

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Strategic Role of Local Gastronomic Points in Revitalizing Rural Communities in Prahova County

Adrian Nicolae Ungureanu

Faculty of Economic Sciences, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești, Bd. București 39, 100680, Ploiești, Romania

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8453-069X>
e-mail: ungureanu_adrian2001@yahoo.com

* Corresponding author



Copyright: © 2025 by the author

Citation (APA Style):

Ungureanu, A.N. (2025). The Strategic Role of Local Gastronomic Points in Revitalizing Rural Communities in Prahova County. *Economic Insights – Trends and Challenges*, 14(4), 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.51865/EITC.2025.04.06>

Abstract: Rural tourism is evolving in Romania and we focus on Local Gastronomic Points (PGLs) as drivers of sustainable development. Based on ethnographic research as well as digital analysis we explore how culinary heritage shapes modern consumer behavior and short food supply chains. The South-Muntenia Development Region is the focus of our work. The area is rich in agro-gastronomic diversity: from the vineyards and orchards of Prahova and Argeș to the rural customs of Dâmbovița, Ialomița, Călărași, Teleorman, and Giurgiu. PGLs are more than just restaurants; they are the means of ensuring that territorial identity is capitalized in a way that is the basis of food. And because small agricultural producers are naturally incorporated into the family-run catering industry, PGLs create a business model that works best with local resources. As PGLs source ingredients from either their own farms or the immediate vicinity, they guarantee food traceability and authenticity. Thus, they contribute to South-Muntenia's rural areas' economic revival and development. And not only are they business-related, but they are also hubs for preserving the intangible cultural heritage of each county. Local culinary practices are a good way to diversify the regional tourism market and offer a substitute for mass tourism. Successful examples from other areas such as Novaci are a practical example of how to spread these structures to South-Muntenia. In the end, using traditional gastronomy and sustainable practices can make PGLs central in the brand identity of the region and shield it from the pressure of a globalized market.

Keywords: Local Gastronomic Points; Gastronomic; Rural Tourism.

JEL Classification: L83; R11; Z32.

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is crucial to the revival of villages in the South-Muntenia region. It is also a way to diversify local incomes and keep the population in check. The region has a rich agricultural history: Argeş and Prahova are renowned for fruit production, the Bărăgan plains of Ialomiţa and Călăraşi produce huge amounts of grain and Dâmboviţa, Teleorman and Giurgiu are known for vegetable production. Nevertheless, local gastronomy is a competitive advantage which has yet to be fully exploited.

Small farmers in these seven counties are still struggling to sell their surplus products on traditional routes. Local Gastronomic Points are an answer to this issue. The Local Gastronomic Points (PGLs) create a mechanism for farmers to bypass the hurdles of commercialization through sanitary regulations to make harvests into a real culinary experience for tourists and provide a strategic framework. By circumventing the intermediaries, this model not only ensures the traceability of food but also transforms South-Muntenia's regional cuisine into a sustainable source of economic growth and local branding.

2. Literature Review

The institutionalization and academic conceptualization of local food systems have seen a significant paradigm shift over the last few decades, moving from marginal, anti-industrial niches to mainstream strategies for regional resilience. In economic literature, the operationalization of structures equivalent to Romania's PGL is deeply rooted in the overarching theory of agricultural multifunctionality (Marsden, Banks, & Bristow, 2000). This paradigm posits that the modern farmer's socio-economic role transcends the mere extraction of primary commodities; instead, it dynamically integrates services that add high value at the farm gate, effectively fusing primary production with the experiential hospitality sector. (Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003)

The emergence of these integrated frameworks was historically accelerated by a systemic backlash against the homogenization of globalized agri-food networks. The inception of the *Slow Food* movement in Italy in 1989 crystallized an alternative consumption model predicated on "good, clean, and fair" food ecosystems (Petrini, 2003). Academically, this triggered a prolific body of research dedicated to Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) and local food networks, which are defined by their capacity to minimize the physical, logistical, and social distance between producers and consumers. (Ilbery & Maye, 2005), (Kneafsey, 2013)

At the European Union level, the strategic focus has transitioned from productivist mandates to supporting resilient, circular bio-economies. This is heavily reflected in the European Green Deal's *Farm to Fork* initiative, which champions supply chain shortening as a tool for rural revitalization. Because strict industrial food safety designs would inevitably lead to the regulatory extinction of micro-scale culinary heritage, the European legislative framework integrated the crucial "Principle of Flexibility" via Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 (Hygiene Package). This allows Member States to grant derogations for small-scale traditional producers without compromising consumer biosecurity.

