

GASTROGRAPHY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

Gastrography is an innovative gastronomic concept based in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, that celebrates and promotes Europe's rich heritage of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) products. Rooted in authenticity and cultural diversity, the restaurant offers a unique dining experience where every dish is crafted exclusively with PDO/PGI-certified ingredients, highlighting traditional methods and regional excellence. Beyond the culinary experience, Gastrography includes interactive workshops designed to educate and immerse guests in the stories, techniques, and tasting profiles of these emblematic products. Complementing the experience is a curated boutique offering PDO/PGI items and branded merchandise, allowing visitors to take a piece of Europe's gastronomic legacy home. Cluj-Napoca, known for its dynamic multiculturalism and growing interest in culinary tourism, provides the ideal setting for this concept to thrive and foster appreciation for protected food heritage.

Keywords: Food tourism, PEST, Porter's Five Forces Analysis, SWOT

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INTRODUCTION

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) are European quality schemes that recognize and protect the names of regional foods. PDO products are made, processed, and prepared in a specific geographical area using traditional methods, ensuring a strong link between the product and its origin. PGI products also highlight the importance of origin, but allow for more flexibility, requiring that at least one stage of production takes place in the designated area. These labels guarantee authenticity, preserve culinary heritage, and support local economies by valuing regional know-how and identity.

Today, PDO and PGI products enjoy growing recognition and demand beyond Europe, with exports reaching markets across Asia, North America, and the Middle East. Products like Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma, Roquefort, and Kalamata olives are consumed and appreciated worldwide not only for their quality, but also for the stories and traditions they represent. This global interest reflects a rising consumer awareness of origin,

traceability, and artisanal food production, positioning PDO and PGI products as ambassadors of European food culture on the

international stage. However, not only European products are the ones that enjoy this protection, but other products also that are commercialized in the area can obtain this scheme as part of different agreements.

Promoting these products is essential not only for preserving gastronomic heritage, but also for protecting producers from imitation and unfair competition. Education and visibility; through restaurants, workshops, and retail experiences play a vital role in helping consumers understand the value behind the labels. By raising awareness, we foster appreciation for regional diversity, support rural communities, and encourage more sustainable, transparent food systems. In this context, concepts like Gastrography act as cultural ambassadors, connecting people with the identity, history, and craftsmanship behind PDO and PGI products.

According to a 2019 study, 80.3% of consumers do not recognize the PGI logo, and 78.6% do not recognize the PDO logo. However, among the products with the highest level of

awareness and consumption are Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma, etc. They are mainly purchased in supermarkets and food fairs (Nistoreanu et al, 2019).

As a measure of this situations and other factors (environmental, social, sustainability, economical) that affect the consumption, and most important, the recognition of these products, it has been decided that one of the best ideas for promotion can be a restaurant that promote the sense of belonging, involucrate people and cooperate with small producers for a better recognition of the products.

This analysis of the proposal focuses on the relevant research literature about business project related with food industry and tourism. The paper aims to identify the specific product-market fit that will serve as the starting point for launching this new business.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The primary methodology used to analyze the project's feasibility and development is an individualized roadmap for business internationalization. This approach supports business growth through a comprehensive five-step:

1. Development Process Assessment: Analyses the business environment to determine the existence of market opportunities for the proposed venture.

2. Product Internationalization Assessment: Examines key variables such as company context, consumer needs, product offerings, customer satisfaction, timing, and competitors.

3. Resources Internationalization Assessment: Evaluates the human resources, materials, equipment, and facilities required to support the business operations.

4. Communication Internationalization Assessment: Focuses on developing the business's visual identity and communication strategy.

5. Financial Internationalization Assessment: Reviews the financial aspects, including costs, revenues, and profitability projections.

Each step targets a critical component of building a successful business, collectively aiming to assess the overall feasibility of the business idea in the target market.

