

BANAT AND CRISANA - A CULINARY MOSAIC OF HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

Timeea CARAGENA¹, Lorena LUPEI¹, Natalia LASAC², Alexia Anamaria MATEI², Diana-Nicoleta RABA¹, Luminita PIRVULESCU¹

¹University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timisoara, Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Timisoara, Romania

²University of Oradea, Faculty of Environmental Protection, Oradea, Romania

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The Romanian cuisine is a true culinary treasure, a heritage handed down from generation to generation, constantly enriched by the influences of the peoples who have lived in Romania. Each historical region of the country has developed its own gastronomic traditions, reflecting both local specificities and the impact of the different cultures with which it has interacted. In this context, Banat and Crisana represent two of the most interesting areas from a culinary point of view, due to their multi-ethnic character and diverse influences on local gastronomy.

The present study highlights the common influences in the gastronomy of Banat and Crisana of several nationalities living in these multiethnic regions.

Keywords: local gastronomy, multi-ethnic influences, culinary traditions

#Corresponding author: luminita_pirvulescu@usab-tm.ro

INTRODUCTION

Romanian cuisine was born at the crossroads of times and influences, shaped by the generous relief, the vagaries of the weather, the fruits of the earth and the skill of hands that cook with soul. Tastes have been chiseled along with the civilizations that have passed through here, and people's habits and preferences have given flavor to each dish, transforming food into tradition and tradition into art. (Roman, R.A., 2010)

Over the ages, Romanian cuisine has preserved its ancestral origins, but at the same time has been enriched by the tastes of other countries. Like a culinary mosaic, it has borrowed recipes and techniques from the peoples with whom it has shared its history. In Transylvania, Hungarian influences can be felt in savory dishes such as goulash, paprikash or stews with paprika. In Wallachia and Dobrogea, oriental spices have given rise to "sarmale" in vine leaves, soups soured with yoghurt and sweets inspired by Turkish *baclava*. Moldova took over from its Slavic neighbors the intense taste of thick *borsch*, *vareniki* and "piftie". (Roman, R.A., 2010; Ghidul gastronomic al Romaniei - Bucataria traditionala, 2010)

After the middle of the 19th century, when Western refinement began to penetrate the houses of the boyar, Romanian cuisine borrowed the elegance of French sauces and the finesse of soufflés. (Roman, R.A., 2010; Ghidul

gastronomic al Romaniei - Bucataria traditionala, 2010)

Today, the legacy of these influences is to be found in the diversity of meat products, artisanal dairy products, the flavors that fill the kitchens and the cooking techniques carefully passed down from generation to generation - all of which make up an authentic Romanian culinary style that is always open to the world. (Roman, R.A., 2010; Ghidul gastronomic al Romaniei - Bucataria traditionala, 2010)

Banat, located in western Romania, is a historical region with natural borders drawn by the Danube, Tisa, Mures and Carpathians. Today, this land with a unique identity is divided between Romania, Serbia (where we find the Serbian Banat) and a small strip located in Hungary. The Romanian part of the old Banat includes the entire counties of Timis and Caras-Severin, the territory south of Mures in Arad County, the Orsovei area in Mehedinti and several communes in Hunedoara County. But Banat is not just a geographical region - it is a meeting place of cultures, an area with a multicultural soul. Here, Romanians, Serbs, Hungarians and Germans have lived together for centuries, and this diversity was also felt in the cuisines. Each community has left its mark on Banat dishes, contributing their own recipes, spices and cooking techniques. The result is a unique Banat cuisine, where Romanian stews meet Hungarian goulash, Serbian *sarma* shares the plate with Swabian sausages, and desserts

have Austrian and Viennese accents. Everything is woven together in a taste harmony that tells the story of the place without words. (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banat>; <https://memoriabanatului.ro/wp-content/uploads/Banatul-din-memorie.pdf>)

Crisana is a historical region located between the borders of Romania and Hungary, naturally contoured by the Tisa River in the west, the Mures in the south, the Apuseni Mountains in the east and the Somes River in the north. A connecting area between the Pannonian Plateau and the Carpathian Mountains, Crisana has always been a place of passage, exchange and coexistence between peoples. After the partition of 1920, the Romanian part of Crisana includes the whole of Bihor county, most of Arad and Salaj counties, the south of Satu Mare county and a northern part of Hunedoara county.