In the Romanian context, the formalization of Local Gastronomic Points represents a recent legal transposition of these international practices. Empirical literature on Romanian rural tourism highlights that while counties with mature destination brands and rugged subcarpathian landscapes (such as Braşov or Sibiu) rapidly absorb entrepreneurial models, spatial polarization remains a major challenge (Gică, Moisescu, & Coroş, 2021). Gastronomic activities rarely generate tourist flows entirely on their own; rather, they scale up by embedding themselves into pre-existing tourism ecosystems, such as mountain trails or established viticultural routes (*The Wine Road*). Consequently, understanding the domestic dissemination of PGLs requires an

analytical framework that links regional culture, institutional flexibility, and localized geographic advantages.

In the Romanian context, the formalization of Local Gastronomic Points represents a recent legal transposition of these international practices, operating as a distinct structural mechanism for sustainable economic growth. Recent domestic literature underscores that the legislative crystallization of PGLs has successfully unlocked the endogenous potential of smallholders by integrating them into short, resilient food networks (Andrei & Popescu, 2024). Empirical literature on Romanian rural tourism highlights that while counties with mature destination brands and rugged subcarpathian landscapes (such as Braşov or Sibiu) rapidly absorb entrepreneurial models, spatial polarization remains a major challenge (Gică, Moisesescu, & Coroş, 2021). Gastronomic activities rarely generate tourist flows entirely on their own; rather, they scale up by embedding themselves into pre-existing tourism ecosystems, such as mountain trails or established viticultural routes (The Wine Road).

Consequently, understanding the domestic dissemination of PGLs requires an analytical framework that links regional culture, institutional flexibility, and localized geographic advantages. In this regard, contemporary spatial analyses indicate that the development of Romanian micro-scale hospitality units is deeply asymmetrical, characterized by strong territorial polarization between historically established tourist hubs and structurally disadvantaged lowland areas (Turek-Rahoveanu, Matei, & Adrian, 2025). This systemic gap is further exacerbated by varying levels of local institutional backing and differing entrepreneurial absorption rates across county boundaries, leaving the socio-economic revitalization of purely agricultural territories heavily reliant on targeted regional public policies (Dinu, 2024).

3. Research Methodology

To understand the formation of gastronomic tourism networks and the spatial differences in South-Muntenia, our research is conducted in a mixed-methods way, where qualitative and quantitative data are added together. Our primary data set was based on official records from Veterinary Sanitary Directorates (DSVSA) and were collected for the seven counties (Argeş, Călăraşi, Dâmboviţa, Giurgiu, Ialomiţa, Prahova and Teleorman). These records were then linked to demographic and economic data from the National Institute of Statistics (INS).

This interaction of data allowed us to map the geographical distribution of hospitality venues so that they could be linked to the tourism potential and spatial planning in the regions. We also used a comparative analysis to show the development gap related to geography. Specifically, we compared Prahova and Argeş (where diverse landscapes and a long history of mountain and wine tourism led to rapid PGL adoption) with Giurgiu, Ialomiţa, Călăraşi and Teleorman. In the latter group, we asked how historically low tourist traffic affects the adoption of this new rural entrepreneurship model. Finally, we are trying to determine what the key factors are that help a PGL to survive. The central hypothesis of our analysis is that the success of Local Gastronomic Points in South-Muntenia depends on three connected elements: regional culture, a sustainable use of local food resources, and a well-developed tourism ecosystem.

The concept of the PGL, in its Romanian legal acceptance, represents the national transposition of a phenomenon extensively studied in the specialized literature under phrases such as “local food systems,” “Short Food Supply Chains” (SFSC), or integrated farm-to-table models. The development of these chains reflects a profound structural and economic cleavage between Eastern Europe, notably Romania, and Western European states such as France, Germany, or the Netherlands. This dissonance does not derive exclusively from the aggregate volume of transactions, but primarily from the intrinsic motivation of the economic actors. While in Western economies the orientation towards the proximity market constitutes a deliberate strategy of capitalized holdings, designed to facilitate access to high value-added niche markets,

in the Eastern European space, direct selling has functioned primarily as a subsistence mechanism for small farmers with limited access to long retail circuits. (Kneafsey, 2013)

The operationalization of agritourism holdings under the “Ferme-Auberge” certification, a framework monitored by the *Bienvenue à la ferme* network under the aegis of the French Chambers of Agriculture, requires strict compliance with norms designed to prevent the commercial deviation of the rural unit. This legal toolkit aims to block the outsourcing of services specific to the HoReCa industry, ensuring the maintenance of the endogenous character of production. (Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003)

The regulatory framework is based on essential restrictive pillars: the added value generated in catering must be based on a predominantly internal agricultural input, stipulating a minimum share of 51% of processed food resources coming from the farm itself. This parameter consolidates the architecture of short chains, mitigating the logistical footprint and maximizing capital retention at the local level. Concurrently, the legislation imposes total traceability of critical raw materials, restricting exogenous sourcing to neighboring farms and obliging the holder to maintain the status of an active agricultural producer, validated through mutual insurance systems. At the same time, the hosting capacity is subject to regional caps designed to limit anthropic pressure and balance the tourist flow.

