

FLAVOURS OF DOBROGEA



Ancient Roots, Living Waters, Timeless Taste

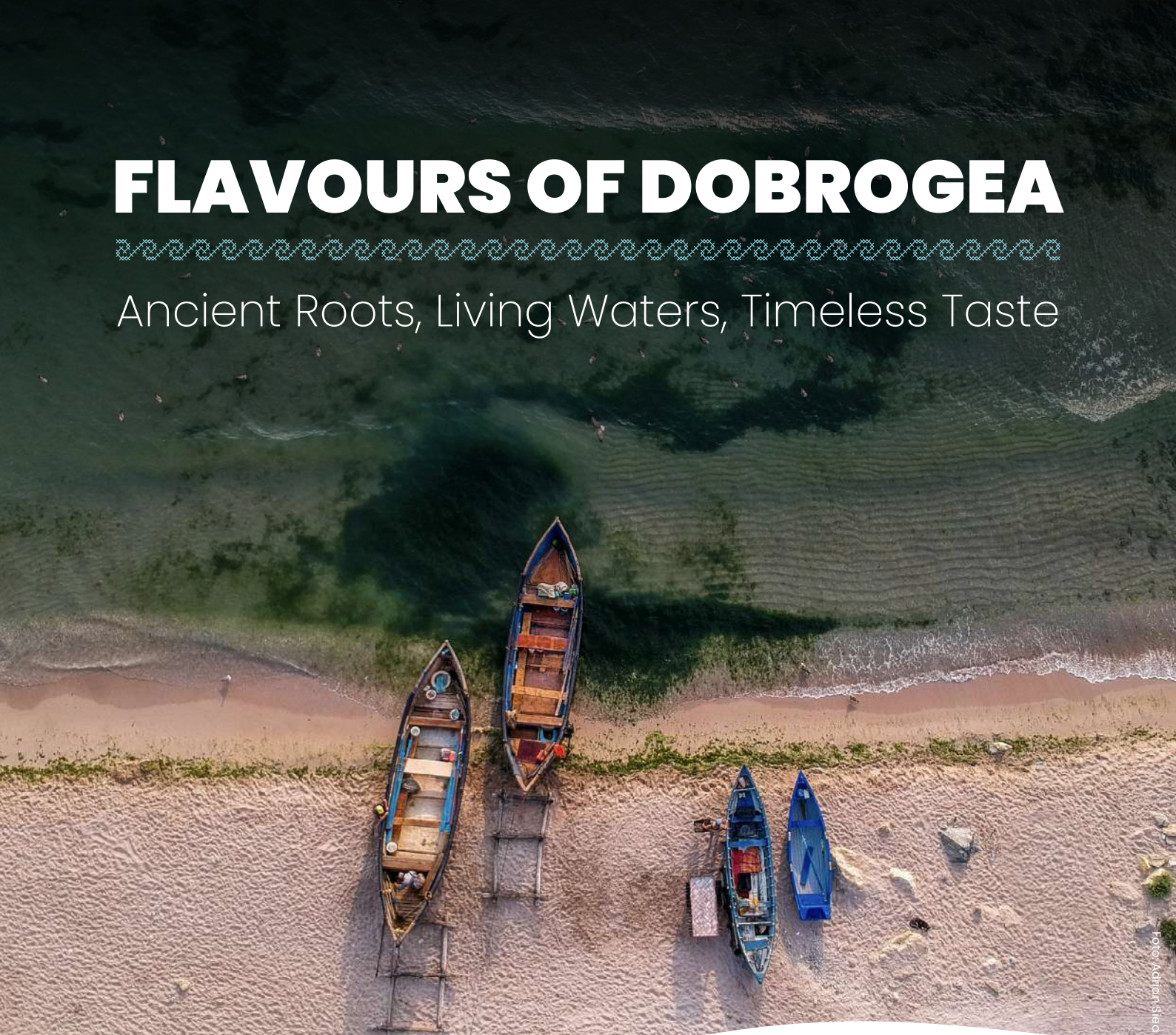


Foto: Adrian Sted



EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY
DOBROGEA CANDIDATE 2029



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
GASTRONOMY, CULTURE, ARTS AND TOURISM

Contents

12

Flavours of Dobrogea: Ancient Roots, Living Waters, Timeless Taste

Ancient Roots: A Brief History of Dobrogea 14

Living Waters: A Territory Shaped by Land and Water 26

Timeless Taste: Dobrogea's Multicultural Gastronomy 29

38

European Region of Gastronomy – Why This Opportunity Matters Now

40

From Vision to Action: Dobrogea through the IGCAT Focus Areas

Feeding the Planet 42

Innovation, Creativity and Job Opportunities 56

Educating for Our Future 76

Regenerative Food Destinations 92

Urban and Rural Citizen Engagement 102

Well-being and Healthier Living 116

126

Governance and Partnerships

130

Coordination Mechanisms

131

Ambassadors and Community Visibility

136

Programme Framework and Public Engagement

148

Communication and Promotion Plan

152

Economic Provision / Budget

153

Legacy and Long-term Impact



Teodora Moraru
Vice President, UNPR-RSE



For the National Union of Romanian Employers - Southeast Region (UNPR-RSE), the candidacy of Dobrogea for the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2029 is both a strategic responsibility and a natural continuation of our mission to support the business community of South-East Romania. We believe that Dobrogea's gastronomic heritage can drive sustainable economic development, connecting local producers, the hospitality sector, SMEs, start-ups, artisans and cultural actors into one regional ecosystem.

Our activity focuses on representing companies, facilitating partnerships, encouraging entrepreneurship and creating stronger links between the private sector, public institutions and local communities. Through this candidacy, we aim to support market access and visibility, food education, short supply chains, responsible tourism, innovation, professional training and stronger urban-rural links.

UNPR-RSE reaffirms its commitment to mobilising the business community, supporting producers and hospitality actors, and helping Dobrogea 2029 create lasting opportunities, strengthen local identity and leave behind a more resilient, creative and collaborative regional economy.



Ștefan Ilie
Mayor of Tulcea



For the Tulcea Municipality City Hall, Dobrogea's bid for the title of European Region of Gastronomy in 2029 is a major opportunity to showcase the culinary heritage of our city, Tulcea County, and the entire region. Its value is simply immeasurable!

The City Hall I represent founded the Destination Management Organization (DMO) Tulcea three years ago, an entity through which we promote tourism in our area and which has become one of the stakeholders in the bidding consortium. A main component of our marketing strategy is precisely the culinary one. Our city prides itself on several highly regarded restaurants with a fish-focused menu (thanks to the Danube's bounty) or Dobrogean cuisine (thanks to the region's impressive ethnic mosaic).

We all hope for the success of this bid. We know that securing this much-desired title will be a great development opportunity for Dobrogea. As the Mayor of Tulcea Municipality, I commit to contributing fully, with everything I can, to ensure this objective is achieved.



Horia Teodorescu
President of Tulcea
County Council



Dobrogea is a region of cultural diversity, living traditions, and the coming together of communities that have, over the centuries, forged an authentic culinary identity. The candidacy for the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2029 represents more than just gastronomic recognition; it is an opportunity to transform gastronomy into a tool for economic development and cultural education. We aim to strengthen the connection between tradition and innovation, between communities and visitors, and between heritage and the future.

Through the involvement of institutions, the private sector, local communities, and cultural partners, Dobrogea affirms its willingness to actively contribute to the European values of diversity, intercultural dialogue, and gastronomic excellence by promoting a development model based on sustainability, inclusion, and cooperation.

As President of Tulcea County Council, I pledge, alongside the institution I represent and "Eco Delta" Tourism Destination Management Organization, the commitment to actively support this candidacy and to make every effort necessary to promote Dobrogea's gastronomic heritage, develop local and international partnerships and implement a sustainable vision of positioning Dobrogea as a European benchmark for culinary diversity and excellence.



Florin Chelaru
Mayor of Năvodari



Dobrogea's candidacy for the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2029 is a chance to show Europe who we are: a region of authentic tastes, cultural diversity and traditions kept alive by our communities.

In this story, Năvodari has a special place. The gastronomy of our city is deeply connected to water, to people and to the history of the place. From cherhandale and fishermen's restaurants to recipes passed down within families, here the taste of the sea and lakes is transformed into memorable culinary experiences.

Mamaia Nord resort, located within our city's administrative area, completes this identity and carries it further. Here, seaside tourism naturally meets gastronomic tourism and many of those who visit us return home not only with the memory of the sea, but also with the taste of a good meal by the water.

Năvodari is the "City between Waters", and this identity is reflected in its landscape, its people and its local cuisine. The Black Sea, Lake Siutghiol, Lake Tașaul and the Danube-Black Sea Canal have given us not only natural beauty, but also a gastronomic tradition that we have a duty to promote.

Dobrogea deserves to be known through its tastes, through Romanian, Turkish, Tatar, Greek and Aromanian influences, but above all through the communities that have transformed this diversity into a unique culinary identity. And Năvodari and Mamaia Nord have their own story to tell in this European journey.



Oana Valeria Zaharia
Interim Manager,
The National Institute
of Heritage



Dobrogea, a meeting place between East and West, is one of Europe's most valuable multicultural regions, where traditions, communities and gastronomy have coexisted harmoniously for centuries. The ethnic diversity of this province: Romanians, Turks, Tatars, Lipovans, Ukrainians, Greeks, Aromanians, Bulgarians and Germans, has created an authentic culinary heritage, rooted in simple flavours, local ingredients and recipes passed down from generation to generation.

The European Region of Gastronomy distinction offers Dobrogea the opportunity to bring this unique cultural and gastronomic heritage to the fore, transforming tradition into an ambassador of local identity. From the fish dishes of the Danube Delta to the oriental aromas of Dobrogean villages, the region's cuisine tells the story of a territory shaped by diversity and hospitality. Dobrogean gastronomy is not only about food, but also about memory, community and cultural continuity, becoming a bridge between past and future.



Dr. Daniela Mihai
Deputy Director,
The National Institute
of Heritage



Surrounded to the north by the ancient Măcin Mountains and guarded by the waters of the Danube and the Black Sea, Dobrogea holds a treasure of multiculturalism and culinary traditions, carefully preserved in communities such as Greci, Izvoarele, Telița, Ghindărești, Cobadin, Constanța, Tulcea and in many other settlements with distinct identities. Each of these reflects a unique cultural blend, giving rise to an impressive gastronomic universe.

If we were to define the taste of Dobrogea, this would be almost impossible: it is rich, surprising, full of aromas, colours and influences, a living heritage of coexistence among ethnic communities.

Dobrogea's food system was shaped over time through the relationship between local resources, traditional occupations, beliefs and the way of life of the communities that have shaped this territory. Romanians, Lipovans, Ukrainians, Turks, Tatars, Aromanians and Greeks have built, together, a gastronomy of dialogue and cultural exchange. Culinary practices, techniques, symbols and customs related to food thus become essential landmarks of identity and collective memory, transforming Dobrogea into an authentic European space of diversity and hospitality.



Dr. Laura Boicenco
General Director, INCDM



For the National Institute for Marine Research and Development "Grigore Antipa", the concept of "blue economy" is not merely theoretical, but the very foundation on which its entire activity of research and monitoring in the Black Sea is built.

All our departments contribute directly to the sustainable development of marine space. From the assessment of fishery resources and aquaculture to oceanographic monitoring, biodiversity protection and coastal zone management, our expertise covers the full spectrum of blue growth. We focus our efforts on transforming scientific data into practical solutions for industry and decision-makers.

Through the Department of Marine Ecology and Biology, we protect the natural capital that supports tourism and ecosystem services. The Department of Physical Oceanography and Coastal Engineering provides the essential data for navigation safety and renewable energy, while our specialists in the Department of Living Marine Resources ensure food security through sustainable fishing practices, including aquaculture solutions.

At the same time, through the Department of Chemical Oceanography and Marine Pollution, we rigorously monitor the quality of waters and sediments, identifying sources of contamination in order to ensure a clean environment, essential for the health of ecosystems and the long-term success of all investments in the sphere of the blue economy.

European Region of Gastronomy award represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen the bridge between research and the responsible use of marine resources.



Prof. Lucreția-Claudia Portase
General School Inspector



The candidacy of Dobrogea for the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2029 represents for us, as Constanța County School Inspectorate (ISJ CT), both an honor and a responsibility, reflecting a deep commitment to heritage, sustainability and the well-being of future generations. At the heart of this endeavour lies education, a fundamental pillar in shaping values, behaviours and connections within our community.

ISJ CT plays a vital and meaningful role in this shared vision, contributing through initiatives that nurture awareness, responsibility and pride in local identity. In alignment with the IGCAT framework, educational institutions across the region support key priority areas that bridge knowledge with lived experience.

Through nationally endorsed programmes such as "Școala Altfel" (Alternative Education Week) and "Săptămâna Verde" (Green Week), students explore healthy nutrition, environmental stewardship and sustainable living. These experiences are complemented by activities that celebrate local traditions and bring learning closer to everyday life through gardening, cooking and educational visits.

Equally important is the effort to strengthen the bond between urban and rural communities, helping students understand local practices and ways of life. Civic involvement, volunteering and community-based events cultivate empathy, cooperation and active citizenship, while vocational and technological education fosters innovation, creativity and meaningful career paths in gastronomy, agriculture and tourism.

Together, these efforts reflect a forward-looking approach, where education becomes a bridge between tradition and innovation and where each young person is empowered to contribute to a sustainable and vibrant future for Dobrogea.



Teodor Frolu
Co-founder & Vice-President,
Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association



Dobrogea's gastronomy reflects a living connection between communities, nature, and cultural heritage. Across the Danube Delta and the wider region, culinary traditions have emerged through the meeting of Romanian, Lipovan, Turkish, Tatar, Greek, and Aromanian influences, expressing the diversity that defines this territory. Today, these local resources are becoming increasingly important for the sustainable development of the region.

The Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association strongly supports Dobrogea's candidacy for the title of European Region of Gastronomy 2029, believing that this initiative can strengthen slow tourism, local economies and the promotion of food heritage. The growing network of Local Gastronomic Points already demonstrates how gastronomy can become a real instrument for supporting communities and preserving local identity.

Through this candidacy, Dobrogea has the opportunity to position itself as a European model of collaboration between culture, nature, community life, and local entrepreneurship.



**Associate professor PhD.
Dan-Marcel Iliescu**
Rector, Ovidius University of Constanța



Ovidius University of Constanța bears the name of the Roman poet who, exiled to these shores two millennia ago, found not desolation but wonder – a land where civilizations met, blended, and created something entirely their own. That spirit of cultural confluence has never left Dobrogea.

As an academic institution rooted in this extraordinary territory, we witness, every day, the living heritage that makes Dobrogea unlike any other region within Europe. Romanians, Greeks, Turks, Tatars, Lipovans, Armenians, and many other communities stretching across centuries of shared history not only coexisted here; they have woven together a culinary identity of remarkable depth and authenticity, where every dish carries the memory of a past shaped equally by the Danube and the Black Sea.