(<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisana>; <https://raftulbunicii.ro/retete/gustul-calatorieiprin-frumoasa-romanie-bunatati-din-crisana/>)

In addition to its geographical charm, Crisana is also a region rich in cultural traditions and multicultural influences, which are strongly reflected in the local gastronomy - a cuisine that blends Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak and even Austrian tastes in a delicious blend of flavors and recipes handed down from generation to generation.

(<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisana>; <https://raftulbunicii.ro/retete/gustul-calatorieiprin-frumoasa-romanie-bunatati-din-crisana/>)

The Hungarian influence is perhaps the most pronounced, visible in dishes such as beef goulash, chicken paprikash or lecsó - a kind of vegetable stew with sausages. There is no shortage of hearty soups, often soured with vinegar sour cabbage juice, or the famous "langosi", fried flatbreads, sometimes filled with cheese or jam. From the Romanian heritage come "sarmale", polenta with cheese and sour cream or pies baked on a griddle. Desserts complete the culinary picture with their Central European finesse: walnut cozonacs, poppy seed or walnut beigli, puff pastries and cream, but also Viennese - style jam pancakes. (<https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisana>; <https://raftulbunicii.ro/retete/gustul-calatorieiprin-frumoasa-romanie-bunatati-din-crisana/>; http://www.revista-alternante.de/Irina_Petras_-Transilvania_din_cuvinte.pdf)

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In carrying out this study, the authors consulted an extensive bibliography, which

includes scientific papers, specialized publications, brochures and monographs. The methodology used combines classical research methods - documentation, analysis and synthesis of information - with the formulation of conclusions based on the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Slovak leavened dumplings in Crisana (Nadlac). The preparation of Kysnuté Halušky dumplings begins with melting the lard, and then adding the sifted flour with the yeast and sugar. The dough is kneaded with lukewarm water and lard, then left to rise until it doubles in volume. After rising, small dough shapes are formed. In a heated pan with lard, the dumplings are carefully placed, leaving them to rise under the lid. Then, water is added until it covers them slightly and they are boiled over low heat until they begin to fry in the pan. Finally, they are greased with lard and rolled in the favorite mixture. The dumplings of Slovak origin have a slightly aerated core, specific to the Nădlac area. (<https://www.dulceromanie.ro/oameni-care-ne-inspira/galuste-dospite-slovacesti-de-nadlac-kysnute-halusky>)

Slovak Sour Dumplings Made in Banat - Kysnuté Halušky. For this recipe, the yeast is mixed with sugar in a cup and allowed to ferment with warm milk. In a bowl, the flour is combined with grated lemon peel and activated yeast. The egg yolk beaten with salt and diluted with warm milk is mixed into the dough, after the dough becomes elastic, oil is added and kneaded until it promises a soft texture, which comes off your hands. The dough is left to rise. In a heated pan, the dumplings are fried with oil and lard for about 15-20 minutes, and when the water evaporates, the dumplings turn brown. Finally, the dumplings are greased with melted butter and rolled in sugar with cinnamon or ground walnuts. (<https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/retete-traditionale/galuste-slovacesti-reteta-traditionala-a-slovacilor-din-banat.html>)

In conclusion, the two recipes for Slovak leavened dumplings, one prepared in Nadlac (Crisana) and the other in Banat, reflect distinct culinary traditions and techniques, each with its own particularities. The difference between the two recipes lies in the cooking process and the ingredients used. The dumplings from Nadlac are more aerated due to the longer leavening process and the use of lard, while in Banat, the dough is finer and the dumplings are denser and easier to prepare. However, both dishes are

a symbol of the hospitality and culinary traditions of these regions.