Similarly, the Italian *agriturismo* model with a catering function establishes itself as a hybrid mechanism for mitigating seasonal disparities, regulated by Framework Law No. 96/2006. The foundation of this system lies in the principle of “functional subordination” (*connessione*), which prohibits the conversion of the holding into a purely commercial entity. Compliance is quantified through strict temporal and financial criteria, ensuring the primacy of the agricultural activity over the tourist one. The legislation imposes a quantitative matrix of raw materials - in which a majority share must be ensured through endogenous and proximity production - thus blocking the expansion of industrial chains. The development of facilities is conditioned by the reconversion of the pre-existing rural building stock, a measure that halts the consumption of agricultural land (*consumo di suolo*) and protects the cultural landscape. Systems analysis reveals that this functional hybridization transforms the farm into an economic volatility buffer, where the agricultural activity ensures cash flow during periods of tourist contraction, while catering maximizes added value during peak periods.

The genesis of this phenomenon's institutionalization in the 1970s and 1980s was marked by a backlash against the industrialization of agriculture and the homogenization of food. The Slow Food movement, founded in Italy in 1989, represented a decisive catalyst, promoting a consumption model based on “good, clean, and fair” food. Academically, the emergence of these entities was theorized through the paradigm of the “multifunctionality of agriculture,” which postulates that the farmer's role transcends primary production, integrating complex services that add value at the farm gate. Globally, the phenomenon has evolved from a marginal niche to a major trend in experiential tourism, with examples such as the Farm-to-Table model in the US or the *Chisan-chisho* concept in Japan confirming the importance of the proximity strategy in public policies.

The European Union has adopted a proactive approach to regulating and supporting these structures, a process integrated into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Although there is no uniform directive regarding “Gastronomic Points,” the European legislative framework has crystallized around adaptive food safety. Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 on the hygiene of foodstuffs represents the crucial legislative pillar, introducing the “Principle of Flexibility.” This allows Member States derogations from the strict industrial design norms of processing units for small producers, protecting traditional methods without compromising consumer safety. The 2006 Hygiene Package and the strategic “Farm to Fork” initiative, integrated into the European Green Deal, aim to transform food systems, stimulating the shortening of supply chains and the resilience of small farmers. From a scientific perspective, the European legislative evolution

marks a transition from a purely productivist model to a hybrid socio-economic ecosystem, recognizing that imposing industrial standards on small producers would inevitably lead to the extinction of the gastronomic heritage. (Borrello, Caracciolo, & Cembalo, 2022)

4. Results

4.1. Analysis of the Dynamics and Evolution of PGL in the South-Muntenia Region (2018–2026)

Empirical analysis of the development of PGL network in the South-Muntenia Region indicates a strong upward trend, marked by inclination towards system consolidation. Despite a period of uncertainty in the legislative framework and limited adoption, the area has witnessed accelerated integration of this entrepreneurial approach. This change is reflected in the increase in operational units, which reached 65 structures by 2026 and contribute 9.49% to the national network. (Apetroaie, 2024)

This chronology highlights a qualitative change from 33 to 205 by 2025, reflecting the effectiveness of implementation schemes and the adaptability of local businesspeople to meet market demand. Despite the peak of regional share at 11.82% (2025), slight adjustment to 9.49% (2026) indicates diversification of national growth despite strong momentum in other areas. Overall, the data demonstrates the advancement of the business approach and a greater comprehension of how gastronomic tourism can positively impact the economy in the rural area of South-Muntenia (Marele, D.C., Ghergheleş, C.G., Turek-Rahoveanu, A., 2025). Additionally, with almost 10% of the total PGL units in the country, the South-Muntenia Region has emerged as a significant player in Romania's culinary tourism industry. This importance is reinforced by the ability of the region to convert agri-food resources into tourism services, which has led to family catering units becoming important sources of support for the local economy (Figure 1).

