



ULST Timisoara
**Multidisciplinary Conference on
Sustainable Development**
21-22 May 2026



CULINARY TRADITIONS OF MARAMURES AND THEIR ROLE IN ROMANIAN GASTRONOMIC PATRIMONY

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the gastronomic characteristics of the Maramures region from an ethnogastronomic and nutritional perspective, highlighting the correlation between local agri-food resources, geographical factors, and traditional culinary practices. Maramures gastronomy is characterized by a well-defined traditional food system, in which dishes made from basic ingredients sourced from one's own household predominate. The structure of the menus is influenced by seasonality and the nature of local occupations, which leads to the frequent use of meat, dairy, and grain products. Traditional dishes, such as hearty soups, pork-based dishes, and traditional desserts, reflect the community's way of life and the use of locally available ingredients. The study also highlights the influence of customs and holidays on culinary practices, emphasizing the importance of gastronomy in the social and spiritual life of the community. By showcasing local products and authentic recipes, Maramures cuisine contributes to the promotion of cultural heritage and the development of gastronomic tourism.

• Introduction

Romanian cuisine is the term used to describe the result of the gradual synthesis of the culinary traditions specific to the Romanian people. It is diverse, encompassing countless culinary customs and traditions, as well as specific dishes, along with customs resulting from the intersection of the culinary culture with the traditions of other peoples with whom the Romanian people have come into contact throughout history.

Maramureş cuisine is simple and based on a few basic ingredients: sheep's milk, cheese, curd cheese, jintiţă (a dairy product made from whey), cornmeal, wheat flour, pork (especially smoked), sausages, eggs, potatoes, cabbage, and honey. It is a rural cuisine, tied to pastoral life. The delicious flavor comes not from variety, but from the quality of local ingredients and the preservation of traditional recipes.

• Material and method

For this study, the authors consulted a bibliography comprising scholarly works, monographs on the Maramureş region, ethnographic publications, and traditional recipes preserved within families. The research methodology combines classic methods and techniques of scientific inquiry: documentation, analysis, and synthesis of information, as well as the formulation of conclusions.

• Results and discussions

The cuisine of Maramures is simple, hearty, and closely tied to rural life and local resources. The region's cuisine is based on ingredients such as cornmeal, potatoes, cabbage, sheep's milk, cheese, and pork or mutton, often preserved by smoking or salting. The dishes are generally hearty and slow-cooked, with many prepared in a cauldron or in a bread oven.

"Sarmale" (stuffed cabbage), also known in some parts of Maramures as "piroşte" (a linguistic term linked to Slavic and Ukrainian influences on the local dialect and cuisine), are one of the region's most important traditional dishes, a staple at festive meals, weddings, patron saint's day celebrations, and other family events. They are prepared with pork or cornmeal (coarsely ground corn) and wrapped in sauerkraut leaves.

"Tocana" is a dish consisting of warm polenta layered ("stacked in layers") with sheep's cheese and small pieces of fried bacon or cracklings. Sometimes sour cream or butter is added as well. The combination offers a hearty and satisfying flavor, characteristic of traditional Maramures cuisine.

"Plăcinta creţă" (curly pie) is a traditional dish representative of Maramureş cuisine, prized both for its taste and its unique preparation method.

The name comes from the "creţ" (curly) appearance of the dough sheets, which are rolled out very thinly, then gathered and arranged in layers or in a spiral shape. The filling varies by region and occasion, but the most common versions include cottage cheese, sheep's cheese, potatoes, or cabbage. After baking, the pie develops a crispy exterior and a soft interior, and is enjoyed both hot and cold.

"Coleaşa" is a traditional dish specific to Maramures, representing a local variation of the peasant bulz. It consists of polenta with a softer consistency, combined with sheep's and cow's milk cheese and cracklings (fried bacon). In some areas, this dish is prepared by layering the polenta with cheese and fried bacon, resembling the Tocana of Maramures.

"Vărzar" is the name of a pie made with sheep's cheese, dill, and onions. The dough is made with flour, lard, eggs, and yeast. The filling consists of grated sheep's cheese, green onion leaves, and dill. After assembly, the vărzar is baked or fried until it develops a lightly browned crust, keeping the filling creamy and flavorful on the inside.

"Ciurigăi" are a traditional dish from Maramureş, similar to doughnuts but with a more distinctive shape and a crispy texture. They are made from a dough of eggs, flour, and white wine, kneaded until smooth, then rolled out into a very thin sheet. The sheet is cut into narrow strips, which are rolled by hand and shaped into bows. The pieces are then fried in oil until they turn golden brown and become crispy. They are served with powdered sugar sprinkled on top.

• Conclusions

This study highlights the fact that the cuisine of Maramureş is an essential component of the local cultural heritage, being closely linked to the rural way of life and the area's natural resources. Traditional dishes are characterized by simplicity, substance, and the use of local ingredients, reflecting a food economy based on self-sufficiency.

An analysis of these dishes reveals the diversity and coherence of a well-preserved culinary tradition, in which food is not merely a source of sustenance but also a bearer of cultural identity and collective memory.