Ovidius University is proud to support Dobrogea's candidacy as European Region of Gastronomy 2029. Through research, education, and community engagement, we are committed to document, preserve, and celebrate this multicultural gastronomic heritage – ensuring that its timeless flavors nourish not only our tables, but future generations across Europe.



Official commitment of the Regional Stakeholders Committee

The Regional Stakeholders Committee of the region of „Dobrogea, Candidate for the European Region of Gastronomy award 2029” through his members – representing public institutions, the private sector, academia, and non-governmental organisations – expresses firm commitment to support the principles (visibility, cohesion, knowledge sharing), focus areas and criteria underlining the European Region of Gastronomy Award. We will work with the long-term aim, together with our partners across the region, to provide a sustainable future based on cultural and food diversity.

We uphold the values of cultural and culinary diversity, sustainability and cooperation, undertaking the following objectives:

To promote the gastronomic heritage, multicultural identity and distinctive food traditions of Dobrogea, both nationally and internationally

To develop projects and events that bring together gastronomy, culture, education, innovation, nature and tourism

To engage local communities, producers, the HoReCa sector, educational institutions, research and innovation actors and all relevant stakeholders in this shared endeavour

To comply with the standards and criteria established by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Art and Tourism (IGCAT) and the World Regions of Gastronomy Platform

To ensure the international visibility of Dobrogea through partnerships, exchanges of best practices and active collaboration with other regions

To contribute to the sustainable development of the region through initiatives that generate long-term economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits

Through this commitment, the members of the Regional Stakeholders Committee affirm their full support for transforming Dobrogea into a model of European gastronomic excellence and contributing to a better quality of life for its citizens by raising awareness of the region’s cultural and food uniqueness, stimulating creativity and gastronomic innovation, nourishing children and adults through culinary education, improving sustainable tourism standards, strengthening circular economies in both urban and rural settings and supporting community and environmental well-being and health.

European Regions of Gastronomy

An initiative recognising European regions that use gastronomy to support sustainable development, cultural diversity and social cohesion. The programme promotes long-term strategies, knowledge exchange and collaboration across Europe, highlighting the role of food in strengthening regional identity and local economies.

Earning this title means:

European recognition of Dobrogea’s gastronomic, cultural and identity value	Increased visibility for the region at both national and international level	Dobrogea’s integration into a European network of collaboration, best-practice exchange and partnerships
A shared platform for sustainable development through gastronomy, tourism, culture and education	Greater opportunities for local producers, entrepreneurs and communities across the region	A real chance to build a regional model with long-term economic, social and cultural impact

For Dobrogea, gaining this recognition represents an opportunity to transform its natural, multicultural and gastronomic heritage into a coherent driver of development, with European relevance and lasting benefits for the entire region. It also reminds us that the development of a region is not built through economy or technology alone, but also through shared values, credible institutions and the capacity of a society to look towards the future with a long-term vision.



UNPR RSE



Năvodari City Hall



Tulcea Destination Management Organisation



Eco Danube Delta County Destination Management Organisation



National College of Arts Queen Mary



Constanța County School Inspectorate



The National Institute of Heritage



National Institute for Marine Research and Development “Grigore Antipa”



Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association



Kirvad Tour

Flavours of Dobrogea: Ancient Roots, Living Waters, Timeless Taste



The concept proposed for the Award year takes shape naturally. More than a slogan, it is a way of understanding the region as a living territory where nature, history and cultural diversity continue to define everyday life.

Flavours of Dobrogea: Ancient Roots, Living Waters, Timeless Taste reflects the essence of a region built on contrast, continuity and convergence. It speaks first of an exceptional geography: the Măcin Mountains, among the oldest mountains in Europe and the Danube Delta, the youngest land in continuous formation on the continent and the Romanian Riviera, where the region opens itself to the Black Sea where land, waters and cultural exchange meet along the Black Sea shore.

At the same time, this concept expresses the human depth of Dobrogea. The region's multicultural character is not a historical footnote but a living reality. Traditions, knowledge, rituals and cuisines have created a food culture that is layered, diverse and distinctive. In Dobrogea, taste is never singular. It is the result of encounter, adaptation and coexistence.

This is why the concept responds directly to the region's current challenges. Dobrogea needs a stronger shared identity, one capable of connecting Constanța and Tulcea, coast and delta, urban and rural communities, heritage and innovation. It needs a shared narrative and a strong brand image that can move the region beyond fragmented tourism models, strong seasonality and underused local potential.

It also provides a coherent framework for the long-term objectives of the region: extending the tourism season, diversifying the visitor experience, improving the quality of hospitality and gastronomy, supporting local producers, promoting cultural identity and strengthening cooperation across sectors and territories. Under this concept, gastronomy becomes a language through which Dobrogea can express its uniqueness, generate economic value, reinforce social cohesion and build a more sustainable future. For Dobrogea, this concept is a recognition of what the region already is, and a commitment to what it can become.

Dobrogea. From unknown to unmissable.



Ancient Roots

A Brief History of Dobrogea

Dobrogea's history is a story of waters, routes and people. Between the Danube and the Black Sea, the region has been shaped by ancient cultures, empires, migrations, trade, faiths and forms of coexistence that continue to define its identity today.

Ancient Times



The Istro-Pontic territory has been inhabited since the most ancient times, most archaeological evidence comes from the Neolithic period, when the Gumelnița and Hamangia cultures are recorded on this territory. One of the most powerful proofs of human genius is the statuary ensemble The Thinker and The Sitting Woman dating back almost 6,000 years.

Antiquity



The multi-ethnicity of Dobrogea is the logical consequence of the province's turbulent history: a rich territory that has attracted all kinds of people, from antiquity to the present day. Since the most ancient times, Dobrogea was inhabited by the Getae, part of the great family of Thracian tribes that lived across a vast area stretching over the territories of today's Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and northern Greece.

Beginning in the 8th century BC, the Scythian warriors settled between the Danube and the Sea and coexisted alongside the majority native Getae. Their presence would later give Dobrogea the name of Little Scythia, Mykra Scythia to the Greeks and Scythia Minor to the Romans.

From the 8th century BC onwards, the ancient Greeks began to arrive in the Pontus Euxinus and they founded colonies such as Histria, Tomis, today's Constanța, and Callatis, today's Mangalia.

In 514–512 BC, Darius the Great of Persia, the King of Kings, reached Dobrogea during a mission to punish the Scythians, but, as Herodotus wrote, he was defeated by the locals and forced to retreat. In the 4th century BC, ancient Dobrogea also saw the armies of Philip II of Macedon and Alexander the Great.

Beginning in the 1st century BC, Rome began to impose its control over Dobrogea. Little Scythia was conquered by Burebista, king of Dacia, who imposed tributary control over the Greek cities until his assassination in 44 BC. Dobrogea became an official Roman imperial province only around the middle of the 1st century AD, during the reign of Emperor Claudius.

Roman rule, continued by Romano-Byzantine rule under emperors such as Constantine the Great and Justinian, came to an end in the 7th century AD, when, because of the attacks of migrating people and the situation in the Eastern Roman Empire, the province was abandoned and the great cities became ruins.

Always a Cosmopolitan Territory



Throughout the Greek, Roman and Romano-Byzantine periods, Dobrogea was a cosmopolitan territory. People came here from all corners of the empire, from European lands, from Asia Minor and from North Africa: merchants, veterans, colonists and adventurers. They brought with them the religions of their homelands and spoke their own languages, even though the official language was Latin. Then, as now, Dobrogea was a multi-ethnic and religiously tolerant territory.

The Middle Ages and the Modern Era



The 7th to 10th centuries were dark centuries in the history of Dobrogea, as the territory was attacked and devastated by Slavs, Pechenegs, Cumans and others. At the end of the 10th century, from 971 onwards, Byzantium regained control over Dobrogea and established a new province here, the Theme of Paristrion, at one point also called the Western Mesopotamia.

In the 14th century, Dobrogea came under the control of Dobrotici, or Dobrotiță, son of Balica.

After the death of Dobrotici, Dobrogea came under the rule of Mircea the Elder, ruler of Wallachia, who governed the region from 1388 until his death in 1418. The Istro-Pontic land then fell under Ottoman rule, either immediately in 1418 or, according to other sources, in 1420 or 1421, after the death of Mircea's son, Mihail I

During Ottoman domination, there were further military campaigns by rulers of Wallachia, including Vlad the Impaler and Mihai Viteazul, but they controlled

the territory between the Danube and the Sea only for short periods. Dobrogea remained under Ottoman rule from 1418 until 1878, when Romanian administration was established following the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, with 14 November marking this moment (today celebrated as Dobrogea Day).

Constanța, or Kiustenge, suffered repeated destructions and was often reduced to the status of a small shepherds' village, becoming an important town again only after 1878.

In 1895, Anghel Saligny completed the Carol I Bridge at Cernavodă, which became the only land route connecting Dobrogea to the rest of the country. The railway linked Cernavodă to Constanța, setting the latter on the path of modern development. Gradually, Constanța, with its maritime port, became the capital of Dobrogea, taking the place of Tulcea. With the modernisation of the port, Constanța developed and became a cosmopolitan and flourishing city, especially during the interwar period.

A Living Mosaic of Communities



At the beginning of the 20th century, the great Swiss anthropologist Eugène Pittard described Dobrogea as "A Euro-Asian microcosm. A meeting point of Western Asia and Western Europe, Dobrogea may be, for some, a stopover, for others, a shelter". Both he and many other foreign researchers were fascinated by this land, home to an extraordinary mosaic of communities and people. A century ago, during the interwar period, no fewer than 19 ethnic groups were recorded in Dobrogea. Today, no fewer than 14 are officially recognised, alongside other small ethnic groups that are not officially declared minorities.

Dobrogea is an extraordinary model of coexistence and a place of religious tolerance, where Christians of various denominations coexist, including Russian Lipovans, Armenians, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Adventists and Evangelicals, alongside Muslims, Jews and others.

Today, Romanians, Aromanians, Turks, Tatars, Roma, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, Russian Lipovans, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Germans, Italians, Serbs, Hungarians and Csángós live together in Dobrogea.





Armenians



After their country of origin was occupied by the Turks in the 16th century, many Armenians migrated towards Europe. As mediators of trade between the Orient and the Occident, they also settled at the mouths of the Danube, in cities such as Silistra, Babadag, Tulcea, Sulina and Constanța.

Their number was quite small, a few hundred families, but they always had a special importance from an economic point of view. Bankers, merchants and craftsmen, they left the Dobrogean cities with impressive stories and extraordinary buildings, private ones such as the House with Lions in Constanța, or public ones such as places of worship, including the Armenian Church in Constanța.

Aromanians



The Aromanians, also called Armâni, Macedo-Romanians or Vlachs, are an ethnic group from northern and central Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Romania and Bulgaria. They speak a Romance language called Aromanian, considered by linguists to be one of the four dialects of the Romanian language.

Since the Middle Ages, because of the Turkish occupation, the pressures of the Greek clergy and the destruction of their cities, as was the case with Moscopole, many Aromanians left their ancestral lands in the Balkans to settle in Austria-Hungary and in the Romanian Principalities. In the 1920s, a few years after Romania obtained Southern Dobrogea, the Quadrilateral, they came to the Pontic territory in large numbers, thousands of people, settling in large settlements such as Silistra, Balchik, Kavarna or in villages such as Shabla.

In 1940, the Treaty of Craiova took place, and Southern Dobrogea was given to Bulgaria. In this context, a population exchange occurred, with the Romanians and Aromanians from the Quadrilateral settling in Romanian Dobrogea, while the Bulgarians from here moved to the Quadrilateral.

Bulgarians



The most densely populated region with Bulgarians in Dobrogea is the northern one, neighbouring Bessarabia. The population exchanges carried out under the 1940 agreement, the Treaty of Craiova, through the cession to Bulgaria of part of Dobrogea's territory, led to a drastic reduction in the number of members of the community. At the last official census, 106 people of Bulgarian ethnicity were recorded. A place of worship that recalls the former importance of the community is the Church of Saint Nicholas in Constanța, located in the Old Town of the city.

Circassians



In Dobrogea, two localities still preserve the memory of the Circassians in their names: Slava Cercheză and Cerchezu. Their history in the region is said to have begun in the 17th–18th centuries, when small groups from the Caucasus settled on the lands between the Danube and the Sea. Their larger exodus is recorded in 1862–1863, when, persecuted by the Russians, many Circassians sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire.

Around 10,000 Circassians settled in Dobrogea, perhaps even more, forming compact communities in villages close to forests, including Armutlia, Ortachioi, Canli-Bugeac, Acadin, Bașchioi, Slava Cercheză and Cerchezu. Slava Cercheză itself was once a community of 500 Circassian families.

Today, their presence remains mainly in place names and in the layered historical memory of Dobrogea.

Csángós



In Dobrogea, the Csángós form a single community of Hungarian speakers, settled in the village of Oituz, Lumina commune, only a few kilometres from Năvodari. They are a Roman Catholic community whose ancestors arrived here more than nine decades ago. Their language, Csángó, differs from modern Hungarian and preserves features of an old medieval dialect spoken by Hungarians settled east of the Carpathians, in Moldavia.

The Csángós of Dobrogea came from Bacău County, from the Ghimeș-Făget area. During the First World War, many fought in the Romanian army, and many lost their lives in the battle of Oituz in August 1917. Six years later, land was granted to 40 families, widows and orphans of the heroes from the village Luizi-Călugăra (near Bacău). The Moldavian Csángós came to Dobrogea and named their new settlement after the battle in which many of their people had fallen. They remained here, preserving their traditions, language and customs, while living in peace with neighbours of other ethnicities and religions.

Gagauz



The land between the Danube and the Sea has, over the centuries, been a good home for all kinds of ethnicities and religions. This is also the case of the Gagauz, or gagauzlar, Orthodox Christians who left their mark and the stories of their migration in the villages of our Dobrogea. Around 152,000 Gagauz now live in the Republic of Moldova, over 30,000 in Ukraine, as many in Greece, approximately 15,000 in Turkey, 13,700 in Russia and 540 in Bulgaria.

In the past, there were thousands of Gagauz in Romania, especially in Dobrogea. They were majorities in, or founded, villages such as Beidaud, Stejaru, Agighiol, Izvoarele, Vama Veche, Tătaru, Șipotele and Pădureni, and were also present in larger settlements such as Cernavodă, Techirghiol, Mangalia and Constanța. A local census from 1930 recorded 1,000 Gagauz, most of them in Constanța County.

Today, very few remain, all living in Vama Veche, a village founded by the Gagauz themselves in 1811. Their story adds another layer to Dobrogea's history of migration, settlement and coexistence.

Germans



For almost a century, the land between the Danube and the Sea was also home to tens of thousands of German colonists, hardworking people who founded prosperous settlements and contributed fully to the economic development of Dobrogea. Their migration began indirectly in Russia, after Empress Catherine II invited Germans to settle in her empire in 1763. Later, because of broken promises, attempts at Russification, lost tax exemptions and the threat of military service, many Germans moved from Bessarabia and Kherson towards Dobrogea, where they became the only Germans ever to live under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

Their number increased significantly after Dobrogea became part of Romania in 1878. Most lived in villages, as farmers and craftsmen, with the exception of those in the cities of Constanța and Tulcea.