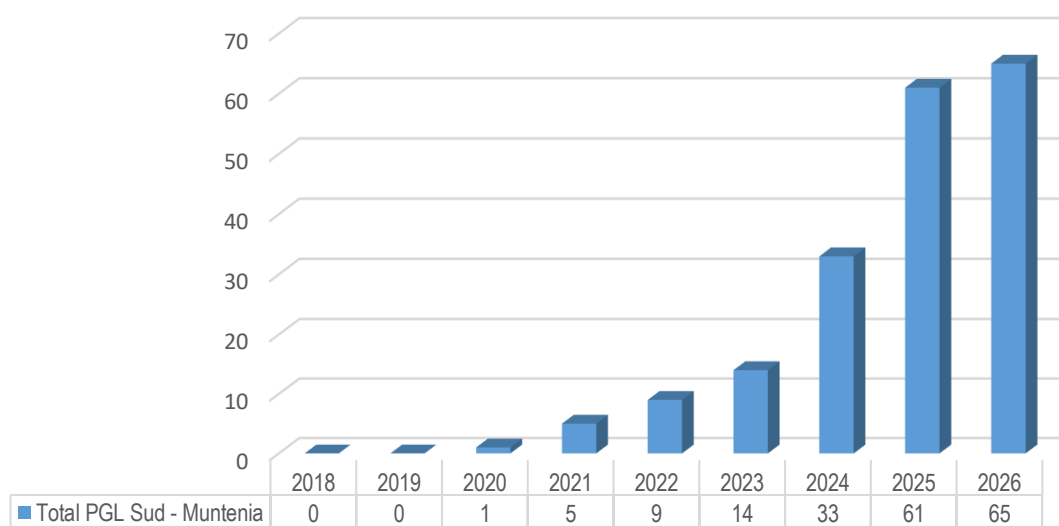


Fig. 1. Dynamics of the Local Gastronomic Points Network: South-Muntenia Region (2018–2026)

Source: <https://infopgl.ro/registrul-pgl/index.html>

4.2. Comparative Analysis of the Dissemination of PGL in Romania

The statistics for 2026 on PGL show a clear difference in territories. In terms of hierarchy, Braşov County is clearly the leader with 116 units in possession, which is higher than the other administrative units. Tulcea County (73) is the second largest in the ranking. A compact core is formed by counties of Cluj (52), Sibiu (50), and Hunedoara (49). In PGL there are few numerical differences. The density of PGLs in Alba, Maramureş, Prahova, Argeş and Bistriţa-

Năsăud is at the lower end of 28 to 35. In this statistical list Prahova County is ranked 8th with 29 PGLs. The county is located in the lower half of the top 10 which indicates an intimate relationship with the indicators found within each county's counties, such as Maramureș (30) and Argeș (28) (Figure 2).

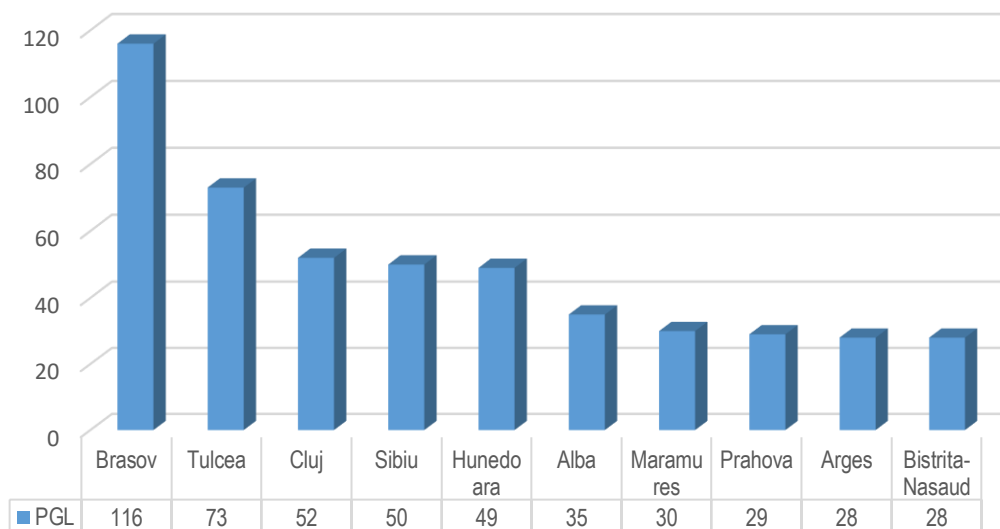


Fig. 2. Top 10 Counties by the Number of PGLs in 2026

Source: <https://infopgl.ro/registrul-pgl/index.html>

The structural gap to the national leader is significant since Prahova's capacity accounts for about 25% of the total PGL volume reported by Brașov County. These are the factors to discern between counties that are performing well and the ones that are at a very early stage. The city of Brașov has a high concentration of tourists in the mountainous and cultural side of the city. This dynamism is a natural factor to support the stimulation that PGLs provide to diversify regional cuisines. (Bulau-Olaru, 2025) Inter-county differences also show the effectiveness of local policies that promote sustainable tourism and how easy economic operators could access and implement the specific legislative framework. While Brașov and other counties have quickly adopted the gastronomic approach, Prahova and others are in a different phase of implementation, possibly due to preference for other tourism or administrative factors in the process of advertising and licensing the PGL network.