Additionally, PEST analysis and Porter's Five Forces framework were applied to understand the competitive landscape and

external factors influencing market entry. These analyses were informed by relevant international literature and databases on food tourism and consumption of PDO/PGI products. Complementing these, a SWOT analysis helped identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, providing a multidisciplinary perspective to effectively position the products in the market.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

PEST Analysis

A PEST analysis was performed in order to identify different factors that may or might contribute to the correct development of the business:

• Political

EU Membership & Regulations: Romania's EU membership ensures alignment with regulations for PDO/PGI product protection, food labeling, and hygiene standards, which benefits a business based on authenticity and quality. With this type of relationship, several factors can be covered in the business, especially those related with policies and regulations.

Support for Local & Cultural Enterprises: National and regional governments (including Cluj city council) often support initiatives related to gastronomy, tourism, and cultural identity, potentially enabling access to grants or promotion. The good working of Cluj authorities can help to a better development of the settling of the business, especially to build alliances and partnerships.

Trade & Import Policy: Gastrography may rely on importing certified products from other EU countries; smooth cross-border trade within the EU favors this, although customs formalities can still impact cost and logistics.

Bureaucracy & Licensing: Romanian administrative processes may be time-consuming when setting up hospitality businesses, applying for workshop permits, or registering as a retail food operator.

•Economic

Rising Middle Class: Cluj-Napoca is one of Romania's most economically dynamic cities, with a growing tech sector, student population, and higher-income consumers more open to premium food and trendy experiences. According to Luca (2013) Cluj population consumption patterns of food and different stuff are higher than other Romanian cities.

Tourism Growth: Romania's increasing appeal as a tourist destination, especially for niche markets like food tourism, creates demand for authentic culinary concepts like Gastrography that might help to the development of interest and promotion of consumption of local and traditional food from different part of Europe or from the World.

Cost Structure & Pricing: PDO/PGI products can be expensive due to import costs and strict sourcing criteria. This affects menu pricing and may position the restaurant in the premium market segment. Despite that the concept is not a luxurious restaurant, prices can be competitive.

Economic Volatility: Inflation and changes in consumer purchasing power could limit discretionary spending on premium dining and gourmet products.

• Social

Multicultural & Young Demographic: Cluj's diverse population of students, foreigners, expats, and professional's values international culture and unique experiences. This is ideal for a concept based on European culinary heritage and to the promotion of different products in the market, especially those that represent the sense of belonging.

Growing Food Awareness: Consumers are increasingly conscious of food quality, origin, and sustainability, values aligned with the PDO/PGI philosophy and schemes.

Cultural Education Appeal: The workshops offer a social and educational dimension, appealing to food enthusiasts and tourists interested in learning about traditions and protected products. Promoting the "storytelling" helps to understand what's behind the product and giving credits to the producers.

Limited PDO/PGI Recognition: Despite alignment with EU standards, awareness of PDO/PGI labelling among Romanian consumers remains relatively low. Educating the market will be key. According to the authors Glogovetan and Pocol (2024) there is a lack of information and some gaps that need to be filled into the segment of recognition of different quality schemes in food products to standardization.

• Technological

Digital Marketing Tools: Strong potential for brand visibility and storytelling through Instagram, TikTok, and culinary blogs. Highlighting PDO/PGI products' heritage can

resonate with curious audiences. Especially in a city which a big part of the population are students, which a representative group of social media users.

E-commerce Integration: Opportunity to sell PDO/PGI products and merchandise through an online store, expanding Gastrography's reach beyond physical visitors. Taking into advantage the good development of Cluj-Napoca in IT services.

Reservation & Booking Systems: Online platforms can streamline restaurant and workshop reservations, improving customer experience and operational efficiency.

Traceability & Transparency Tech: Digital tools can support supply chain traceability, reinforcing the authenticity and trust in PDO/PGI products, essential for brand credibility and for regulations and policies comply, especially for methodologies like HACCP that must be implemented in a management of food products.

Porter's Five Forces model

A Porter's Five Forces model helps in identifying and analysing the competitive forces that shape an industry. (Gratton P. 2024). This model is applied to Gastrography to understand its position in the market.

• Threat of New Entrants (Moderate)

Barriers to entry in the restaurant sector are generally low, especially in urban areas like Cluj-Napoca where the market is active and relatively open. However, Gastrography's niche positioning is focused on PDO/PGI-certified products and educational workshops, creates a unique identity that is harder to replicate. Importing and consistently sourcing authentic PDO/PGI products adds logistical complexity that could discourage casual entrants. The initial costs for setting up a premium-quality dining experience, plus compliance with EU food traceability regulations, increase the barrier slightly.