On the eve of the Second World War, Dobrogea counted around 16,000 ethnic Germans. Most left between 1939 and 1940 under the *Heim ins Reich* programme, but their stories, customs and the memory of their settlements remain part of Dobrogea's layered heritage. Today, the German community in Dobrogea is much smaller, with 187 declared members.

Greeks



The Greeks have always been a constant presence on the territory of the province. First came the ancient Hellenes, the founders of the ancient colonies, whose role in the development of the area was overwhelming. In the early Middle Ages, Greeks subject to the Byzantine Empire are recorded in the region, having commercial, political and military roles.

The Greeks were the ones who supplied the Ottoman state with all kinds of goods, including food for the army and for the great cities.

Still, most Greeks lived in Sulina and Constanța and settled here during the 19th century. Today, according to official statistics, the number of declared ethnic Greeks is approximately 1,000 people. The community in Constanța is a strong one, involved in numerous cultural and civic activities.

Jews



Today, the Jewish community in Dobrogea is small in number, yet its historical contribution to the region remains strong. Brilliant businesspeople, craftsmen and merchants, they made an important contribution to the development of Dobrogea. The synagogues in Constanța and Tulcea are today places of worship, but also emblematic cultural tourism landmarks, attracting visitors from all over the world. Most of the Jews of Dobrogea left Romania in 1940–1941, going to Israel and thus avoiding the persecutions of Nazi Germany.

Italians

The history of the Italian presence in Dobrogea begins in the Middle Ages, in the 13th century, when the Maritime Republic of Genoa obtained a commercial monopoly in the Black Sea and at the mouths of the Danube. The Genoese established trading posts at Constanța and Vicina (not precisely located) and built fortifications and settlements such as Enisala, Licostomo and Moncastro. Later, after the arrival of the Ottomans, the Venetians continued this commercial presence on Dobrogean land.

The modern story of the Italians in Dobrogea is closely connected to work, craft and settlement. After 1878, many Italians arrived in the region and worked in the stone quarries of Tulcea County, especially in the area of the Măcin Mountains, while others settled as farmers in villages suited to agricultural life. Some later moved to Constanța to work in the port, where their skill as stonecutters was highly valued.

Although many returned to Italy during the interwar period, after losing concessions over agricultural lands because they did not want to give up their original citizenship, a significant number accepted Romanian citizenship and remained in Dobrogea. Their story continues today in communities such as Greci, Turcoaia and Cataloi.

Lipovans

After a stop in southern Bessarabia, in the linden forests, the starovers (Old Believer Russians separated from the Orthodox Church of Moscow), settled in the Romanian space, especially in Dobrogea and Bucovina, in several waves. Most arrived between the Danube and the Sea after 1666, as a result of the religious persecutions that began following the reforms imposed by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. The process of migration continued in the 18th century, during the reigns of Tsar Peter the Great and then Empress Catherine the Great.

The Lipovans settled in the area between Tulcea and Babadag, rebuilding on the shore of Lake Razelm the villages of Sarichioi, or Seriacovo and Jurilovca (which would become the richest fishing villages in Dobrogea). Southeast of Babadag, in the mountain region, lies Slava Rusă and Slava Cercheză, whose population was engaged in agriculture. They are found in greater numbers in the city of Tulcea, but also in Chilia Veche, Mila 23, Mahmudia, Letea, Dunavăț, Periprava and others. They also formed a strong community in the village of Ghindărești, in Constanța County.

Their name is often linked to lipa, the linden tree, whose wood was used for household objects and for the frames of their traditional fishing boats, the lotca. Deeply connected to water, fishing, religious tradition and village life, the Lipovans remain one of the most recognisable communities of the Danube Delta and northern Dobrogea.

Roma

The Roma have been a constant presence in Dobrogea for centuries. At the last official census, 10,552 people declared themselves members of this community, although the real number is probably higher, as many prefer to declare themselves Romanian.

Their history is a millennial one, beginning with migrations from the Punjab region of India through Asia and, by the 11th century, into the Byzantine Empire. While Roma who reached the Romanian Principalities became enslaved until emancipation in 1856, in Dobrogea they were present not as slaves, but as citizens of the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, and in order not to pay the tax imposed on Christians, many chose to become Muslims.

Today, the Roma of Dobrogea include both Christians and Muslims and form communities in places such as Cuza Vodă and Babadag, while also being present in villages and towns across the region. Over time, they practised various trades, such as coppersmiths, woodworkers, farriers, musicians and others, some of them now forgotten, such as bear-handlers.

Tatars

The first Tatar presences in Dobrogea are recorded during the great Tatar, or Mongol, invasion of 1241–1242, especially in the north, in the Isaccea area. Larger communities settled here in the first half of the 19th century and after the Crimean War of 1853–1856, when thousands of Tatars from Crimea arrived in Dobrogea, driven away by the persecutions of the Tsarist Russian Empire.

Over time, the Tatars formed strong local communities in villages such as Medgidia, Cobadin, Techirghiol, Corbu, Valul lui Traian, Tătaru and Independența, as well as in the large cities of the province. According to the 2021 census, 17,024 ethnic Tatars were registered in Dobrogea. The Tatars of Dobrogea created their own culture, inspired by history and traditions, in which both national and religious holidays are respected.

Turks

The presence of the Turks in Dobrogea is closely linked to the history of Ottoman rule, which lasted over 450 years, from the 15th century until 1878. Their story, however, began even earlier. In 1264, more than 10,000 pre-Ottoman Turks settled in northern Dobrogea under the leadership of Sari Saltuk Baba, founding Babadag, a name that translates as Father's Mountain.

After the conquest of Dobrogea, first partial in 1420 and then total in 1484, a period of major colonisation followed. Turks founded new settlements and populated existing ones, living as shepherds, farmers, soldiers, clerics, craftsmen, merchants and members of the administration.

In 2021, the Turkish community in Dobrogea numbered 17,114 people, most of them living in Constanța County. Their heritage remains visible in place names, religious landmarks, traditions and the everyday cultural landscape of the region.

Ukrainians

A flourishing ethnic community, one that wonderfully enriches the ethnic pastel of Dobrogea through its traditions, customs, music and gastronomy. They live mainly in the north of the province, in the villages of the Danube Delta and the Razim/Razelm-Sinoe lagoon system, as well as in the city of Tulcea. Important settlements include Murighiol, Sfântu Gheorghe, Dunavățu de Jos and Dunavățu de Sus, Chilia Veche, Periprava and Letea, where their way of life has been connected to fishing, agriculture and animal husbandry.

Their settlement in Dobrogea is recorded from 1775, after Empress Catherine II of Russia ordered the destruction of the Zaporizhian Sich, their political, military and administrative centre. To escape the reprisals of the Russian army, more than 8,000 Cossacks came to the Delta area, with the acceptance of the Ottoman Empire. Later, some settled in Sfântu Gheorghe, while others founded the Zadunavska Sich military camp at Dunavățu de Sus in 1813. In the second half of the 19th century, other groups from southern Ukraine settled in the region, adding their own stories and traditions to Dobrogea's cultural landscape. To distinguish them from the Russian Lipovans, the older inhabitants of the region called them Hahols.



Archaeological Sites: Ancient Cities, Fortresses and Trade Routes

From the Greek colonies on the Black Sea coast to the Roman and Romano-Byzantine fortifications along the Danube, these sites show how geography, economy and cultural exchange shaped Dobrogea long before the present day.

Histria is the oldest city on the territory of present-day Romania – founded by the Greeks of Miletus in the 7th century BC and inhabited continuously for 13 centuries. Tomis: now largely covered by modern Constanța, became the capital of

the Roman province Scythia Minor and the “brilliant metropolis of the Left Pontus”. **Callatis**, today’s Mangalia, was developed as a powerful Greek, Roman and Romano-Byzantine settlement.

Argamum / Orgame, located on Cape Doloșman near Jurilovca, completes this ancient coastal line as the first settlement on Romanian territory founded by Greek colonists, a few decades before Histria.

The Roman and Byzantine layers of Dobrogea are equally visible inland and along the Danube. **Tropaeum**

Traiani / Adamclisi recalls Emperor Trajan’s victory in the winter of 101–102 AD and the monument raised in memory of the soldiers who died in battle. **Capidava, Carsium, Dinogetia, Noviodunum, Halmyris** and **Ibida** speak of military strategy, trade, river crossings, ports, episcopal centres and the long life of Roman and Romano-Byzantine civilisation in the region. Later, medieval fortresses such as Păcuil lui Soare and Enisala continue the story of Dobrogea as a territory of movement, defence and exchange.

Places of Worship and Living Heritage: Memory, Faith and Coexistence

Dobrogea’s multicultural history is also visible through its places of worship, monuments and urban landmarks, which speak of faith, coexistence and the communities that have shaped the region.

In Constanța, the **Great Mosque**, also known as the **Carol Mosque** or **Kral Camisi**, is one of the most important Muslim places of worship in Dobrogea. Built at the order of King Carol I and inaugurated in 1913, it combines Egyptian-Byzantine and Romanian architectural influences and remains a powerful symbol of respect towards the Muslim community. Nearby, the **Orthodox**

Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, the **Roman-Catholic Basilica of Saint Anthony of Padua**, the **Greek Metamorphosis Church**, the **Hunchiar Mosque**, the **Armenian Church**, the **Bulgarian Church** and the **Ashkenazi Synagogue** show the spiritual diversity of the old city.

This landscape of faith extends across Dobrogea. In Mangalia, the **Esmahan Sultan Mosque**, built in 1573, is the oldest Muslim place of worship in the region, while in Babadag, the **Ali Gazi Pasha Mosque**, built in 1610, also preserves the memory of Sari Saltuk Baba, the holy man associated with the

founding of the town. At Niculițel, the **paleo-Christian basilica** and the crypt of the martyrs Zoticos, Attalos, Kamasis and Filipos recall the early Christian history of the region.

Dobrogea’s living heritage is also marked by civic and cultural landmarks. The **Statue of Ovid** in Constanța’s Old Town remains a symbol of Latinity and of the poet’s exile in Tomis, while the **Genoese Lighthouse** and the **Constanța Casino** speak of the city’s maritime, commercial and cosmopolitan identity.

If history shows Dobrogea as a land of encounters, geography reveals the territory that made these encounters possible: ancient mountains, living waters, steppe landscapes, fertile contrasts and the constant dialogue between the Danube and the Black Sea.

Dobrogea is a territory of fertile contrasts: very ancient mountains and new lands still in formation, arid steppe and rich waters, river channels and coastline, lakes and caves, reed beds and coral reefs, forests and wind turbines, vineyards and rapeseed fields, fishing villages and port cities.

This complex geography explains why Dobrogea's food cannot be separated from its landscape. Fish, wine, cereals, fruit, aromatic plants, honey, dairy products and the cuisine of local multiethnic communities are expressions of the same relationship between land, water, climate, biodiversity and people. Within this territory, nature is the main source of food, identity, economy and responsibility for the future.

Dobrogea is the region in south-eastern Romania situated between the Danube and the Black Sea – two major waters of Europe, being a space of transit between Western Europe and Asia, with a high geostrategic, economic and ecological importance. It has a unique geographical identity, whose age reaches back to the Hercynian period, but it still continues to grow its territory through a delta, with a relief characterised by ancient mountains, hills, plateaus, plains and the coastal area. At European level, the nature of Dobrogea is of high importance, and it is recognised through a large network of around 50 Natura 2000 protected sites. The diversity of the natural heritage in Dobrogea comprises geological, fauna and vegetation reserves.

Formed mainly of mountains, low hills and plateaus eroded by time, its relief speaks of a very ancient natural history. Măcin Mountains, protected as a national park, due to their geological heritage and biodiversity, are the

oldest mountains in Romania, maintaining the alpine landscape at altitudes that do not exceed 400 metres. The entire area represents a true natural treasure of vegetation and fauna, sought after by researchers as well as by hiking enthusiasts and it offers one of the strongest expressions of the connection between landscape, biodiversity and the life of local ethnically diverse communities.

Formed almost two million years ago, while being covered by a former tropical sea, Dobrogea Gorges add another dimension to this ancient landscape, as they shelter coral reefs, atolls and caves, together with Jurassic fossils and traces of early human presence.

Given its relief and climate characteristics, steppe soils predominate in the region, suitable for cultivating vines, fruit trees and cereals. Besides the Danube, the internal hydrographic network of Dobrogea is weak, including only a few small rivers (such as Casimcea). But a network of protected lakes – the lagoons of Razelm and Sinoe, together with other saltwater (Techirghiol) or freshwater lakes (Siutghiol, Babadag, Bugeac, Taşaul), rich in fish, birds and with curative and therapeutic properties – add to the region's natural diversity that supports food, health, tourism and local identity.

A TERRITORY SHAPED BY LAND AND WATER

Living Waters

An element of rare beauty, unique in Europe, is the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, an ecosystem on the UNESCO World Heritage List. As the second largest delta in Europe and one of the continent's most valuable natural territories, the Danube Delta continues to expand as the youngest Romanian land. Its entire network of waters, lakes, canals, islands, dunes, forests (Letea, Caraorman) and reed beds creates a complex ecosystem, unique through its biodiversity and landscape. Over 5,000 species of plants and animals live here, along with more than 300 species of birds, many of them migratory or rare, such as the Dalmatian pelican, the largest bird in Europe. The fish fauna is represented by a great variety of species, from carp, catfish, perch, zander and pike to Danube shad, sturgeons, anchovy, turbot and horse mackerel.

For the multiethnic communities of the Danube Delta, water is not only part of the landscape, but it is also a source of food, a route of transport, identity and way of life. The population of the Delta is small and spread across isolated settlements such as Sulina (the only town of the area), and the villages of Sfântu Gheorghe, Mila 23 or Crişan, where

the most frequent activities remain fishing, tourism, traditional agriculture and beekeeping. Transport takes place largely by water, on the Danube channels, with boats and motorboats, while local life continues to be connected to the rhythms of the river, fish, reeds, birds and the seasonal changes of nature.

Due to its beauty and value, the Danube Delta attracts tourists, researchers and nature lovers from all over the world, offering a variety of experiences and opportunities for exploration: wild birds, rare species of plants and animals, cultural and historical landmarks, fishing, boat trips and direct encounters with a way of life built around water. In this sense, the Delta is essential for understanding Dobrogea as a region of biodiversity, multicultural identity, local food and responsible tourism.

The Black Sea completes this geography of identity waters and it supports port, commercial, tourism and balneary activities, but also a food culture connected to fish, salt, wind, navigation and exchanges between interethnic communities. Marine fish such as anchovy, mullet, turbot, horse

mackerel are part of the region's food history, while the protected species of sturgeons and cetaceans (common dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, porpoise) define the natural heritage of this marine basin. For Dobrogea, the Black Sea is not only a natural frontier, but a space of connection: between economy and nature, between fishing and gastronomy, between tourism and responsibility.