4.3. Territorial Polarization and County Disparities at the Level of the South-Muntenia Development Region

The PGL in the South-Muntenia region are in significant structural disequilibrium. This mixed business model is not uniform to the region since it is shaped by the existing tourism facilities and the landscape of the land. The rural hospitality sector is fragmented in the South-Muntenia region (65 active units) by 2026.

With a concentration of 29 units in Prahova and 28 units within 43.07%, the sector is concentrated in the core of the region, making up 87.69% of its total area. A strategically oriented capitalization of culinary heritage within tourist-driven areas accounts for the territorial concentration. The regional leader Prahova County continues to excel in fusing genuine culinary delights with the mountainous (Prahová Valley) and oenological (Dealul Mare subcarpathian viticultural ecosystem) tourism offering. In this context, the tourism product is diversified using local units. The plain counties (Călărași și Ialomița) have no adoption rate, in contrast. The directional difference is determined by the economic structure that prioritizes intensive agriculture and the lack of uninterrupted tourist flows. (Mire & Casangiu-Siea, 2022) The

county of Prahova is a regional leader in gastronomic tourism and has been instrumental in driving this sector, with 44.62% of the total units (29.8% of total) being generated from empirical data (Figure 3).

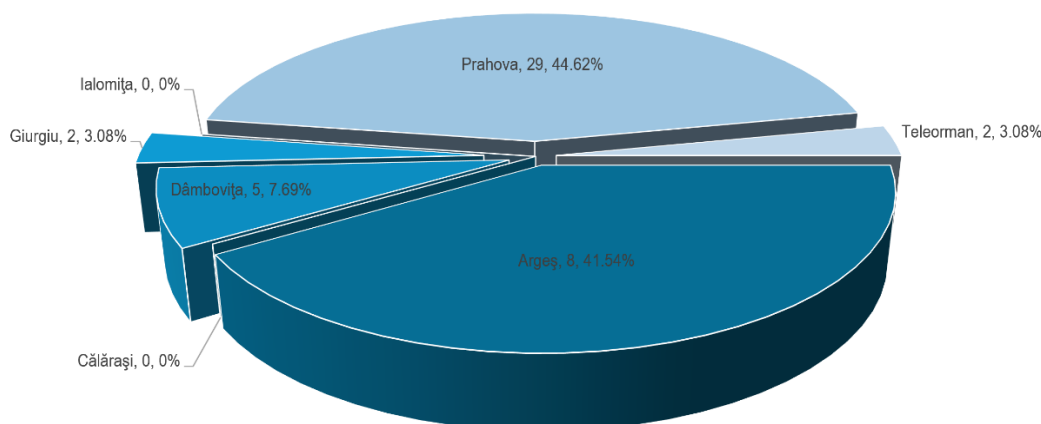


Fig. 3. Active Distribution of Local Gastronomic Points in the South-Muntenia Region (2026)

Source: <https://infopgl.ro/registrul-pgl/index.html>

The effective positioning indicates that policies leveraging culinary legacy are feasible in regions with already high tourist numbers. Prahova County's success is based on the ability of local entrepreneurs to integrate authentic food into established tourist trails (Prahova Valley) and subcarpathian agritourism ecosystems, which are closely linked to wine tourism (Dealus Mare area – Wine Road). The PGLs serve as a means of increasing tourist attraction and diversifying the mountain and oenological tourism product. The northernmost point of the area is marked by a sudden decline in investment interest, as seen with the transition to the southern plain area. Approximately 7.9% of the market is held by Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, and Teleorman, with a smaller share of only 14.2%. The counties also hold 3.21%. (Bulau-Olaru, 2025)

The structural limitations that exist in the territorial divide are twofold. The absence of major tourist destinations that generate ongoing traffic and demand for niche catering services is due to geography and flow challenges. The emphasis on intensive primary agriculture (grain farming) rather than experiential agritourism and short food supply chains benefit the latter. (Pecingina, 2025)

The South-Muntenia Region's spatial distribution is in sync with the north-south geographical gradient of Local Gastronomic Points. Prahova County is a prime example of this dynamic. The proof is that mixing local cuisine with well-known tourist destinations is a distinct competitive advantage. The southward counties have a lot of differences. For this reason, institutional support must be provided to extend the PGL network in these areas. For future work we need to create weekend micro-companies and build collaborative networks with small agricultural producers.