Knedlikii from Crisana. In Crisana, knedlikii are often made from potatoes and flour, having a softer and more airy consistency. It is a dish that reflects the Austro-Hungarian influences in the region, being lighter and more delicate compared to other variants. The dumplings are usually boiled and served with meat dishes and sauces or stews. The preparation is done by boiling, then adding flour and eggs to the mashed potatoes. The dough obtained by kneading is divided into small balls, which are boiled in salted water. After boiling, the dumplings are served with steaks, stews or cabbage. (<https://temananc.ro/retete/knedla-reteta-slovaca-2903.html>)

Knedlikii from Banat- Slovak/Czech inspired version. In Banat, the knedliki recipe is heavier and denser, influenced by the traditions of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, where dumplings are an essential side dish. Here, knedliki are made from flour and water (or milk), and in some cases breadcrumbs or dried bread are added to make them more consistent. These dumplings are usually boiled, but can be fried later to achieve a crispy texture on the outside. They are served with stews or roasts, often accompanied by cabbage. (<https://www.gustos.ro/retete-culinare/knedla-reteta-slovaca.html>)

In conclusion, the culinary preparation Knedliki cooked in Crisana is different from that prepared in Banat. In Crisana, the knedliki are lighter, based on potatoes and flour, while in Banat, the recipe uses equal parts flour and breadcrumbs or dry bread, which gives a denser consistency. The bread in Crisana is softer and airier due to the potatoes, while in Banat it is denser and more consistent due to the bread or breadcrumbs. In both regions, the knedliki are boiled, but in Banat they can also be fried after boiling, which gives them a slightly crispy texture on the outside. Both variants are served with meat, sauces or stews, but in Banat, the knedliki can also be accompanied by cabbage or other side dishes.

Pirohy from Crisana. In Crisana, pirohy are made using a simple dough of flour, water and salt, and the filling is often made of potatoes and onions, having a finer and lighter texture. They are boiled and usually served with melted butter and fried onions or with sauces, depending on preference. Pirohy from Crisana are similar to a kind of "coltunasi" and are a

simple variant, influenced by the Austro-Hungarian traditions of this region. A dough is prepared from flour, water and salt. The dough is rolled out and cut into shapes, these are filled with a mixture of boiled potatoes and fried onions. The pirohy are wrapped and boiled in water. After boiling, they are served with melted butter and fried onions or with sauces. (<https://bucatarieardeleneasca.ro/>)

Banat pirohy. In Banat, pirohy are influenced by traditional recipes from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with a more varied filling including potatoes and onions, can be replaced with cheese, cabbage or meat, and have a more consistent dough. A similar dough is prepared from flour, water and salt, but sometimes eggs are added for a denser texture, then potatoes, cheese or cabbage are used as the filling, after which they are folded and boiled. After boiling, they can be fried in butter to form a crispy crust and served with various sauces. (https://ghidulbanatului.ro/zestre-culinara-de-romana-rista-povestea-paturatei-pe-crumpi-primul-articol-din-noua-rubrica-de-pe-ghidul-banatului-2_12779.html)

Crisana pirohy are simpler and lighter, with a filling based on potatoes and onions, traditionally served with butter and fried onions. On the other hand, pirohy from Banat, influenced by recipes from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, are denser, with more varied fillings - cheese, cabbage or meat - and after boiling they are fried. Both variants present the culinary traditions of the region, but in Banat there are more complex fillings and a more consistent preparation, while Crisana keeps a simpler and easier-to-prepare recipe.

Polenak from Crisana. In Crisana, polenak is a traditional dessert that consists of a yeast dough, filled with a mixture of nuts, sugar, honey and thyme or cinnamon. It is a recipe influenced by the Austro-Hungarian traditions of the area. A yeast dough is prepared from flour, yeast, sugar and water or milk which is then spread into a thin sheet. The filling of nuts, sugar, honey and spices is added and rolled to form a roll, then baked in the oven. Finally, it is served dusted with powdered sugar or glazed with honey. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1hTw1UGo3w&ab_channel=TransilvaniaPolicrom%C4%83TVRCluj_TV3)