Dobrogea's climate is temperate continental with Pontic influences in the coastal area, while the inland faces hot and dry summers, harsh winters, low precipitation, cold and dry winds, which makes it one of Romania's arid regions. But it still includes ancient, protected forests (Hagieni, Topolog) as complex ecosystems found across the entire region and as places of regional identity – the wild peony is the national flower and a landmark for Dobrogea in spring (Enisala, Babadag forests). Also, the strong winds of Dobrogea encompass the highest aeolian energy potential in Romania and the landscape was enriched in the last decades with large wind farms which are now another symbol of the region.



Foto: Adrian Sieda



In Dobrogea, ancient roots and living waters finally meet in taste.

The region's gastronomy carries the memory of its landscapes, its communities and its long history of coexistence, turning local ingredients, rituals and recipes into one of the clearest expressions of Dobrogea's identity.



DOBROGEA'S
MULTICULTURAL GASTRONOMY

Timeless Taste

**Flavours of Dobrogea:
recipes of coexistence**



Every Dobrogean dish carries more than taste. It carries routes, waters, migrations, family rituals and the quiet wisdom of communities that have lived together between the Danube and the Black Sea. These recipes are living fragments of memory, shaped by local ingredients, religious calendars, family knowledge and the landscapes of water, steppe and coast. To cook and share them is to understand Dobrogea as a region where food has always been a form of dialogue.

ROMANIAN CUISINE

Saramură de pește

(Grilled fish with savoury brine)



A signature dish of Dobrogea's fishing communities, *saramura de pește* brings together fresh fish, fire and salt in a simple, deeply local preparation. Carp, bream, pike, perch or other local fish are grilled over embers or on a hot plate, often on coarse salt, then served with a hot brine made with water, tomatoes, peppers, garlic and herbs, usually alongside polenta. Rooted in older practices of salting and preserving fish, *saramura* keeps alive the memory of fishermen, waterside households and meals shaped by the Danube, the Delta and the Black Sea.



MEGLENO-ROMANIAN CUISINE

Colacul cu ban sau Turta cu para

(Braided coin bread)



A ritual bread of the Megleno-Romanian community, *colacul cu ban* or *turta cu para* is traditionally prepared for Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve. Made from a simple fasting dough of flour, water, salt and yeast, it is shaped as a round bread and baked with a coin hidden inside. Once ready, it is divided by the head of the family into pieces for household members, animals, guests and even the family land. Whoever finds the coin is believed to receive good fortune in the year ahead. It is not simply bread, it is a gesture of blessing, sharing and continuity.

GREEK CUISINE

Musaca

(Layered eggplant and meat bake)



A familiar dish in Dobrogea's Greek culinary repertoire, *musaca* brings together eggplants, minced meat, tomatoes, white sauce and cheese in generous baked layers. The eggplants are sliced, salted and fried, then alternated with meat cooked slowly with onion, wine and ripe tomatoes until the sauce becomes rich and concentrated. A layer of white sauce and grated cheese finishes the dish, forming a golden crust in the oven. In Dobrogea, *musaca* reflects a household cuisine built on patience, layering and abundance, where vegetables, meat and dairy become a festive family-style meal, served warm and shared at the table.

LIPOVAN RUSSIAN CUISINE

Borș lipovenesc de pește

(Lipovan fish borsch)



A landmark dish of the Lipovan communities of the Danube Delta, *borșul lipovenesc de pește* is prepared with several kinds of fresh fish, such as pike, zander, carp, Prussian carp or perch. The broth begins with onions and potatoes, followed by peppers, tomatoes and fish, then gains its distinctive sharpness from vinegar and its aroma from lovage. Traditionally, it is served in two moments: the fish and potatoes are taken out on a platter and eaten with garlic sauce, while the hot broth is served separately. It is a ritual of Delta households, fresh catch and meals shaped by Danube water.





GERMAN CUISINE

Borș verde de miel
(Green lamb borsch)

Remembered in Dobrogea's German households, *borșul verde de miel* is a spring soup built around young lamb, rice, root vegetables and many fresh greens. The meat is gently boiled, then joined by carrot, parsley root, celery, lovage, dill, parsley, sorrel and lettuce, creating a bright, herb-rich broth. Sourness may come from fermented bran borsch, lemon juice or buttermilk, while sour cream and egg yolk can soften the final taste. Closely linked to Easter tables and seasonal renewal, this dish shows how Dobrogea's German community adapted local ingredients into a nourishing, festive soup full of freshness and memory.

foto: Mihail Barbu

AROMANIAN CUISINE

Piperchi (pipiriți) tsârgâsiti
(Fried bell peppers with tomatoes and cheese)

A beloved Aromanian summer dish, *piperchi tsârgâsiti* celebrates the moment when bell peppers and tomatoes are at their peak. Peppers are lightly fried, then added to a thick tomato sauce and gently simmered until the flavours come together. Eggs may be added for richness, while grated or crumbled sheep milk cheese gives the dish its final savoury depth. Served warm or cold, often with extra cheese on top, it is a simple recipe in which ingredient quality matters most. In Dobrogea, it speaks of seasonal cooking, local gardens and the Aromanian talent for turning a few honest ingredients into a generous, memorable meal.



ITALIAN CUISINE

Pasta asciuta
(Homemade pasta with meat sauce)

A dish remembered in the households of Dobrogea's Italian community, *pasta asciuta* is built around thin homemade pasta and a rich meat sauce. The dough is prepared from flour, eggs, warm water and salt, then rolled very thin and cut into noodles. The sauce begins with finely chopped meat, traditionally cooked with vegetables, concentrated broth, tomatoes, sage, salt and pepper until it becomes aromatic and full of flavour. Served on a large platter, often with extra sage, tomato sauce or grated cheese, *pasta asciuta* carries the memory of family cooking, adaptation and continuity among the Italians of Dobrogea, where inherited recipes met local ingredients and everyday life.



foto: Mihail Barbu

JEWISH CUISINE

Gefilte fish, știucă umplută
(Stuffed pike)

A ceremonial dish of Dobrogea's Jewish culinary memory, *gefilte fish* is traditionally linked to the Shabbat table and to the wider Ashkenazi route of stuffed fish across Europe. In the Delta version, pike is carefully skinned, then filled with a mixture made from minced fish, onion, vegetables, herbs and spices. The fish is baked gently, sometimes with tomato sauce, garlic and peppers, until the filling becomes firm and aromatic. Served cold as an appetiser or warm as a main dish, *știuca umplută* shows how a ritual recipe travelled, adapted and became part of Dobrogea's shared food heritage.

UKRAINIAN CUISINE

Storceag ca la Sfântu Gheorghe
(Sturgeon soup with vegetables and sour cream)

A cherished recipe from Sfântu Gheorghe, *storceag* is a fish soup closely linked to Delta households and Ukrainian culinary memory. Traditionally made with sturgeon, though catfish, zander or mullet may also be used, it begins with vegetables such as onion, carrot, celery, cabbage and potatoes, simmered into a gentle broth. The fish is added carefully, then the soup is soured with zer or enriched with sour cream, according to taste. Nourishing and delicate, *storceag* carries the flavour of a fishing village where recipes are learned in the family, adapted to the catch of the day and served as comfort food shaped by water, work and tradition.



TATAR CUISINE

Siyborek, şuberec

(Crispy fried meat turnover)



A true emblem of Dobrogea's Tatar cuisine, *siyborek*, widely known as *şuberec*, is made from a simple elastic dough filled with minced beef or lamb, onion, pepper and mint. The dough is rolled into thin rounds, filled on one side, folded into a half-moon and fried until golden and crisp. Traditionally served hot, often with yoghurt or ayran, it is loved for the contrast between the crunchy outside and the juicy filling inside. In Dobrogea, *şuberec* is both everyday comfort food and a festive reminder of Tatar family kitchens, where skill, speed and generosity meet in one savoury bite.

TURKISH CUISINE

Baclava

(Layered nut pastry in syrup)



One of the most recognisable sweets of Dobrogea's Turkish community, *baclava* is a festive dessert built from thin sheets of soft dough, oil, finely chopped walnuts and fragrant syrup. The dough is rolled into delicate layers, brushed with warm oil, filled with nuts, folded and cut before baking until golden. Once cooled, it is covered with syrup made from water, sugar, vanilla and lemon juice, then sometimes finished with lemon zest or pistachio. Served at family gatherings, celebrations and festive tables, *baclava* speaks of patience, skill and hospitality, turning simple ingredients into a rich dessert meant to be shared.





The wine of Dobrogea

16330 ha
of vineyards

6370 ha
Tulcea county

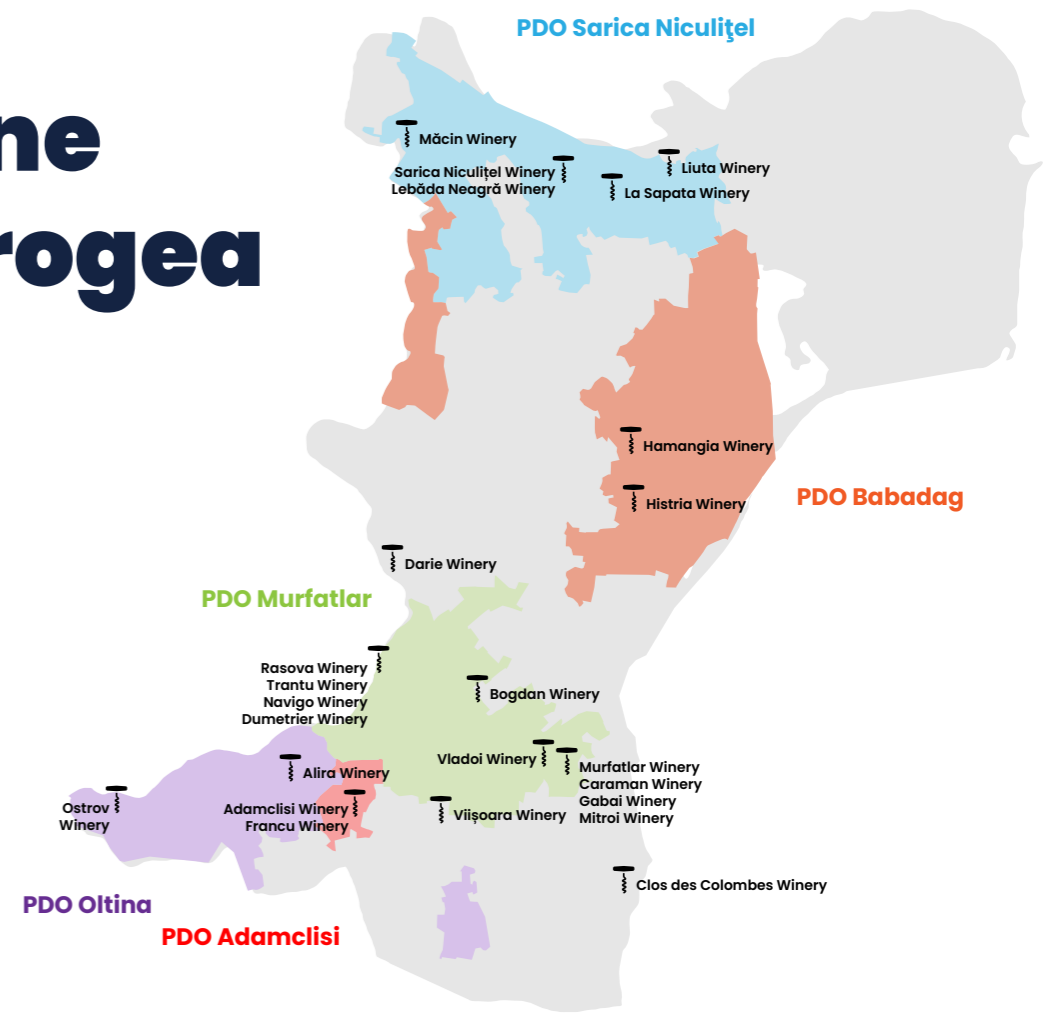
9960 ha
Constanța county

In Dobrogea, wine reflects a unique meeting of terroir, climate, and history. Shaped by abundant sunshine, the moderating influence of the Black Sea, and soils rich in limestone, chalk, loess, and sand, the region offers one of Romania's most favorable environments for viticulture. In renowned areas such as Murfatlar, the Danube-Black Sea Canal creates a unique microclimate by reflecting sunlight and generating cooling air currents that slow ripening and enhance aromatic complexity.

Wine has been produced in Dobrogea for more than 2,500 years. The tradition began with the Greek settlers who

founded the colonies of Histria, Tomis, and Callatis in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE, introducing vine cultivation and winemaking to the region. Under the Roman Empire, local wines were traded across the Black Sea and along the Danube. This tradition has continued through successive cultures and remains part of Dobrogea's identity. Beyond Murfatlar, important vineyard areas include Niculițel near the Danube Delta and Babadag.

Dobrogea is home to both indigenous Romanian grape varieties and internationally renowned sortiments. Among the most representative local grapes are Fetească Neagră, Romania's flagship red known for its rich fruit and spice notes, alongside Fetească Regală and Fetească Albă. These are complemented by internationally recognized varieties such as Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Cabernet Sauvignon.



EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY

Why This Opportunity Matters Now

Dobrogea has significant tourism development potential, due to its exceptional natural resources, some of them unique or found in only a few countries in the world, as well as its remarkably rich cultural and historical heritage. Despite these strengths, its tourism and gastronomic assets are not yet fully connected into a coherent, year-round regional destination model.



Dobrogea holds the largest tourist accommodation capacity in Romania in terms of number of beds.

Constanța County ranks first nationally, concentrating the highest share of tourist accommodation capacity in the country and accounting for approximately 28% of all classified tourist accommodation places. These figures show that Dobrogea has a strong tourism infrastructure and remains one of Romania's most visited

regions, but its growth still relies primarily on domestic, short-duration travel.

Seasonality remains one of the region's most visible opportunities for transformation. Tulcea also displays seasonality, although with a more balanced distribution throughout the year.

The opportunity is therefore not only to attract more visitors, but to create new experiences that distribute value more evenly across the region and

throughout the year. By connecting gastronomy, local agriculture, wine culture, fisheries, multicultural heritage and cultural tourism into a coherent destination identity, Dobrogea can move beyond a predominantly seasonal model and develop thematic routes, producer networks, gastronomic events, educational initiatives and community-based experiences that bring greater visibility to rural communities, local products and intangible heritage.

Food, Land and Water: Production and Environment Snapshot

Dobrogea's food identity is supported by a production landscape shaped by land, water and climate. Although the region has an arid climate, with relatively low rainfall of 300–450 mm per year and hot, dry summers, agriculture has remained one of the fundamental economic activities of its inhabitants. The region's continental climate with Pontic influences, its fertile chernozem and brown steppe soils and its predominantly plateau and hilly relief have shaped a farming culture based on adaptation, rational water use and resilience.

Contemporary agriculture is dominated by cereals, especially wheat, barley, maize and sunflower, which occupy over 70% of the arable land. These are complemented by vines, fruit trees, vegetables and, in the northern areas of Dobrogea, lavender, medicinal and

aromatic plants, as part of a recent process of agricultural diversification.