An average growth of 8.6 new units per year is found in the region using linear regression. Nevertheless, the conventional statistical approximation fails to account for the rapid growth occurring in 2025 and 2026, indicating that it is not a linear progression. With stable institutional backing and sustained consumer interest in genuine goods, the network is expected to reach 72 units by 2028 as per current projections. In the end, the evidence shows that gastronomic activities seldom create new tourist spots on their own (Figure 4). Rather than other options, they naturally integrate into established tourism ecosystems. Focusing on specific public policies will be necessary to address the current regional imbalances.

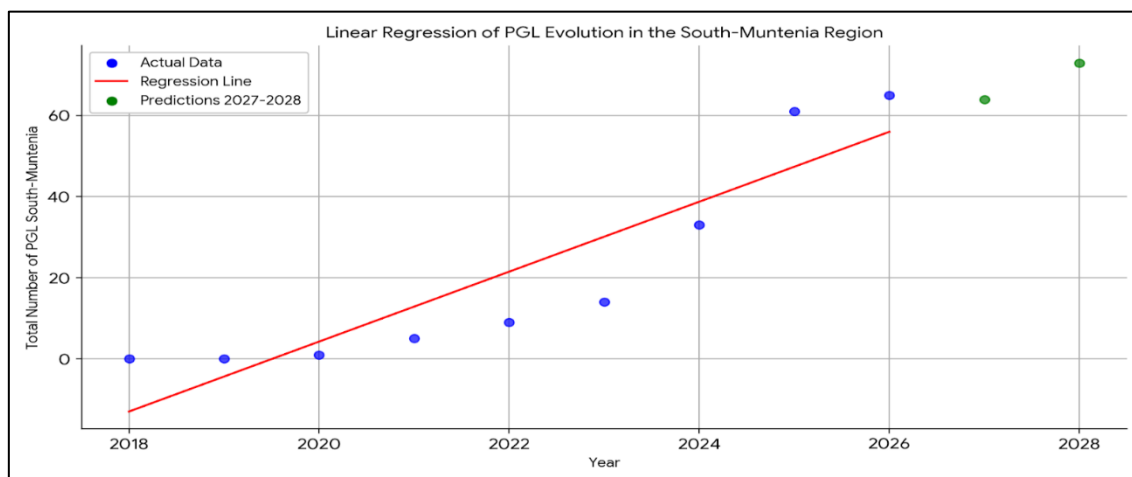


Fig. 4. Projection of the Evolution of Local Gastronomic Points in the South-Muntenia Region (2018–2028): Linear regression model

Source: <https://infopgl.ro/registrul-pgl/index.html>

4.4. Predictive Modeling and Development Prospects

An average growth of 8.6 new units per year is found in the region using linear regression. Nevertheless, the conventional statistical approximation fails to account for the rapid growth occurring in 2025 and 2026, indicating that it is not a linear progression. With stable institutional backing and sustained consumer interest in genuine goods, the network is expected to reach 72 units by 2028 as per current projections. In the end, the evidence shows that gastronomic activities seldom create new tourist spots on their own. Rather than other options, they naturally integrate into established tourism ecosystems. Focusing on specific public policies will be necessary to address the current regional imbalances.

4.5. Evaluation of the Spatial Dispersion of PGL at the Level of Administrative-Territorial Units in Prahova

Table 1 indicates that PGL activity is concentrated across 16 localities, exhibiting a high degree of dispersion, but also a clear pole of development:

Table 1. Territorial Distribution of Local Gastronomic Points at the Level of Administrative-Territorial Units in Prahova County (2026)

Administrative-territorial units	Number of PGLs
Valea Doftanei	10
Breaza	2
Gura Vadului	2
Scorțeni	2
Telega	2
Other localities (Blejoii, Ceptura, Cerașu, Comarnic, Cornu, Iordăcheanu, Izvoarele, Măgureni, Plopu, Șirna, Șotrile)	1 (per unit)

Source: <https://infopgl.ro/registrul-pgl/index.html>

The focal point is the Valea Doftanei commune. The locality of Valea Doftanei holds supremacy within the county, with 10 PGL units, which represents approximately 34.48% of the total 29 units analyzed in the table. This concentration indicates a mature tourism ecosystem,

where the success of the initial units has created a “contagion” effect or local specialization, transforming the area into a recognized gastronomic destination.

The remaining 15 localities are characterized by a low presence (1 or 2 units), which suggests that the PGL model is still in its pioneering phase or in the stage of exploring opportunities in these areas.