Polenak from Banat. In Banat, this dessert is similar to the one in Crisana, but has a richer filling and a more consistent texture. In the Banat recipe, the dough is left to rise and then rolled out into a large sheet. Make a filling

of walnuts, poppy, cheese or apples, distribute it evenly over the dough and roll it out. Add to the oven until golden brown, then glaze with syrup or honey and serve. (https://ghidulbanatului.ro/zestre-culinara-de-romana-rista-povestea-paturatei-pe-crumpi-primul-articol-din-noua-rubrica-de-pe-ghidul-banatului-2_12779.html)

In conclusion, the differences between the two recipes can be found in its preparation. Polenak from Crisana is a simpler traditional dessert, with a filling based on nuts and cinnamon, offering a fluffier texture. In Crisana, polenak is prepared in the form of a roll, while in Banat, it can be made in various shapes and often served with a sweet syrup or honey. Banat polenak, influenced by Slovak and Czech traditions, has more varied fillings with poppy seeds, cheese or apples, and can be served with a sweet syrup or honey, which makes it richer and more hearty. Both variations embody local traditions, but Banat polenak is a more complex dessert and has a heartier texture compared to the Crisana recipe.

Toros kapozsta from Crisana. In Crisana, Toros kapozsta is a hearty dish, reflecting the Hungarian and Slovak influences of the area. The Crisana version includes pork, usually ribs and sometimes pork rinds, all cooked together with cabbage, which can be fresh or pickled, seasoned with garlic, paprika. In this region, the dish is cooked slowly, to allow the meat to become tender. (Consiliul Județean Bihor, 2023)

Toros kapozsta from Banat. In this region, the dish is cooked with pork, the most commonly used being sausages and sauerkraut, which give the dish a specific acidity. It is seasoned with chili pepper, and the dish is often fried at the end. This is a dish that often appears on holiday tables during the winter. (<https://ghidulbanatului.ro/rubrica/retete-banatene>)

In conclusion, Toros kapozsta from Crisana is an easier dish to prepare, which has a base of pork, ribs and rinds, slow-cooked with fresh or sauerkraut and seasoned with spices such as paprika and garlic. In Banat, Toros kapozsta is more substantial by using sauerkraut, sausages and other additional ingredients such as beans and potatoes. The Banat dish is also spicier, with a more pronounced use of chili peppers, and is often fried for a crispy texture.

Zelnik from Crisana. In Crisana, zelnik is a thin pastry made from flour, water and oil, which is folded to create thin layers. The filling is based on cottage cheese, mixed with spinach

or dill. Zelnik is baked in the oven until it becomes crispy on the outside, but remains light and tender on the inside. The dish is served as an appetizer or snack at traditional holiday meal. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zelnik>)

Zelnik from Banat. In Banat, zelnik follows a similar recipe, but with some differences. The dough is generally as thin, but more substantial, and the filling can be, in addition to cottage cheese, potatoes or even minced meat are added in Banat, which makes the dish more substantial than in Crisana. Banat places greater emphasis on the diversity of the filling and the use of local ingredients. (<https://ghidulbanatului.ro/rubrica/retete-banatene>)

In conclusion, the zelnik from Crisana and the one from Banat have common roots in Slovakia, the differences between the two reflect regional adaptations. The zelnik from Crisana is a lighter pie, with a simple filling of cheese and spinach. In contrast, the zelnik from Banat is much richer, with fillings of meat, potatoes and cheese, which makes it more consistent. Spices such as garlic are also added to the preparation. Both dishes have Balkan influences, but with the specific technical preparation of each region.

Hribovica from Crisana. In Crisana, Hribovica is made with dried mushrooms, which are rehydrated to add to the soup. The onion is browned in lard or oil, and potatoes are added to give it consistency. The soup is then thickened with a combination of flour, milk and cream, which gives it a creamy texture. The vinegar added at the end gives a touch of acidity. This soup is usually served as a main course or as a hearty snack. (<https://g4food.ro/supa-slovaceasca-de-ciuperci-sau-hribovica-era-o-supa-pe-care-slovacii-o-consumau-inainte-de-craciun-in-perioada-de-post-cand-carnea-era-interzisa-ingredientul-principal-erau-ciu/>)