Animal husbandry remains closely linked to the natural resources of the region, with sheep and goats particularly well adapted to the arid climate and steppe vegetation. Traditional dairy products are increasingly valued as part of Dobrogea's regional gastronomic heritage.

Viticulture is another defining resource, supported by over 40,000 hectares of noble vines and by microclimates influenced by the proximity of the Black Sea. Dobrogean wines are recognised for their balance between acidity, alcohol and aroma, while wine traditions, harvest rituals and wineries continue to shape both the cultural landscape and the visitor experience.

Fishing remains one of the oldest and most defining occupations of Dobrogea. The meeting of the Danube, the Danube Delta, lakes and the Black Sea has created a rich aquatic food heritage. In fishing communities such as Jurilovca, Sarichioi, Mila 23 and Sfântu Gheorghe, fish has long been a main food source, consumed fresh, salted or smoked, with preservation methods adapted to the local climate.

Together, agriculture, animal husbandry, viticulture and fishing show that Dobrogea's gastronomy is rooted in real productive landscapes. They also explain why the region's future food strategy must be connected to soil protection, responsible water management, biodiversity, local value chains and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Environment: Fragile Ecosystems, Shared Responsibility

Dobrogea's food systems are inseparable from the environmental conditions that sustain them. The region brings together ecosystems of exceptional value, from the Danube Delta and the Black Sea to lakes, wetlands, steppe landscapes, agricultural plains and the Măcin Mountains. This diversity supports fishing, agriculture, viticulture, animal husbandry, medicinal and aromatic plants, local food traditions and nature-based tourism, but it also requires careful protection.

The same climate that gives Dobrogea its distinctive crops and flavours also creates vulnerability. With a temperate-continental climate marked by Pontic influences, hot and dry summers, strong

winds and relatively low rainfall, Dobrogea is one of Romania's arid regions. Steppe soils are suitable for cereals, vines and fruit trees, while the Danube, the Black Sea, the Razim–Sinoe lagoon system and the region's saltwater and freshwater lakes support fishing, food traditions and, in some cases, therapeutic uses. At the same time, these conditions create pressures on soils, water resources, biodiversity, agriculture and the Black Sea ecosystem.

Climate-related pressures affecting agriculture, biodiversity and the Black Sea ecosystem further reinforce the need for sustainable regional development models centred on resilience, responsible water management, soil protection,

local value chains and heritage preservation. Protecting Dobrogea's landscapes and ecosystems also means protecting the future of its food culture.

Within this context, the European Region of Gastronomy Award represents a strategic development opportunity for Dobrogea. Beyond the international recognition associated with the title, the Award can provide the region with an operational framework capable of strengthening cooperation between public authorities, tourism stakeholders, cultural institutions, educational organisations, local producers and civil society.

FROM VISION TO ACTION

Dobrogea through the IGCAT Focus Areas



Through this candidacy, Dobrogea aims to connect tourism, gastronomy, culture, local production and regional cooperation through a set of long-term objectives: developing sustainable tourism, improving the quality of the visitor and gastronomic experience, promoting cultural identity and local distinctiveness, reducing seasonality, supporting local producers and strengthening cooperation between Constanța and Tulcea, coast and delta, urban and rural communities, public institutions, private operators, cultural actors and education partners.

To become meaningful, this vision must be carried into concrete action. The region's

programme is built around the six focus areas defined by IGCAT, each of them reflected through initiatives, partnerships and examples of good practice already present across the territory. The six focus areas defined by IGCAT offer Dobrogea a practical framework for valorising its resources, connecting its communities and responding to its current challenges in a coherent and sustainable way.

Brought together under the umbrella of this project, these initiatives will be strengthened, expanded and developed further through a shared regional commitment. These are not abstract directions, but concrete expressions

of how Dobrogea can transform its natural heritage, cultural diversity, local knowledge, and economic potential into a regional model with European relevance.

Through the contribution of its partners, Dobrogea proposes a programme in which food, education, innovation, tourism, community and well-being support one another. Together, these directions shape not only the title year, but a long-term development vision rooted in the region's specificity and in the values promoted by IGCAT.

IGCAT Focus Areas

Feeding the Planet

Protecting biodiversity, supporting sustainable food production, and valuing local resources as a foundation for resilience, identity and the future.

Regenerative Food Destinations

Developing authentic visitor experiences rooted in gastronomy, living heritage, community involvement and respect for place.

Innovation, Creativity and Job Opportunities

Transforming local knowledge, craftsmanship and food heritage into products, services and initiatives that generate value, visibility and new economic opportunities.

Urban and Rural Citizen Engagement

Rebuilding the connection between city and countryside, producers and consumers, people and landscape, through food, participation and social cohesion.

Educating for Our Future

Reconnecting children, young people and communities with food, taste, health, seasonality and the cultural meaning of what we eat.

Well-being and Healthier Living

Promoting a more balanced relationship between food, nature, health, environment and quality of life, for the benefit of both communities and territory.



Feeding the Planet



In Dobrogea, feeding the planet begins with understanding that food cannot be separated from biodiversity, water, soil and the communities that depend on them. The region's natural wealth, from the Danube Delta and the Black Sea to its steppe landscapes, agricultural lands, wetlands and traditional rural environments, gives Dobrogea a particular responsibility in shaping a more sustainable relationship between nature, food and future generations.

Here, food is shaped by ecosystems of exceptional value, by local knowledge passed on through generations and by forms of livelihood that remain closely connected to the rhythms of land and water. Protecting biodiversity, supporting sustainable food

systems and valuing local resources are therefore part of the same regional vision.

In Dobrogea, this focus area finds a particularly strong expression as it brings together some of the region's defining realities: fragile ecosystems, emblematic species, traditional food knowledge, small-scale producers and the need to build long-term resilience in the face of environmental and economic pressures. Across the region, sustainable beekeeping, regenerative farming, marine research and responsible aquaculture already give concrete form to this direction.





Danube Caviar

Conserving an Emblematic Species through Sustainable Aquaculture



Sturgeons are often described as living fossils, emblematic migratory species that connect marine and freshwater ecosystems and play an essential role in maintaining the ecological health of river basins and hydrographic systems. Among the oldest living fish species in the world, they have survived for 200 million years, adapting to a wide range of environments.

Today, sturgeons are among the most threatened species in Europe. Populations in the Danube and the Black Sea are particularly vulnerable, and the species of the north-western Black Sea and the Lower Danube are no exception. Romania remains one of the last countries in Europe whose waters still host naturally reproducing wild sturgeons.

In response to this decline, Romania introduced a ban on commercial sturgeon fishing in 2006, a measure that has been repeatedly extended and is currently in force until 2026. At the same time, national and international efforts have continued across the Danube Basin to address the major threats facing these species, including overexploitation, illegal trade, disrupted migration routes, habitat loss and the fragmentation of spawning grounds. Authorities, NGOs, fishermen and young volunteers are all part of this wider effort to protect one of the region's most emblematic fish.

Within this context, Danube Caviar offers a compelling example of how biodiversity conservation, responsible entrepreneurship and premium gastronomy can support one another.

Since the 1990s, entrepreneur Marilena Maereanu has been working to protect sturgeon populations and advance sustainable aquaculture practices. Faced with the alarming decline of sturgeon stocks in the Danube and the Black Sea, she understood early on that the future of caviar and sturgeon production depended on responsible aquaculture.

In 1998, despite considerable challenges, she established the first private sturgeon farm in Romania and created the Danube Caviar brand. This pioneering initiative provided an alternative source of sturgeon meat and caviar, helping to reduce pressure on wild populations.

Committed to innovation, Marilena later pursued specialist training in Germany in artificial sturgeon reproduction. In 2004, her company became the first in Romania to successfully reproduce Beluga sturgeon in captivity. These captive-bred fish were later introduced to other fish farms, contributing to the preservation of the valuable Beluga gene pool.

Today, with organic certification and a strong reputation built over time, Danube Caviar is recognised for its quality both in Romania and internationally. In Dobrogea, it stands as a meaningful example of how the protection of an endangered species can be linked to innovation, responsible production and long-term regional value.





Moșia Generalului

Preserving Biodiversity through Seeds, Soil and Taste



In the arid landscape of Dobrogea, where dry winds and strong sunlight put every garden to the test, lies Moșia Generalului, a family-run rural estate where a passion for seeds and respect for the land have given rise to one of the richest private vegetable collections in the region.

Here, more than 1,000 vegetable varieties, not only from Dobrogea, but from all over the world, have been gathered, many of them rare or heirloom varieties, preserved for their diversity, their genetic heritage and their authentic taste. Every year, hundreds of varieties are cultivated and tested, especially heritage tomatoes, in order to see how they perform in the specific conditions of Dobrogea.

The climate is not easy for plants. Dry winds, strong light and periods of drought challenge every variety. Yet these very conditions, when understood and respected, can give tomatoes a distinctive flavour. Under the sun of Dobrogea, aromas and sugars become more concentrated and the tomatoes develop that intense taste that many still recognise from the gardens of the past.

For those who arrive at the estate, everything often begins with a simple gesture: a tomato picked straight from the garden. From there begins a story about seeds carefully preserved from year to year, about the patience with which the plants are grown and about the natural connection between people, land and food.

The work carried out here has also been recognised through awards at events dedicated to tomatoes: second place in Brussels in 2022, first place in Brussels in 2024, first place in Sibiu in 2024 and first place in Bucharest in 2025.

Moșia Generalului also contributes to education by opening its work to students and young people interested in food, biodiversity and sustainable agriculture. Through its participation in initiatives such as the Local Food Challenge and the Green Deal – From Farm to Fork programme, which involved 70+ students and master's candidates, it has created opportunities for learning grounded in place, practice and direct contact with the land. This openness reflects a wider commitment to sharing knowledge and supporting future generations in reconnecting with food, nature and local resources.

Through what it does, Moșia Generalului seeks to keep alive the biodiversity of vegetables and the authentic flavours that are part of Dobrogea's gastronomic heritage reminding us that, sometimes, the most valuable things grow from good seeds, patience and love for the land. Building on this experience, Moșia Generalului will also contribute to the development of a future Tomato Festival under the umbrella of the regional programme. Conceived as a platform for biodiversity, education, taste and community engagement, the initiative has the potential to grow from a specialised local practice into a wider regional event, bringing greater visibility to Dobrogea's agricultural heritage and to the value of heirloom varieties, seed preservation and sustainable cultivation.





INCDM “Grigore Antipa”

Advancing Sustainable Marine Aquaculture through Research and Innovation



Marine aquaculture is one of the strategic development pillars of the “Grigore Antipa” National Institute for Marine Research and Development, supported through the expertise of the Living Marine Resources Department and the activity of the Demonstrative Aquaculture Centre. Its objective is to strengthen food security and promote a sustainable blue economy.

Through sustainable and innovative practices, such as long-line systems and the adaptation of fish and mollusc species to the specific conditions of the Black Sea, INCDM aims to reduce dependence on chemical inputs and shorten supply chains. This production model ensures access to nutritious food while turning aquaculture into an instrument of economic regeneration, using natural resources without compromising marine ecosystems.

The research team, coordinated by Dr Victor Niță and Dr Magda Nenciu, has validated the successful acclimatisation of species with high commercial value, transforming environmental constraints into opportunities for economic and entrepreneurial development. The adaptation of species from the Mediterranean and Adriatic basins to the salinity and chemical composition of the Black Sea represents technological innovation aimed at increasing the resilience of production systems in the context of climate change.

Research has confirmed remarkable biological performance: gilthead seabream recorded a 100% survival rate and reached market biomass

in 10 months, opening the way for seasonal crop rotation; European seabass demonstrated excellent tolerance to thermal variations, offering prospects for year-round production; Rainbow trout, adapted from freshwater, showed a growth rate 2.5 times faster in the marine environment, highlighting the potential for a superior-quality “salmon-type” product with reduced food miles.

INCDM has also developed shellfish farming by adapting Japanese oysters to Black Sea conditions. The success of the Japanese oyster, with a meat-to-shell yield of 30%, created the premises for a luxury market niche. Also, the Institute initiated the adaptation process for the shrimp species *Palaemon adspersus*, initially collected from the natural environment and now being prepared for artificially induced reproduction.

Under the guidance of Dr Victor Niță and Dr Magda Nenciu, advanced technologies for intensive growth and repeated reproduction are being tested, with the aim of optimising production, providing technical support for investors interested in marine economic development hubs and increasing the resilience of the fisheries sector in the face of climate change.

As a committed stakeholder in the project, INCDM “Grigore Antipa” brings scientific expertise and the capacity to support long-term innovation, food resilience and sustainable blue growth, helping position Dobrogea as a territory where research, responsible production and regional development advance together.

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Training the next generation for sustainable food systems



Within the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences of Ovidius University of Constanța, the teaching and research activity is grounded in a modern educational model centred on the training of specialists capable of responding to current challenges regarding environmental protection, the development of the rural economy and sustainable agri-food production. Within the Feeding the Planet focus area, this contribution is reflected in the training of future professionals capable of producing food in a sustainable and responsible way, through modern agricultural practices, soil protection, the efficient use of natural resources and the promotion of the farm to fork and farm to table principles.

A central objective of its activity is to contribute to food security by training specialists capable of producing food in a sustainable and responsible manner.

Students are directly involved in agricultural production activities and are encouraged to adopt modern practices, including organic and biodynamic farming systems. Through these approaches, they learn to produce healthy food with a reduced impact on the environment.

Particular emphasis is placed on protecting the soil, an essential resource for agriculture. Thus, students are introduced to technologies such as minimum tillage and no-till farming, which help preserve soil structure, reduce erosion, and maintain biodiversity. At the same time, practices involving the use of ecological inputs, the reduction of chemical substances and the adoption of environmentally friendly solutions are encouraged. These contribute to maintaining ecosystem balance and protecting natural resources.

Through direct contact with economic operators, students come to understand the importance of reducing food waste and using natural resources efficiently. They also learn how agricultural residues can be recovered and transformed into useful by-products that may be reintegrated into the agricultural cycle.

Furthermore, it promotes the principles of “farm to fork” and “farm to table,” encouraging shorter supply chains and the development of direct relationships between producers and consumers. These practices contribute to greater transparency, support the local economy and foster the rural development of Dobrogea.

Concrete actions from FSNSA

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA): „**Institutional Forcings on Agricultural Landscapes in Post-Socialist Europe: Diachronic Hotspot Analysis of CAP Influences on Agricultural Land Use in Romania 2002-2025**”, Grant Number: 80NSSC23K0535, 2023-2026

Integrated research and sustainable solutions to protect and restore Lower Danube Basin and coastal Black Sea ecosystems (ReSPonSE), 2022-2026, MARALTECH (use of residual marine algae as biofertilisers, connecting Black Sea resources with sustainable agriculture and circular economy practices)

Green Deal in Dobrogea: Students, producers and entrepreneurs met in a workshop dedicated to sustainable agriculture, tourism and the future actions supporting Dobrogea’s European Region of Gastronomy candidacy.



Strategic “Feeding the Planet” objectives under the Award

Supporting sustainable food production

Promoting agricultural, aquaculture and food production practices that protect biodiversity, soil and water resources while strengthening Dobrogea’s long-term food resilience.