The geographical distribution shows that PGLs are predominantly located in rural or peri-urban areas with tourism potential or a viticultural/mountain tradition (such as Ceptura or Valea Doftanei), confirming the hypothesis that the development of these structures is inextricably linked to pre-existing tourist flows. This locality-based analysis highlights that, although Prahova County is a regional leader, the success of PGLs is strongly polarized around certain “micro-destinations” (e.g. Valea Doftanei), whereas in the remaining localities, the capacity to capitalize on local resources through this model is still in its early stages.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings of this study unveil a complex socio-economic landscape regarding the deployment and impact of PGLs within the South-Muntenia Development Region. The analytical data collected up to 2026 validates the core hypothesis that the structural success, scaling capacity, and long-term viability of these alternative micro-hospitality units do not occur in geographical isolation. Instead, they are fundamentally conditioned by pre-existing tourism ecosystems, localized agricultural assets, and institutional responsiveness.

A critical revelation of the spatial distribution mapping is the profound territorial polarization along a clear north-south geographical gradient. The factual concentration of 87.69% of the entire region's active PGL units within just two counties—Prahova (29 units) and Argeş (28 units)—uncover a structural path dependency. This deep geographical cleavage directly reflects the theoretical frameworks established by Marsden et al. (2000) and Renting et al. (2003) on alternative food networks, which demonstrate that PGLs do not organically generate destination traffic autonomously. Instead, they function as high value-added layers embedded within already consolidated tourist pathways. In Prahova County, the rapid incorporation of 29 operational units is geographically anchored in the subcarpathian agritourism hubs and the oenological corridors of the Dealu Mare viticultural ecosystem. This alignment confirms the assertions of Ilbery and Maye (2005) regarding the significance of territorial identity and geographic association as marketing attributes.

Conversely, the complete absence of PGL adoption in the lowland plain counties of Călăraşi and Ialomiţa underscores a major structural constraint. These territories remain firmly locked within a productivist, intensive primary agricultural model centered on large-scale grain farming. As a result, they lack both the regular weekend tourist flows and the localized, diverse family-farm networks required to sustain an experiential hospitality business model. This structural mismatch confirms the recent assessments of Turek-Rahoveanu et al. (2025), who identified that localized culinary tourism in Romania often inadvertently reinforces existing regional imbalances rather than naturally mitigating them.

At the intra-county level, the administrative-territorial unit (UAT) analysis of Prahova further illuminates this polarization, revealing a severe localized clustering. The supremacy of the Valea Doftanei commune, which alone accounts for 34.48% of the county's total PGLs (10 units), points toward a strong regional “contagion” or imitation effect. From an entrepreneurial standpoint, the pioneering success of early PGL entries in Valea Doftanei has effectively lowered risk perceptions for subsequent local farmers. This has led to a mature, specialized micro-destination brand centered around local agro-identity, such as the regional *Caşcaveaua de Doftana*. This localized phenomenon embodies the core values of the Slow Food paradigm theorized by Petrini (2003) and contemporary experiential design models (Fusté-Forné, 2024), where traditional gastronomy shields a distinct micro-region from the price pressures of

globalized, generic food markets. However, the fact that the remaining 15 localities in Prahova host only 1 or 2 isolated units indicates that outside of these specific micro-clusters, the PGL model remains in a precarious, pioneering phase.

This uneven pattern is also reflected in the temporal expansion of the network. The statistical projection executed via the linear regression model provides an institutional warning: while the historical trend estimates an average addition of 8.6 units per year, the abrupt, non-linear surges recorded in 2025 and 2026 demonstrate that the network's evolution is heavily policy-driven. The institutionalization of the PGL framework in Romania represents a highly successful domestic application of the European Union's Principle of Flexibility embedded within Regulation (EC) No 852/2004. By bypassing the prohibitive infrastructural and financial barriers of industrial HoReCa licensing, the PGL legislative model allows small-scale family holdings to capture substantial added value at the farm gate. As argued by Andrei and Popescu (2024), this operational framework transforms direct sales from a historical subsistence fallback into a proactive commercial mechanism for rural youth retention and income diversification. Nevertheless, as highlighted by Dinu (2024), the wide gap between national frontrunners like Braşov (116 units) and regional leaders like Prahova (29 units) suggests that administrative bottlenecks, local sanitary-veterinary (DSVSA) processing speeds, and regional marketing deficits continue to limit full entrepreneurial absorption.