Hribovica from Banat. In Banat, Hribovica is also a traditional dish, but with some local gastronomic variations. The soup is made with dried mushrooms but other vegetables are also added, such as carrots or celery, as well as garlic or bay leaves. One aspect that differentiates the dish is that in Banat the soup is thinner than in Crisana, and vinegar is added according to preferences. (https://ghidulbanatului.ro/zestre-culinara-de-romana-rista-povestea-paturatei-pe-crumpi-primul-articol-din-noua-rubrica-de-pe-ghidul-banatului-2_12779.html)

In conclusion, hribovica from Crisana and Banat is a traditional dish taken from Slovak cuisine, each region adding a different traditional technique to the preparation. Hribovica from Crisana is thicker, with a mushroom flavor balanced with vinegar, while in Banat, the soup can be thinner and different flavors are added through additional spices and vegetables. Both variants are differentiated by the texture, ingredients and spices used in the preparation specific to each region.

Bryndzové halušky from Crisana. In Crisana, Bryndzové halušky keeps its recipe according to the traditional Slovak cuisine. The potato dumplings are made from finely grated potatoes, flour, eggs and salt, forming a firm dough which is then boiled in water. An important ingredient of the dish is sheep's cheese (called "bryndzá" in Slovak), finally sour cream and fried bacon are added. These ingredients make Bryndzové halušky a satisfying dish with a traditional specificity in the Crișana area. (Consiliul Județean Bihor, 2023)

Bryndzové halušky from Banat. In Banat, the recipe for Bryndzové halušky differs in texture and ingredients used. As in Crisana, the dumplings are made from grated potatoes, flour, eggs, with a larger amount of water added, and the dough can be less firm. Sheep cheese remains the basic ingredient, and cream is added to create a creamy texture, but in Banat a little butter is added. In this culinary preparation, fried bacon is also added as an essential ingredient. Bryndzové halušky from Banat is a lighter preparation. (<https://calatorii-si-bucatareli.blogspot.com/2015/05/bryndzove-halusky.html>)

In conclusion, the culinary preparation Bryndzové halušky from Crisana and Banat retains its traditional Slovak recipe, but each region adds a distinct local technique. Finally, in Crisana, the preparation is creamier and more consistent due to the sheep cheese and the larger amount of cream. In Banat, the preparation is not as consistent and has a softer dough and often with ingredients such as meat.

Jablečný koláč from Crisana. In Crisana, Jablečný koláč is made with a soft dough, made of flour, butter, sugar, eggs, a little water or milk, which becomes fluffy after baking. The filling consists of baked apples mixed with cinnamon. After the pie is baked, it is left to cool, and finally sugar can be sprinkled on top for extra sweetness. In Crisana, Jablečný koláč is often served as a dessert and is

prepared according to the traditional recipe of Slovak cuisine. (<https://cookidoo.international/recipes/recipe/en/r70219>)

Jablečný koláč from Banat. In Banat, Jablečný koláč keeps the same bases as the Slovak one. The soft dough is also similar in this version to the one from Crisana, in Banat, cornmeal or corn flour can be added to provide a more different texture. The apple filling contains ground nuts and vanilla essence. Finally, in Banat, a layer of powdered sugar is sprinkled or honey is spread on top. (<https://ghidulbanatului.ro/rubrica/retete-banatene>)

In conclusion, both preparations of Jablečný koláč are specific to both Crisana and Banat, the latter retaining its traditional recipe from Slovak cuisine, the differences being brought by the flavors and texture that reflect the local traditions of each area. In Crisana, the pie is simpler, with a filling of apples and cinnamon, while in Banat, additional ingredients such as nuts or vanilla essence are added, resulting in a preparation diversified in flavors, and finally sugar is sprinkled. Both variants represent the culinary traditions of the two regions.