Strengthening local value chains and reducing food waste

Encouraging shorter supply chains, responsible resource use and the recovery of agricultural by-products that can be reintegrated into the local food system.

Protecting biodiversity from seeds to aquatic species

Valuing heirloom seeds, local varieties, emblematic species and aquatic resources as strategic assets for identity, food sovereignty and climate resilience.

Connecting research, education and producers

Bringing together universities, research institutions, farmers, aquaculture specialists, students and local producers to transform knowledge into practical solutions for sustainable food systems.

Encouraging soil-friendly and water-conscious agriculture

Supporting organic, biodynamic, minimum tillage and no-till practices, the reduction of chemical inputs and the rational use of water in a region marked by aridity and climate pressure.

Raising public awareness of food, nature and responsibility

Developing public and educational actions around food miles, pollinators, pesticide reduction, biodiversity, responsible fishing, aquaculture and the role of small-scale producers in maintaining resilient local food systems.

Projects and actions under development

Food Film Menu: Documenting Dobrogea’s Food Resilience



Dobrogea will encourage and support the identification, documentation and submission of short food films to IGCAT’s Food Film Menu, giving visibility to local stories connected to biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, responsible fishing, aquaculture and food heritage. The aim is to use audiovisual storytelling and IGCAT’s international platform to raise awareness of Dobrogea’s food resilience.

Dobrogea Tomato Festival: Seeds, Taste and Biodiversity



Starting from the work of Moșia Generalului, its collection of more than 1,000 vegetable varieties and its recognised results in tomato and biodiversity festivals, Dobrogea will develop a Tomato Festival under the umbrella of the regional programme. Conceived as a platform for seed preservation, taste education and sustainable cultivation, the event will bring together producers, students, chefs, researchers, families and visitors around heirloom varieties, local gardens and responsible agriculture. The festival can grow from a specialised local practice into a wider regional event dedicated to biodiversity, seasonal food and the connection between soil, climate and taste.

Black Sea Food Resilience Lab



Building on the research and demonstrative work of INCDM “Grigore Antipa” and its sustainable marine aquaculture initiatives, Dobrogea will develop a cooperation format connecting researchers, aquaculture specialists, chefs, students, producers and public. The aim is to make responsible use of Black Sea resources more visible and applicable through workshops (together with FNSNA), demonstrations (with local chefs), knowledge transfer and public communication around sustainable aquaculture, local fish and shellfish, food security and blue economy. Starting in 2026, this direction can also be tested through curated pop-up dinners in which local chefs work with ingredients and recommendations provided by marine researchers, including species such as blue crab, where culinary valorisation may support better public understanding of changing marine ecosystems. This action can help position Dobrogea as a region where marine research, gastronomy and responsible production work together for long-term food resilience.

Together, these initiatives show how Dobrogea can turn the protection of biodiversity, local knowledge and sustainable production into a shared foundation for food resilience and regional development.

Through the combined efforts of producers, farmers, aquaculture experts, researchers and educators, they create an ecosystem in which traditional wisdom is preserved, revitalized, and passed on to new generations in forms that remain relevant and meaningful today.





Innovation, Creativity and Job Opportunities



For Dobrogea, this focus area offers a particularly meaningful framework through which it connects heritage with enterprise and identity with future-oriented development. From food gifts and digital platforms to educational tools, certified local products and start-up support, the region already brings together initiatives that show how gastronomy and culture can create new forms of economic value while remaining rooted in place.





Product & identity innovation

Flavours of Dobrogea HIBOX

From Local Heritage to a Regional Innovation Flagship



Suvenir din Dobrogea, the project created by Bianca Folescu (regional ambassador) in the village of Vişina, Jurilovca commune, is a space where children can discover rural heritage through direct experience. The traditional household includes a house that is almost 100 years old, with a typical Dobrogean structure made up of three rooms, where traditional Romanian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Lipovan costumes are displayed, alongside objects that were found, donated or acquired, as well as elements that speak about the multicultural character of northern Dobrogea.

For children and young people, the place functions as a living school of the village. The workshops organised here include painting, embroidery and handicrafts. More than 600 children engage with this Private Living Museum every year, especially during the Green Week programme and during holiday periods, where they learn, through direct contact with the place, crafts, handicraft work, traditional gestures and reference points of Dobrogea's cultural and food heritage. The project has a strong educational dimension because it connects material heritage with cultural identity. For Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Suvenir din Dobrogea offers a model of applied cultural learning, in which food education is complemented by heritage education. Children discover that the taste of a region is also shaped by the houses in which food is prepared, by the hands that sew, paint and repair, by the objects that have been saved and by the communities that pass their stories on.

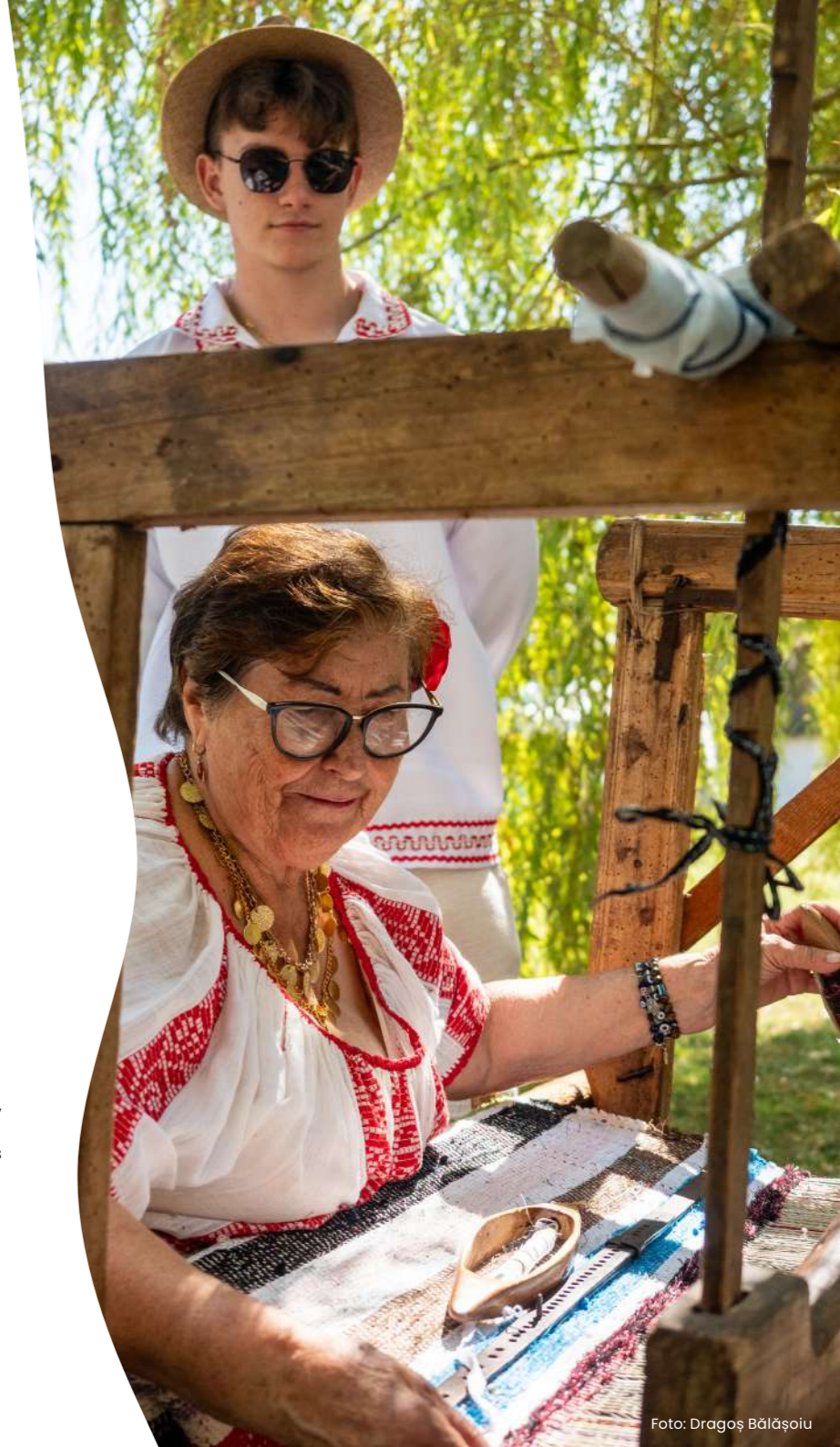
From this living core of heritage and direct experience begins Flavours of Dobrogea HIBOX, Heritage in a BOX,

proposed as a flagship project of the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy.

Flavours of Dobrogea HIBOX, Heritage in a BOX, is designed to transform the gastronomic and craft heritage of the region into a contemporary, scalable and market-oriented format. The project starts from the Flavours of Jurilovca prototype, developed together with Suvenir din Dobrogea, a product that represents the region in the World Food Gift Challenge 2026, organised by IGCAT. HIBOX functions as a cultural and culinary experience box, in which physical products are complemented by a digital layer of storytelling. Each object, food or craft product will be connected through QR or NFC to multimedia stories about the people, recipes, techniques and communities behind it. In this way, a food souvenir becomes a guided journey through Dobrogea, while intangible heritage takes on a clear, interactive and easily shareable form.

The project will be structured as a series of thematic editions, each dedicated to a community, recipe, tradition, locality or food landscape. Each edition brings together food products, handcrafted objects, small publications, recipes, photographs, audio-video materials and translated content, allowing the visitor to explore heritage at their own pace. The innovation of the project lies not only in the physical box, but in the replicable physical-digital framework for producers, artisans, cultural institutions and local communities.

The project can directly connect more than 60 local producers, artisans, heritage experts, academic partners, local authorities and cultural institutions involved in the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy. For small cultural and gastronomic actors, Flavours of Dobrogea HIBOX can reduce barriers to market access through direct sales, curated packages, cross-marketing, digital visibility and distribution to tourists, companies, cultural events and international markets. In the long term, HIBOX, Heritage in a BOX, can become an exportable model for other European regions, a system through which food heritage, crafts and local stories are packaged into high-value physical-digital experiences.



Alex Onofrei

From Traditional Boatbuilding to Contemporary Value



The last *marangoz* in Romania or, as he likes to say, “the first, after the others stopped working,”

At just 26 years old, Alex Onofrei is the young man who managed to build a portal to a disappearing world, in which the *lotca* teaches you that what matters is the journey, not the destination. According to the dictionary, a *marangoz* is a carpenter specialised in carving, shaping and joining the wooden parts of boats. The wooden *lotca* does not disturb the ecosystem, because travelling in it is not about hurry or speed. It is about living in communion with nature. In the past, the *lotca* was the fisherman’s companion. Today, for Alex, it is the concrete image of tradition.

For centuries, *lotca* helped sustain life in the Delta. It was the companion of the fisherman, of the children who went to school by water and of the fishermen’s wives who embraced the craft themselves. The first floating restaurant in the Delta also appeared on a *lotca*, not today, when such ideas are in trend, but hundreds of years ago. And perhaps the most memorable fish soup can only be eaten there, on a *lotca*, at dawn, when the first section of the net is pulled from the water. It is a simple soup, made with potatoes, onions, two tomatoes and water taken straight from the Danube. In that moment, the whole fishing crew pauses for a while and feeds the story of the day’s greatest catch around the steaming cauldron. In this form, the *lotca* speaks not only of heritage, but of a way of living, moving and sharing food that remains deeply relevant today through slow tourism, local memory and a respectful relationship with nature.

Today, *lotca* can be brought into the contemporary world not only as an object of heritage, but as a symbol of slow mobility and respect for the ecosystem.

This vision also takes a contemporary form through the **Lotca Kit** developed by Alex Onofrei, with which he participated in the World Food Gift Challenge 2026 in Crete and won Best Educational Gift award. Conceived as an object that brings together local identity, craftsmanship and storytelling, the kit opens up a playful and accessible way of discovering the world of the *lotca*. Tradition becomes easier to approach for children and young people, turning learning into curiosity, hands-on discovery and, potentially, into inspiration for a new generation willing to embrace a craft that is now close to disappearance.

Through the partnership between Tulcea City Hall and the “Nod în Papură” Association, a permanent *marangozerie* workshop is to be established within the Fishing Village Museum, with a minimum duration of ten years. The space is conceived as a living place, with workshops for children, introductory activities for the general public and the development of a hub for artistic expression through craft. Visitors will be able to reach the workshop and even take part in certain processes involved in building a *lotca*. The association aims to involve other craftsmen from different traditional branches, turning craft into a resource for creativity, education and cultural continuity in Dobrogea.

For the Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, the story of Alex Onofrei shows how a rare craft can generate not only memory and identity, but also participation, artistic expression, learning and contemporary value.

“For me, tradition is the identity I have and the inheritance I received as being part of this place.”



WORLD FOOD GIFT CHALLENGE BEST EDUCATIONAL GIFT





Certified Products

Authenticity, Recognition and Regional Value



Dobrogea is a territory where natural and cultural diversity is directly reflected in its products. Between the Danube and the Black Sea, local traditions, natural resources and knowledge accumulated over generations have shaped a distinct gastronomic heritage, recognised and protected at European level through PDO, PGI, GI and STG certification systems. These certifications function as instruments that guarantee origin and quality, establish the link between product and geographical area, and ensure traceability, offering consumers confidence and coherence.

In the wine sector, Dobrogea is represented by PDOs such as Adamclisi, Babadag, Murfatlar and Dealu Bujorului, and by PGIs such as Colinele Dobrogei and Terasale Dunării. In the food sector, Smoked Danube Shad, Tulcea Pike Roe Salad and Sturgeon Batog, products belonging to Deltaica, reflect the region's fishing resources and traditions, alongside Traditional Carp Roe Salad, certified as STG. Dobrogean Pie likewise reflects the distinct character of the region's culinary heritage, while Vinarsul Murfatlar highlights the tradition of spirits in Dobrogea.

Through these certifications, Dobrogea affirms itself as a territory of authentic products, where tradition, natural resources and local expertise are protected and valued within a framework recognised at European level. Through this project, the region also aims to support and encourage the registration and acquisition of new certifications as a way of strengthening gastronomic identity, competitiveness and local economic value.

Deltaica Seafood

A taste that remembers where it came from



Deltaica Seafood is a family business from Tulcea that does not only produce food, but preserves a way of life connected to the Danube Delta. Through collaboration with local fishermen, through a short and honest circuit, and through respect for freshness, traceability and food safety, Deltaica brings to consumers fish prepared according to recipes and methods inspired by the old *cherhanale* (traditional fish processing houses of the Delta).

Its STG and PGI certified products, such as Traditional Carp Roe Salad, Marinated Sardine, Tulcea Pike Roe Salad, Smoked Danube Shad and Sturgeon Batog, are proof that artisanal methods can become a benchmark of excellence when supported by technology, modern packaging and rigorous quality control. By bringing the recipes of its area to European recognition, Deltaica shows how local tradition can be protected, validated and transformed into contemporary regional value.