• Bargaining Power of Suppliers (Moderate to High)

Gastrography depends on authentic PDO/PGI producers, many of whom are in specific European regions and abroad of Romania. Since PDO/PGI products are protected and often produced by small-scale, traditional producers, supplier options may be limited, especially for exclusive or seasonal products.

Import costs and fluctuations in supply (due to weather, production limits, or geopolitical factors) may further increase supplier power. To reduce this risk, building direct relationships with producers or cooperatives can improve supply reliability and reduce intermediary costs. As a reason of this, it has been decided to work only with producers and try to eliminate middlemen.

- **Bargaining Power of Buyers (Moderate)**

Customers in Cluj-Napoca are price-sensitive but also increasingly interested in quality, authenticity, and unique experiences. As Gastrography offers a differentiated concept (PDO/PGI cuisine + workshops + shop), it reduces direct comparability with regular restaurants or shops, which lowers buyer power. However, if the value is not clearly communicated or if prices are perceived as too high, customers may opt for more conventional or cheaper dining options or even eat the products from the supermarket.

- **Threat of Substitutes (Moderate to High)**

Substitute experiences include other mid- to-premium restaurants, supermarkets offering PDO/PGI or similar gourmet items, or online food retail. Home cooking, food delivery apps, and local specialty stores also pose indirect competition, especially if they offer convenience and variety. Gastrography can counter this threat by offering an immersive, educational, and sensorial experience (via workshops and storytelling), which cannot be easily replicated at home or through retail.

- **Industry Rivalry (Moderate)**

Cluj-Napoca has a growing and competitive food scene, with increasing numbers of concept restaurants, cafés, and gourmet shops. However, few businesses focus specifically on certified European regional products and combine restaurant, workshop, and retail functions, making Gastrography's model relatively unique.

Rivalry may intensify if other players start to replicate the PDO/PGI concept or if market trends shift toward other types of niche dining (e.g., vegan, fusion, or local-only).

In a rapidly growing industry like the food sector, competition tends to be less intense, as the expanding market allows businesses to thrive without aggressively

competing for customers. While the services provided by the concept may appear like those offered by other high-quality restaurants and culinary workshops, Gastrography sets itself apart by delivering a distinctive experience that adds unique value.

The SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis is applied to understand the internal and external forces that might create opportunities or threats for Gastrography. The summary of this can be seen in the figure 1.

- **Strengths**

Unique Concept: Combines gastronomy, education, and retail, offering a one-of-a-kind experience in Cluj-Napoca.

High-Quality Products: Focus on PDO/PGI products guarantees authenticity, quality, and strong cultural value.

Cultural and Culinary Education: Workshops add depth to the customer experience and create emotional engagement with the brand.

EU Integration: Romania's EU membership facilitates access to certified products and legal protection for authenticity claims.

Multicultural Target Market: Cluj's diverse population (students, professionals, tourists) is open to international food culture and experiential dining.

- **Weaknesses**

High Operating Costs: Premium ingredients and imported PDO/PGI products can increase cost structure and limit price flexibility.

Limited Brand Awareness: PDO/PGI labelling is not yet widely recognized or understood by Romanian consumers, requiring significant educational marketing.

Niche Market: A specialized concept may appeal to a smaller segment of the population, especially in early stages.

Complex Supply Chain: Reliance on specific producers and European supply networks may cause availability or consistency issues.

- **Opportunities**

Rising Interest in Food Authenticity: Global and local trends support traceable, traditional, and sustainable food products.

Growing Food Tourism in Romania: Gastrography can position itself as a destination for culinary tourists and organized cultural tours.

Digital Expansion: E-commerce for PDO/PGI products and merchandise could attract buyers beyond Cluj and create a secondary revenue stream.

Collaborations with Institutions: Partnerships with culinary schools, embassies, or EU-funded promotional programs can boost visibility and credibility.