To rectify these pronounced territorial imbalances across the South-Muntenia region, public policy must shift from passive licensing to active network orchestration. In the southern agrarian plains, institutional interventions must focus on establishing collaborative local food hubs and artificial "weekend micro-companies" that tie regional culinary traditions, such as vegetable or freshwater fish specialties, to transit corridors. Furthermore, facilitating structured knowledge transfers from mature micro-destinations like Valea Doftanei to emerging municipalities is vital. Without targeted public investment, associative smallholder networks, and integrated marketing pathways—such as expanding the Wine Road concept into localized Gastronomic Roads—the PGL structure will remain a privileged asset of mountainous and subcarpathian sub-regions. This leaves the wider rural communities of the southern plain decoupled from the socio-economic benefits of the European Green Deal's Farm to Fork strategy.

6. Conclusions

According to this research, the South-Muntenia Region's PGLs are a crucial factor in driving rural development. They serve as a practical means of using agricultural resources sustainably, and they also connect small-scale farmers to wider tourism networks. According to our analysis of the region, there is a clear geographical gap: Prahova and Argeş counties are currently at the forefront of this gastronomic ecosystem, as their tourism industry naturally aligns with their local traditions. However, the lowland regions experience structural challenges that hinder local entrepreneurship, necessitating targeted policy measures. The current exponential growth forecasts indicate that this business model can be highly profitable. Notwithstanding, PGLs have a range of uses apart from ordinary business proposals; they're vital safeguards for territorial identity.

Long-term success in the sector is dependent on the implementation of adapted public policies. It is crucial to promote producer associations and facilitate the transfer of knowledge from successful micro-destinations like Valea Doftanei to emerging areas, which would help balance regional development.

Despite rapid expansion, the South-Muntenia PGL network's growth is not uniform. The dissimilarity is mainly determined by the accessibility of current tourist facilities and the diverse potential of regional merchants to transform agricultural products into edible offerings. Apart from their obvious tourism benefits, these institutions serve as a practical application of short

food supply chains, enabling unbiased, direct contact between the primary producer and the final consumer.

As a result, this model is in close agreement with the wider sustainability goals of the European Green Deal and the “Farm to Fork” approach. By restoring value to local culinary traditions and household economic elements, these initiatives aim to protect the national intangible heritage through their efforts in the formal sector. At the end of the day, integrating hospitality services into traditional agricultural practices is a strategic move.

References

1. Andrei, J. V., & Popescu, A. (2024). Emerging operational structures in Eastern European agritourism: The strategic consolidation of short food supply chains. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 103-118.
2. Apetroaie, C. (2024). *Dezvoltarea rurală durabilă prin puncte gastronomice locale*. Iași: Direcția pentru agricultură județeană.
3. Borrello, M., Caracciolo, F., & Cembalo, L. (2022). *Infrastructure of food safety and flexibility for local food systems in the European Union. Regulating shorter food supply chains: The flexibility principle and local food systems governance in the European Union*, 1021–1036.
4. Bulau-Olaru, I. (2025). Punctele gastronomice locale (PGL) din România: considerații introductive. *Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative*, 41-51.
5. Dinu, M. (2024). Institutional frameworks and entrepreneurship in Romanian rural areas: Barriers and drivers for alternative food networks. *Agricultural Economics and Rural Development*, 45-59.
6. Gică, O. A., Moisescu, O. I., & Coroș, M. M. (2021). Rural tourism entrepreneurship in Romania: Key drivers and sustainability challenges. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 289–307.
7. Ilbery, B., & Maye, D. (2005). Food supply chains and regional development: Evidence from two regions of the UK. *Geography*, 116–130.
8. Kneafsey, M. V.-W. (2013). *Short Food Supply Chains and Local Food Systems in the EU. A State of Play of their Socio-Economic Characteristics*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
9. Marele, D.C., Ghergheș, C.G., Turek-Rahoveanu, A. (2025) Multisensory gastronomy as a tool to strengthen the attractiveness of a sustainable destination. *Scientific Papers Series Management, Economic Engineering in Agriculture & Rural Development*, 25(4), p. 565.
10. Marsden, T., Banks, J., & Bristow, G. (2000). Food supply chain innovations: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development. *World Development*, 423–429.
11. Mire, C.-N., & Casangiu-Siea, L. (2022). Gastronomy – a potential tourism brand of the romanian danubian region. *Ecoforum*, 11-37.
12. Pecingina, I.-R. (2025). Establishment of a local gastronomic point in the novaci area - rural development modality. *Annals of the „Constantin Brancusi” University of Targu Jiu*, 49-54.
13. Petrini, C. (2003). *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*. New York: Columbia University Press.
14. Renting, H., Marsden, T., & Banks, J. (2003). Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development. *Environment and Planning A*, 393-411.