The doors of the factory are always open to pupils and students, offering them the opportunity to see the journey of fish from boat to plate. Through factory visits and its presence at events, Deltaica assumes the role of mentor in shaping a gastronomic culture based on respect for biodiversity and the responsible consumption of local products. It also shows young people that performance can be achieved at home, in Romania, by valuing tradition.



Digital Tools and Smart Access to the Region

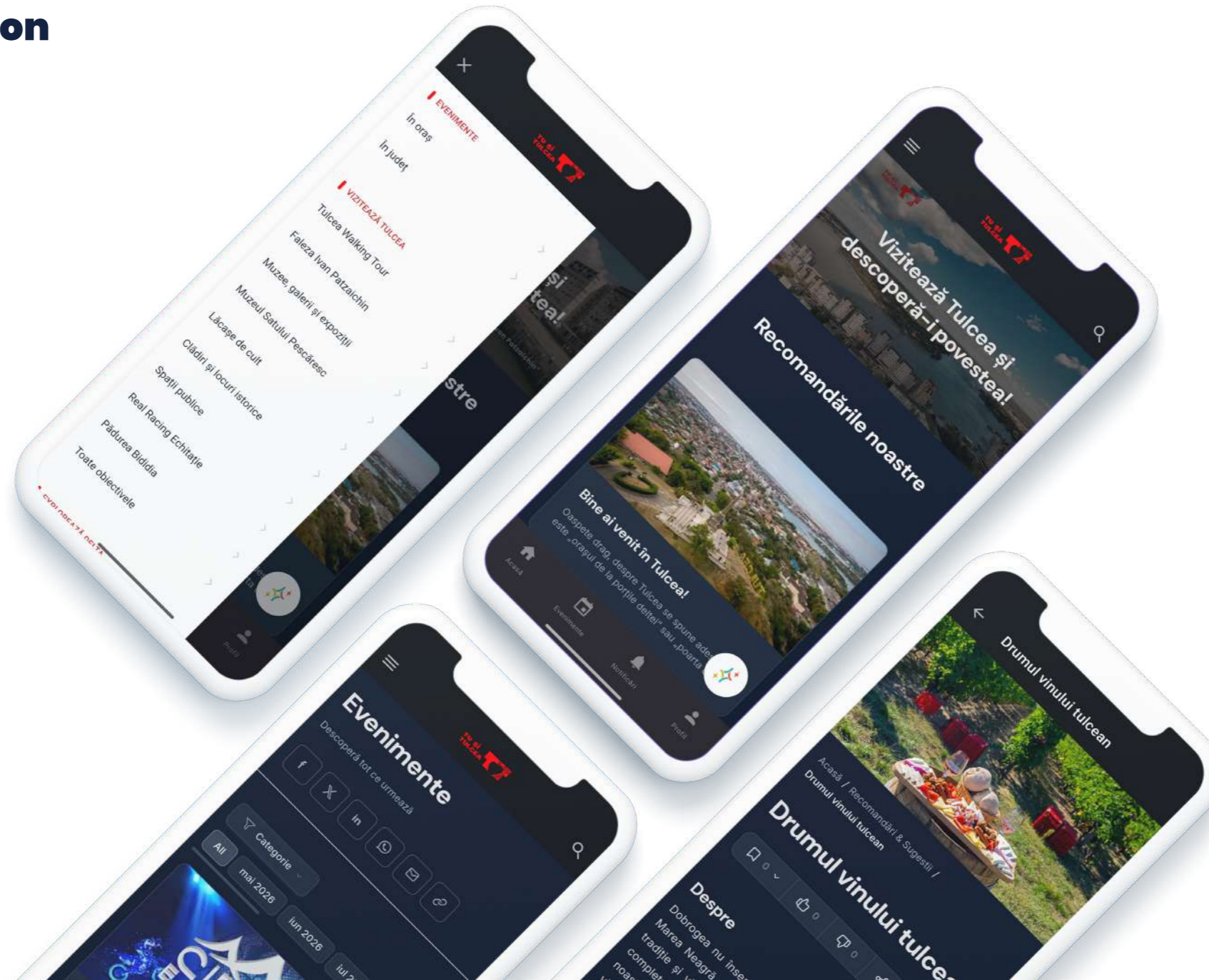
Tu și Tulcea

A Digital Gateway to Local Products, Experiences and Stories



Developed by the Destination Management Organisation of Tulcea Municipality and launched in July 2024, *Tu și Tulcea* functions as a free digital guide for residents and visitors, bringing together tourist attractions, accommodation, restaurants, cafés, events, activities and useful local information in one place. It creates a digital infrastructure for promoting the operators, experiences and stories that define the territory: nature, culture, history, gastronomy, hospitality and access to the Danube Delta.

With interactive features such as maps, reviews, real-time notifications, event agendas and thematic collections, the platform already includes over 200 profiles of points of interest and events. Within the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 programme, it can be further developed as a digital interface for gastronomic routes, seasonal recommendations, video stories about young producers, food gift campaigns and curated local discovery journeys, helping reduce fragmentation and give small entrepreneurs stronger visibility in the regional tourism ecosystem.



Flavours of Dobrogea Recipe Simulator

Interactive Heritage through Technology



Proposed as a flagship innovation project of the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, the Flavours of Dobrogea Recipe Simulator is conceived as an interactive educational application for touchscreen displays in museums, educational spaces, visitor centres and cultural venues across the region.

It transforms traditional recipes and culinary techniques into a game-based learning experience in which visitors select ingredients, combine them through drag and drop, follow short microlearning videos and reconstruct recipes step by step in a visual simulator.

The application can include representative dishes from Dobrogea's communities, linking ingredients, techniques, stories and territories in an accessible format for children, young people, families and tourists. Its innovation lies in combining gamification, food education and cultural storytelling, while also creating a bridge between heritage and market: recipes can be connected to local ingredients, video stories about producers, seasonal recommendations, gastronomic routes and products available in the region. In this way, technology becomes a practical tool for learning, promotion and new opportunity creation, translating culinary heritage into a language that speaks naturally to digital generations.

Ecosystem Building, Skills and Entrepreneurship

Ambasada

Building a Regional Start-up Ecosystem



Ambasada is a community, hub and incubator dedicated to tech founders in Dobrogea, creating a space where early-stage entrepreneurs from South-East Romania can connect, learn, validate ideas and receive real support from mentors, peers and investors. Since its launch in early 2025, it has mentored or identified start-up initiatives in food, agriculture and sustainable tourism with a regional footprint, from AI concierge solutions for

hotels and digital tools for meal planning to IoT and sensor networks that help farmers optimize crops.

Under the Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 programme, this role is expanding further through incubation programmes, hackathons and future collaborations in European consortia, strengthening the region’s capacity to turn local challenges into innovation-driven opportunities.

FONT CT & Local Food Challenge

Skills, Creativity and Responsible Choices



Through the Federation of Youth NGOs of Constanța and the activities developed within Zbor Hub Constanța, young people are engaged in practical, non-formal learning experiences that connect creativity, sustainability and responsible consumption.

become a powerful entry point for informed choices, critical thinking and civic engagement. In this context, initiatives such as the *Local Food Challenge* can grow into a wider regional platform that encourages young people to explore local products, understand their impact and develop new ideas at the intersection of gastronomy, innovation and community life.

Workshops built around local ingredients, live cooking, nutrition and storytelling have shown that food can





Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences Applied Learning for sustainable agriculture



The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences of Ovidius University of Constanța brings innovation into agricultural education through direct experimentation, field exposure and applied research. Its demonstrative agricultural plot functions as a space for learning and testing, where students can work with different cultivation technologies, compare crop systems and analyse their impact on agri-food production and the environment. Within this teaching plot, students can choose crops according to their interests, monitor their development and interpret the results as part of their bachelor's and master's research.

This practical approach is strengthened by collaborations with partner farms and agricultural operators, which place students in direct contact with real working conditions and field challenges. Through interaction with specialists, they learn the value of adaptability, informed decision-making and efficient use of natural resources. Applied research activities, experimental projects and local, national and international exchanges, including through Erasmus+, further develop their innovative mindset and entrepreneurial skills.

In this way, FSNSA prepares students not only to apply existing technologies, but also to contribute to new solutions for sustainable agriculture in Dobrogea.

Strategic “Innovation, Creativity and Job Opportunities” objectives under the Award

Transforming heritage into contemporary products and services

Supporting initiatives that turn Dobrogea’s food heritage, crafts, recipes, landscapes and community stories into high-value products, experiences and services rooted in local identity.

Developing creative and digital tools for regional storytelling

Promoting audiovisual, interactive and digital formats that make Dobrogea’s culinary diversity easier to discover, understand and share, especially for younger audiences and visitors.

Strengthening local entrepreneurship and new job opportunities

Encouraging start-ups, SMEs, producers, artisans, chefs and young entrepreneurs to develop new economic opportunities connected to gastronomy, tourism, digital tools, design and sustainable local production.

Supporting skills, learning and innovation capacity

Creating opportunities for young people, students and professionals to develop skills in storytelling, design, hospitality, entrepreneurship, sustainable packaging, food education and regional promotion.

Increasing the visibility and market access of local products

Using food gifts, curated packages, digital storytelling, certification systems, cross-marketing and tourism channels to help local products reach citizens, visitors, companies and international audiences.

Projects and actions under development

Flavours of Dobrogea HIBOX – Heritage in a BOX



Building on the Flavours of Jurilovca prototype developed with Suvenir din Dobrogea and connected to the World Food Gift Challenge, HIBOX will be developed as a flagship food gift and storytelling product of the candidacy. Each edition will combine local food products, crafts, recipes, photographs, small publications and digital stories accessed through QR or NFC technology. The aim is to create a replicable physical-digital format that helps producers, artisans and cultural actors gain visibility, access new markets and transform intangible heritage into a contemporary visitor experience.

Dobrogea Food Gift Challenge



Under the Award, Dobrogea will develop its own regional Food Gift Challenge as a platform for identifying, improving and promoting local food gifts, craft products and culinary souvenirs. Starting in 2026, co-creation workshops will bring together producers, students, marketing specialists, designers and cultural actors to support product development, packaging, storytelling, curation and market readiness. Each year, a local competition will be organised before the international World Food Gift Challenge, encouraging more producers to take part and involving the public in selecting the products that will represent Dobrogea internationally. Together with Harghita European Region of Gastronomy 2027 and Banat European Region of Gastronomy 2028, Dobrogea will also explore a Romanian Regions of Gastronomy Food Gift, bringing together selected products from the three regions for joint promotion at fairs, conferences, events and international presentations.

Digital Storytelling for Food and Heritage



Building on existing tools such as Tu și Tulcea and the proposed Flavours of Dobrogea Recipe Simulator, the region will develop digital formats that connect visitors with local products, producers, recipes, routes and cultural stories. This direction can include interactive maps, QR-based storytelling, video portraits of producers, recipe simulations for museums and schools, and digital access to gastronomic routes. In this way, technology becomes a practical tool for discovery, education and market access, especially for small producers and community-based initiatives.

Together, these initiatives show how Dobrogea can turn heritage, creativity, technology and local knowledge into a shared ecosystem of innovation, one that creates visibility, strengthens skills, opens new opportunities and gives regional identity a contemporary economic value.





Educating for Our Future



In Dobrogea, education for the future begins by reconnecting children, young people and communities with the real meaning of food. This means more than learning about nutrition. It means understanding taste, seasonality, local ingredients, traditional knowledge, the effort behind a meal and the relationship between food, health, environment and cultural identity.

Across the region, this learning often happens through direct experience rather than formal instruction. In households, gardens, village spaces, cultural initiatives and environmental programmes, children are invited to observe, touch, prepare, taste and understand. Through these encounters, food becomes a gateway to wider forms of learning: about nature, community, responsibility, memory and the value of local resources.

This dimension is particularly meaningful for Dobrogea because it helps pass on not only recipes and skills, but also ways of living, caring and belonging. Under the umbrella of this project, educational initiatives rooted in place can be strengthened and connected into a wider regional framework, one that helps future generations grow closer to food, territory and the cultural diversity that defines Dobrogea.



Constanța County School Inspectorate (ISJ)

Education for taste, skills and the future



ISJ has an essential role in connecting education with gastronomic heritage, cultural diversity and the professional future of the region. Through technological high schools and educational projects developed across the territory, the school becomes a space where students learn not only about food, but also about origin, seasonality, health, tradition, environment and responsibility.

The technological high schools of Dobrogea offer concrete examples of applied education. At **Dobrogea Technological High School in Castelu**, investments in the SmartLab, the public catering laboratory and the serving techniques laboratory create a complete educational pathway, from digital skills and HORECA simulations to cooking, food hygiene, serving techniques and hospitality. Students can work with traditional Dobrogean recipes, as well as with contemporary approaches, preparing for real roles in gastronomy, tourism and services.

In the field of education for agriculture, environment and food industry, projects proposed by schools such as **Cogealac Technological High School** bring practical training to the forefront: food processing workshops, food safety, HACCP standards, waste reduction, composting, documentation of local seeds, demonstration gardens, melliferous plants and the protection of pollinators. In this way, students understand the connection between agriculture, biodiversity, food and environmental protection.

This educational network is further strengthened by **Carol I Commercial College** in Constanța, with its strong profile in services, tourism and food, specialised laboratories for cooking, serving techniques, pastry, tourism and SmartLab activities, partnerships with economic operators and Erasmus projects dedicated to hospitality and professional training at European standards.

Other schools complete this direction through community and vocational activities. In **Topraisar**, projects such as *Agriculture 2050*, *SMARTLAB*, *EDU Grădina*, *the Hortizona Competition*, *the ReCoNnect Science Caravan*, and activities such as *Autumn's Riches* or the *Christmas Fair* create contexts for practical learning and local involvement. At **Nicolae Dumitrescu Technological High School** in Cumpăna, food education activities, visits to vegetable greenhouses and bakeries, vocational competitions and participation in local festivals support healthy eating and the valorisation of traditionally cultivated products.

In addition, **Ion Podaru Technological High School** in Ovidiu proposes practical activities dedicated to traditional Dobrogean products, such as Saint Andrew's pie, Dobrogean pie, leek pie, șuberec or baklava, contributing to the transmission of multicultural culinary heritage to young people.

Within the candidacy, ISJ supports the extension of these good practices into a regional educational programme capable of forming young ambassadors of taste, diversity and responsibility towards Dobrogea's resources.

Examples of good practice

Skills and hospitality
SmartLab, gastronomy and serving laboratories, HORECA simulations, digital menus, professional cooking and service training.

Food, environment and responsibility
Local seeds, food waste journals, composting, pollinator gardens, organic cultivation and food safety.

Community and heritage
School fairs, harvest events, educational visits, traditional Dobrogean products, healthy food activities and local festivals.





Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Education Rooted in Local Food and Future Skills



At university level, this educational direction is continued by the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences of Ovidius University of Constanța, which prepares future specialists to understand local food, sustainable agriculture and the responsibility that comes with managing natural resources.

