledge on GIs.

The survey “Romanian consumers knowledge and willingness to pay a higher price for certified products” was created on Google Form and distributed online in 15th of June 2023, and was closed on 15th of July, 2023. It has to be taken into consideration that the survey was spread online into a version in Romanian and later the questions and the answers were translated in English. The survey was closed with answers received from 396 respondents- these respondents were part of the sample size. The survey was divided into two sections: the sociodemographic one and the main part of the survey.

Gender distributions is the following: 66.92% of the survey respondents were Female, followed by the second category Male, with a percentage of 32.83. The respondents' age ranges from under 25 to over 65 years old. The first category gained a percentage of 15.15% compared to only 2.02% in the case of the second category. Here, it is important to mention that the age category between 25-40 had the most respondents 50.00%. Compared to the inactive population (which represented only 13.38% of the respondents), the workforce-active population predominated the survey (86.62%). The level

of education of the respondents varies from Highschool degree or below to master`s or doctoral studies. Superior studies had the highest range amongst the population of the survey (90.91%). In the above representations, it can be observed that there is close percentage between monthly net income ranged to 3000-4500 Ron (34.09%), and the following category 4500-7000 Ron (31.82%), and only 13.64% of the population has a monthly income higher than 7000 Ron. The residence of the population is clearly higher on the urban area with a percentage of 69.70%, compared to rural areas which had obtained 23.48%.

Chapter 4: AgroTransilvania Cluster study case

With a focus on the instance of the AgroTransilvania Cluster, which housed four voluntary certification schemes, the objective of this qualitative case investigation is to identify the unique certification schemes to incorporate traditional Romanian agri-food products. The status of the state institutions, how various national actors understand traditional items, and the intents of the producers had to be taken into account when calculating the effects of these voluntary certification programs. These initiatives were made taking into consideration the feedback received from both consumers and experts in the field, with the purpose to support the producers and to provide them a mean to better promote their products. In the tables below we can find a short description of each proposal made by AgroTransilvania Cluster.

Special quality or reputation that sets them apart from other products in the same category; composition, method of production and character are considered established by use of a recipe whose existence has been demonstrated on the market for a sufficient amount of time to allow transmission between generations; this period cannot be less than 30 years.



Reteta Consacrata Logo Figure 4.

The special requirements relate to biosecurity and pig welfare standards in accordance with good agricultural practices that are applicable to the fundamental processes in the production stages related to the growth, feeding, shipping, and slaughter of animals.



Carn provenit de la porc crescut in bunastare Logo Figure 5.



Produs Local Fermoras Logo Figure 6.

The customs code of the finished product must be different from the raw materials and ingredients' customs codes when they come from locations beyond the designated area, with the exception of vegetables and fruits, which are sold as such and must entirely originate from the delimited region. The geographical area within a 100 km radius of the production unit where the product subject to certification is made.



Calitate Garantata Logo Figure 7.

A system that enables interested parties to submit their national quality schemes based on a regional reference to the appropriate authority. The particular characteristics of the products, specific production methods or the value of the final product that significantly exceeds commercial standards for the same category of products in terms of public health, animal and plant health, animal welfare or environmental protection.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendation

The reflection on the academic literature revealed that GIs are not the most popular topic of research in Romania. This is due to a scarcity of certified agri-food products and the limited knowledge of certification program benefits among Romanian producers and consumers. The literature hasn't yet covered this topic in all its detail, therefore more research is still needed to be conducted in the future. The path was opened but

are required more and accurate studies on the topic. The overall findings after conducting all the meetings with the panel of experts revealed that: at first, before mentioning the concept of quality, it is essential to define it and ascertain what this notion means to each individual consumer and how important it is for the consumer to have this requirement satisfied. Another conclusion drawn was that the variety of terms such as: scheme, quality system, optional quality badge, and quality mark, all referring at the same concept, might lead the consumer to erroneous paths. The continuous involvement of the national institutes in actions to promote, and raise public awareness of these certification schemes, might change the whole perspective of the Romanian consumers related to this topic. There are no other ways to educate and train the consumers, than the actively engagement of the public authorities through video, audio, and social media campaigns.

The consumers perception and level of knowledge on certified products is the result of the both actions of the public authorities and academia involvement. Even though the results of the survey applied on the Romanian consumers` expressed positive results (most of the respondents have little knowledge on the subject and they were able to recognize the logos) but if we go beyond this, the consumers do not have any other information on the subject in question. AgroTransylvania Cluster through its proposals, has become an example of how private certifications could improve the local environment, and at the same time to address initiatives for both consumers and producers. The fact that two of the certifications proposed are recognized by the EU, demonstrate once again that the value of a certification schemes does not always come from the fact that was created by a public institution. In the present case, all the certifications created are addressed to all the members of the Cluster and not only to them. Every producer that fulfills the

scheme`s specific requirements could apply for one of these certifications.

Recommendations

As a as a follow-up of this research additional activities must be undertaken. That sorts of events in which are engaged all parties in the supply chain, including producers, consumers, retailers, the business world, and the educational sector. One suggestion given in this area was to reach every audience through national campaigns that were heavily promoted on social media using several channels (video, audio, and graphics). It is mandatory for us to understand that certifications are not targeted at a certain segment but they must be seen as a whole. Another proposal to make consumers` life easier is the establishment of a database containing products categorized and classified according to the selection criteria that each customer uses when choosing a food product in accordance with its own quality standards. In the era of digitalization, it is highly necessary that food industry keep up with the trends. In this regard a coding system might have a greater impact. This system features an area specially designed for producers where they may share information regarding certified products, being easily accessible by a terminal, such as a phone or tablet. The consumer can learn more about the history of the certified product (the type of certification, the organization that granted the certification, and the history of the verifications conducted) by addressing the information found in the electronic system in the form of a QR CODE. As a general conclusion, in Romania there is an increasing concern and market on certified products. Most of the traditional products/ recipes could be easily integrated under the umbrella of a certification. In other words, the main goal is to preserve the traditional know-how but in the same time to make it popular across Europe.