• Threats

Economic Uncertainty: Inflation or reduced disposable income could affect customer willingness to spend on premium dining and experiences.

Copycat Concepts: As the market evolves, other players may try to imitate the idea, especially if PDO/PGI products become more popular.

Regulatory Changes: Changes in EU agricultural or labelling regulations could affect product availability or classification.

Cultural Disconnect: If consumers don't relate to or value PDO/PGI concepts, the brand may face resistance or indifference.



Fig. 1. SWOT analysis for Gastrography. Source: Own.

Business Model of Canvas

For the development of this project, a business model has been done to identify the main factors and parts that contributes to a success in the business.

With all the information previously analysed and several factors identified in the PEST and SWOT analysis, it is important to mention what the business is trying to reach.

In the case of the costumer segment, the target is to reach citizens of the city of Cluj-Napoca, but also tourists that visit the area.

The channels of the project will be based on: Location for Restaurant & Villages for the Workshops (Physically), social media for Engagement & interaction (Digital) Partnership

and External Channels with Tourism & Travel agencies, Schools and Culinary institutes.

The value proposition based on the uniqueness of products offered (Dishes based on GI products), wide variety of products from different countries/ Authenticity and Quality Assurance, Immersive Gastronomy offered. Sustainability based on support of local producers. Strong marketing campaign and promotion of sense of belonging and information of the products

With revenue streams of:

- Restaurant Sales
- Workshops Subscriptions
- Merchandise

- Retail and GI product sales
- Digital Revenue for content creation
- Partnerships with other institutions

(Culinary Schools)

And a fixed cost structure of:

- Location and infrastructure
- Utilities
- Staffs Salaries and Benefits
- Licenses and Compliance with law

and regulations

- Maintenance

And a variable cost structure of:

- Ingredients and raw materials
- Workshops expenses
- Marketing and Costumer engagement

(Digital)

- E-commerce Costs

Mission and Vision

In the figure 2, it can be seen the logo of the business and different branding proposition for the on running of the project.



Fig. 2. Logo and Branding. Source: Own.

Being the mission and vision of the project, the following ones:

Mission: “To create immersive culinary experiences that celebrate cultural heritage through Geographical Indication products, combining traditional dining, hands-on workshops, and curated merchandise.”

Vision: “To become a leading destination for authentic, story-driven gastronomy that connects people to the origins, flavours, and traditions behind the world’s most unique regional foods.” enabled fermenters that automate temperature control, timing, and even track fermentation stages via sensors. This could further lower the barrier for beginners and bring fermentation into the realm of precision cooking and health tech(Adebo, 2023). Brands offering compatible cultures and

CONCLUSIONS

Gastrography emerges as a unique and innovative culinary concept that blends gastronomy, education, and retail through the exclusive use of PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) products. Located in the multicultural city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, the project is strategically positioned to appeal to a diverse and curious audience that values authenticity, tradition, and high-quality food experiences.

Through a detailed analysis using internationalization frameworks, PEST, Porter’s Five Forces, and SWOT tools, the feasibility and strategic positioning of Gastrography have been thoroughly examined. The findings reveal strong potential for market differentiation, especially in the context of a growing interest in sustainable, traceable, and culturally rich food offerings. However, challenges such as limited consumer awareness of quality labels, high operating costs, and supply chain complexity must be addressed through effective communication, strategic partnerships, and continuous education.

Ultimately, Gastrography does not only aim to be a restaurant, but a cultural hub that promotes Europe’s rich gastronomic heritage while contributing to the development of food tourism and consumer education in Romania. Its success will depend on its ability to tell

digital fermentation support could gain early-mover advantage in this space.

As awareness grows in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as post-Brexit UK, new pockets of opportunity are forming. These regions often have strong cultural ties to fermentation but lack modern, accessible tools. Liquid starter products can reintroduce ancestral food wisdom with modern convenience, especially when paired with storytelling that honors local traditions.

In essence, the next decade of fermentation innovation will not be about simply selling cultures—it will be about empowering a new generation of fermenters through knowledge, tools, and culture (in every sense of the word).

compelling product stories, build customer loyalty, and remain adaptive in a dynamic food landscape.

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