Lecsó from Crisana. In Crisana, Lecsó is prepared similar to the traditional recipe. The dish is cooked by caramelizing onions, to which peppers and tomatoes are then added, as well as sweet or hot paprika. Optionally, meat is added. The final result is a not very dense dish, which can be served with fresh bread or polenta. (Consiliul Județean Bihor, 2023)

Lecsó from Banat. In Banat, Lecsó is a more substantial recipe. In addition to the peppers and tomatoes used in the recipe, smoked meat is used as the main ingredient. Some recipes may also add potatoes to make the dish more filling. The caramelization of the onions, sweet and hot paprika are preserved, where olives or garlic may also be used. Like the dish from Crisana, Lecsó from Banat is often served with polenta or bread. (<https://savoriurbane.com/lecso-reteta-de-tocana-de-ardei>)

Lecsó from Crisana and Banat reflect Hungarian culinary traditions, but each dish is prepared with techniques specific to each region. In Crisana, the dish is simple, using vegetables prepared with paprika and caramelized onions. In Banat, Lecsó is more substantial. The recipe uses potatoes, olives, and garlic, as well as meat. Both culinary

variants differ in texture and the ingredients used depending on the region.

CONCLUSIONS

Romanian cuisine is indeed a culinary treasure, where each region has formed its own specificity, influenced by history, geography and multiculturalism. Banat and Crisana, two regions with significant ethnic diversity, have managed to combine gastronomic elements from several cultures, creating unique and authentic dishes.

These regions have been strongly influenced by the presence of German, Hungarian, Serbian and Slovak communities, each contributing cooking techniques, spices and recipes that have become an integral part of the local cuisine. For example, Banat, with its close historical ties to Austro-Hungary, took on many Central European dishes such as goulash, apple strudel and various variations of smoked sausages and cold cuts.

On the other hand, Crisana is characterized by a combination of Hungarian and Romanian influences, where thick soups, stews and pork dishes are very popular. Dumpling soup, *bogrács* (goulash soup) and “*langosi*” (fried dough) are just a few examples of the cultural synthesis specific to this region.

This mix of influences makes the cuisine of Banat and Crisana one of the most varied in Romania. The study of the common influences in these regions not only brings to the fore the cultural richness of local gastronomy, but also highlights how culinary traditions are passed down and adapted over generations.

REFERENCES

- Roman, R.A., 2010, *Poveștile bucătăriei românești*, Editura Paideia, București.
- x x x GHIDUL GASTRONOMIC AL ROMÂNIEI - BUCĂTĂRIA TRADITIONALĂ, 2010, Editura LHR, București.
- Consiliul Județean Bihor, 2023, *Rețete tradiționale de Bihor*, debihor.com
- <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banat>
- <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisana>
- <https://memoriabanatului.ro/wp-content/uploads/Banatul-din-memorie.pdf>
- <https://raftulbucuriei.ro/retete/gustul-calatoriei-prin-frumoasa-romania-bunatati-din-crisana/>
- http://www.revista-alternante.de/Irina_Petras_-_Transilvania_din_cuvinte.pdf
- <https://www.dulceromanie.ro/oameni-care-ne-inspira/galuste-dospite-slovacesti-de-nadlac-kysnute-halusky>
- <https://www.lauralaurentiu.ro/retete-culinare/retete-traditionale/galuste-slovacesti-reteta-traditionala-a-slovacilor-din-banat.html>

- <https://temananc.ro/retete/knedla-reteta-slovaca-2903.html>
- <https://www.gustos.ro/retete-culinare/knedla-reteta-slovaca.html>
- <https://bucatarieardeleneasca.ro/>
- https://ghidulbanatului.ro/zestre-culinara-de-romana-rista-povestea-paturatei-pe-crumpl-primul-articol-din-noua-rubrica-de-pe-ghidul-banatului-2_12779.html
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1hTw1UGo3w&ab_channel=TransilvaniaPolicrom%C4%83TVRCluj_TV3
- <https://ghidulbanatului.ro/rubrica/retete-banatene>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zelnik>
- <https://g4food.ro/supa-slovaceasca-de-ciuperci-sau-hribovica-era-o-supa-pe-care-slovacii-o-consumau-inainte-de-craciun-in-perioada-de-post-cand-carnea-era-interzisa-ingredientul-principal-erau-ciu/>
- <https://cookidoo.international/recipes/recipe/en/r70219>
- <https://savoriurbane.com/lecso-reteta-de-tocana-de-ardei/>