Within the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences of Ovidius University of Constanța, education for the future is closely connected to local food, environmental responsibility and the ability of young people to adapt to a changing world. Students are encouraged to understand the value of local and traditional products, as well as the importance of European quality schemes and certifications in protecting regional identity and increasing the market value of Dobrogea's food heritage.

At the same time, their academic training places strong emphasis on the sustainable use of natural resources, modern agricultural practices and adaptation to climate change. Through collaboration with economic operators and research institutions, students gain access to relevant professional experiences and understand the wider impact of their decisions on the environment, society and local communities.

In this way, FSNSA helps prepare a generation of graduates who are not only ready to enter the labour market, but also capable of developing their own initiatives in agriculture, rural development and sustainable local food systems.

Relevant study paths

FSNSA connects food, agriculture and local development through courses such as Organic Agriculture – Principles and Methods, Eco-foods, Traditional Dobrogean Products in the Context of European Policies, Sustainable Agricultural Technologies, Rural Economy, Viticulture, Oenology, Horticulture and Marketing in Agriculture



Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association

Where Water Shapes Community and Becomes a Classroom



The Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association has become one of the key actors redefining the contemporary identity and sustainable future of the Danube Delta. Founded around the vision of Olympic champion Ivan Patzaichin, the association works at the intersection of heritage conservation, ecotourism, education and community innovation, supporting local development while protecting the Delta's cultural and natural biodiversity.

Across its 15 years of activity, the association has developed projects that transform local traditions, landscapes and water heritage into resources for sustainable growth. Acting as a facilitator between local communities, entrepreneurs, researchers, artists and public institutions, it promotes slow tourism, ecological mobility, traditional gastronomy, heritage and cultural education as interconnected parts of a broader development vision.

Nowadays, at the centre of this ecosystem, stands the Ivan Patzaichin Museum – Community Innovation Centre. Not only a museum, it functions as a cultural and educational hub hosting artistic residencies, workshops, debates, heritage projects and community initiatives. Built with sustainable materials inspired by vernacular Delta architecture, the centre has become a landmark for contemporary cultural life in the region and a platform connecting innovation with local identity.



La Colibe

Romania's Only Archaic Village Reimagined for Education and Community



La Colibe, the archaic Romanian hamlet created in Corbu by architect Cosmin Văru, ambassador of Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy Candidate 2029, offers a framework for direct learning built around nature, local food and community life. Located between the village, the sea and the road to the Delta, the project recreates the atmosphere of a small rural community through sustainably built spaces made from local materials: earth huts, natural shelters, camping areas, a garden, play spaces and outdoor event settings. For children and young people, this reimagined archaic village environment becomes a place where they can discover how food, dwelling, landscape,

materials and everyday gestures once formed part of the same way of life.

La Colibe is an educational space where learning happens through participation: kneading bread, cooking in a cauldron, preparing flatbreads, discovering local ingredients, observing plants, understanding the journey of food from producer to table and using resources responsibly. Meals cooked daily over fire, shared under the open sky, and spaces such as *Coliba Bucătarului* create a natural setting for workshops on simple food, seasonality and Dobrogean culinary habits. This educational component is already relevant in the government-backed educational programs such as “Școala Altfel (Alternative Education

Week)” and “Săptămâna Verde (Green Week)” and can be developed further through school programmes, thematic visits and summer programmes for children, connecting food with creative disciplines, local heritage, gardening, waste reduction, recycling and respect for the environment.

Through this approach, La Colibe helps shape a generation that understands food as a relationship with land, local producers, traditions and community. In a carefully reimagined hamlet, children discover Dobrogea through simple gestures: dough kneaded by hand, meals prepared over fire, gardening, play in nature and stories about life by the sea.



Lipovenesc

Learning through Household Life, Food and Living Community Memory



Lipovenesc, the project created in Jurilovca by Daniela and Marian Sterea, is a space where children can understand Dobrogea through direct experience: courtyard, animals, garden, traditional house, food, play and stories about the Lipovan village. The two photographers chose to leave the city for a life closer to nature and transformed an old household in northern Dobrogea into a meeting place with rural rhythms, local traditions and community memory.

At Lipovenesc, educational programmes are built around learning through play and discovery. Children become familiar with the animals of the household, from ducks, chickens and geese to alpacas, a Shetland pony, a donkey, a goat, a sheep, cats and dogs, learning how they are cared for and how their behaviour can be observed. The activities include creative workshops, painting on wood or canvas,

coloured sand painting, time spent in nature and educational experiences adapted to different age groups.

The food component is naturally rooted in the place itself. Lipovenesc organises household tours, meals with local specificity and activities such as cooking flatbreads on the hotplate, feeding and caring for the animals, milking the goat, woodwork and clay-building activities for children. In a village shaped by fishing and the waters of the Delta, children can understand the relationship between water, fish, family, the shared table and community. Recipes and household gestures become starting points for conversations about taste, origin, seasonality, resources and Lipovan culture.

An important dimension of the project is connected to the restored house

and to traditional building techniques. Daniela and Marian Sterea bought an old house in Jurilovca, dated 1893, and chose to rehabilitate it using traditional methods. Around this house, they initiated community clay-building gatherings, working with clay, straw, wood and natural materials in order to bring attention back to a local craft and a form of collective work.

Through Lipovenesc, education takes the form of lived experience. Children come closer to land and water, to animals and food, to old objects and local recipes, and to a community that preserves its identity through simple gestures. For Dobrogea 2029, the project offers a model of living rural learning in which taste, nature, culture and hospitality meet in an experience that is warm, accessible and memorable.



Mare Nostrum NGO Educational perspectives

The educational activity of Mare Nostrum NGO is an essential pillar in shaping a society responsible towards the environment and oriented towards a healthier future. Through previous projects, the organisation has focused on environmental education, awareness of waste impact, especially plastic, and the active involvement of children, young people, teachers and community in actions that produce real change.

Education for the future means forming responsible habits from the earliest years of life, through classroom workshops, interactive activities, educational games, volunteering and public events. Participants learn about waste reduction, recycling, responsible consumption and environmental protection, above all the direct link between environment, food and health. Plastic pollution affects nature and the food chain, as plastic breaks down into microplastics that enter marine organisms and, implicitly, human food. Protecting the environment therefore means protecting health and future food.

Mare Nostrum has combined education with direct action: monitoring 9 beach sectors in 3 annual sessions, carrying out 2 underwater clean-ups and collecting 19,888 waste items of waste, approximately 90% plastic. It also implemented 51 eco-patrols to identify and clean polluted areas, actively involving young people, and carried out pilot identification and clean-up actions along the Danube.

Future directions include international initiatives and exchanges of good practice between EU and non-EU countries, reducing waste impact at sporting events and strengthening local administrations in the Black Sea Basin to use sport as a tool for communication and environmental education.

The organisation is also involved in collaborative actions to combat plastic pollution in the Danube Basin: tagging 41 bottles in the Tag a Plastic Bottle campaign, organising 11 land and water expeditions to locate waste accumulation areas, and collecting and sorting waste, including 2,400 kg from the Borcea branch near the Danube.

Another major objective is reducing the impact of abandoned fishing gear on the Black Sea marine environment. Approximately 9,500 kg of abandoned nets were removed from waters in Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria and Georgia, waste that can seriously affect ecosystems, marine organisms, the food industry and marine product consumption.

Looking ahead, Mare Nostrum will focus on prevention through school programmes, youth and community involvement, responsible consumption, waste reduction, local products and understanding the connection between environment, food and health. Environmental education thus becomes education for life, health and the future, helping form a conscious generation that understands how environmental protection shapes quality of life, health and the food of tomorrow.



Strategic “Educating for Our Future” objectives under the Award

Strengthening food literacy from an early age

Connecting children and young people with the origin of food, taste, seasonality, local ingredients, healthy choices and the cultural meaning of what they eat.

Creating pathways towards future professions

Encouraging young people to discover career opportunities in gastronomy, agriculture, hospitality, tourism, food production, environmental protection and local entrepreneurship.

Expanding practical learning experiences

Supporting visits, workshops and hands-on activities in farms, gardens, households, Local Gastronomic Points, museums, natural areas and food-related cultural spaces.

Supporting skills, learning and innovation capacity

Creating contexts in which children, students and communities can learn directly from producers, farmers, fishermen, cooks, artisans, researchers, hosts and bearers of local traditions.

Connecting food education with sustainability and health

Helping students understand the relationship between food, climate, biodiversity, waste reduction, plastic pollution, responsible consumption and personal well-being.

Projects and actions under development

Food Education through Green Week and Alternative Education Week

Building on existing national programmes such as Săptămâna Verde and Școala Altfel, Dobrogea will strengthen educational activities that bring children closer to food, nature and local heritage. Partners such as ISJ Constanța, FSNSA, La Colibe, Lipovenesc, Suvenir din Dobrogea, Mare Nostrum and the Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association can contribute through visits, workshops, cooking activities, gardening, environmental education, storytelling, animal care, waste reduction and encounters with local producers and communities.

Dobrogea Young Chef and Food Ambassadors Programme

Starting in 2026, Dobrogea will develop its own Dobrogea Young Chef format as part of the regional programme, in close connection with IGCAT’s European Young Chef Award. Organised with Tulcea DMO, Eco Danube Delta County DMO with the support of the County School Inspectorate and local partners, the initiative will create a local framework for discovering, mentoring and preparing young culinary talent rooted in the region’s ingredients, traditions and food stories.

Through the support of ISJ, schools such as Dobrogea Technological High School in Castelu, Cogealac Technological High School, Nicolae Dumitrescu Technological High School in Cumpăna and Ion Podaru Technological High School in Ovidiu can become part of a wider pathway for identifying and encouraging students with an interest in gastronomy.

Workshops, mentoring sessions, cooking demonstrations and meetings with chefs, producers and cultural actors will help prepare young participants for the local selection and, eventually, for participation in the European Young Chef Award. Beyond competition, the aim is to form young ambassadors able to speak about Dobrogea through taste, place and responsible food choices.

Seeds, Pollinators and Food Responsibility in Schools

Building on activities already proposed in schools, the programme will encourage symbolic mini seed banks of local varieties, demonstration gardens, organic corners, melliferous plants, pollinator shelters, food waste journals, composting and responsible consumption campaigns. The action will connect students with agricultural biodiversity, the origin of food, soil and water protection, the role of bees and the importance of reducing food waste.

Learning Routes: From Classroom to Land, Water and Table

Dobrogea will develop a set of educational routes and field experiences connecting schools, universities and youth groups with the places where food, nature and culture meet. These routes can include farms, vineyards, fishing villages, Local Gastronomic Points, the Ivan Patzaichin Museum – Community Innovation Centre, the Traditional Fishing Village of Tulcea, environmental sites and university-led field activities. The aim is to help young people understand Dobrogea not only from textbooks, but through direct contact with land, water, producers, recipes, landscapes and community life.

Together, these initiatives show how education in Dobrogea can move beyond the classroom and become a living experience of food, nature, heritage and responsibility, helping future generations understand the region through what they grow, cook, taste, protect and pass on.

When this knowledge is shared beyond the classroom and the household, it becomes part of the way a region welcomes, inspires and transforms its visitors.



Regenerative Food Destinations



In Dobrogea, regenerative food destinations are built around authenticity, local knowledge and a living relationship between people, place and food. Here, gastronomy is not reduced to consumption or display. It is part of a wider experience shaped by landscape, community, tradition and the rhythms of everyday life.

This focus area resonates strongly in Dobrogea, where the region brings together many of the elements needed to develop meaningful, place-based visitor experiences: local producers, family-run food initiatives, village hospitality, culinary traditions, multicultural heritage and exceptional natural settings stretching from the Danube Delta to the Black Sea coast. When these elements are connected with care, tourism can generate value that remains in the territory, supports local livelihoods and strengthens the distinctiveness of the region.

In Dobrogea, this vision is already taking shape through households, local gastronomic points, community-led initiatives and experiences built around food, hospitality and the rhythms of place. Together, they lay the foundations for a regional network of regenerative food destinations, capable of extending the season, supporting the local economy and offering visitors a deeper relationship with the territory.



Ivan Patzaichin

Following the Rhythm of Water



The broader strategic vision developed around Ivan Patzaichin's legacy positions slow tourism as a framework connecting mobility, culture, ecology and community life. Water routes, rowing competitions and village festivals are conceived as interconnected experiences encouraging visitors to engage with the Delta gradually and respectfully.

The "Ivan's Delta" water route links villages, natural areas and cultural landmarks through non-invasive travel by kayak, canoe, canotca, SUP (Stand Up Paddleboarding) and traditional boats, restoring the historical relationship between movement and water.

The International Canoe Marathon Ivan Patzaichin, organised between Tulcea and Mila 23, transforms endurance rowing into an immersive encounter with the Delta landscape, bringing together elite athletes and recreational participants alike.

Alongside it, events such as Bibaniada de Fete celebrate the convivial and cultural dimensions of Delta life through women's fishing competitions, gastronomy, music and village gatherings. Together with the Rowmania caravans and festivals organised throughout Romania, these initiatives form a living infrastructure of ecological mobility, cultural activation and community-based tourism — one where heritage, landscape and contemporary creativity continuously flow into one another.

Girls' Perch Festival (Bibaniada)

Celebrating the Delta at Its Own Pace



Among the initiatives shaping the Delta's slow-tourism identity, the Girls' Perch Festival (Bibaniada de Fete) stands out as one of the clearest expressions of how local customs can evolve into contemporary cultural experiences without losing authenticity. Organised annually in Mila 23 by the Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association, the festival combines recreational fishing, gastronomy, music, crafts and community life into a format that reflects the natural rhythm of the Delta itself. In less than a decade the event has become an important gathering point for visitors seeking direct encounters with local traditions and everyday life beyond conventional tourism models.

The festival draws inspiration from a longstanding practice in the villages of the Delta: after the annual fishing closed season ends, the women of the community traditionally go out onto the waters to fish for perch. From this gesture of seasonal renewal emerged Romania's first women's perch-fishing competition, transforming an intimate local custom into a public celebration of identity, participation and living heritage. Yet Bibaniada extends far beyond the competition itself. The caught perch becomes the centrepiece of culinary demonstrations and communal meals, where visitors discover fish recipes, local brines and Delta cooking techniques prepared by families and Local Gastronomic Points. Around these encounters develops a wider festival atmosphere: fairs of local products, guided visits to the Ivan Patzaichin Museum – Community Innovation Centre, children's activities, traditional Lipovan music and village gatherings that blur the line between spectator and participant.

In this way, the festival embodies the broader philosophy behind the Delta's slow-tourism strategy — one based not on spectacle or rapid consumption, but on immersion, hospitality and meaningful engagement with place. Organised together with local communities and cultural actors, Bibaniada supports the visibility of the Delta's multicultural heritage while strengthening small-scale entrepreneurship connected to gastronomy, tourism and crafts.

For the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, the festival offers a compelling example of regenerative tourism in practice: a model in which traditions remain alive because they continue to be shared, adapted and celebrated by the community itself, while visitors become temporary participants in the social and cultural life of the Delta.





La Mirela în Ogradă

Hospitality, Seasonality and the Taste of Household Life



Local Gastronomic Point (PGL) *La Mirela în Ogradă*, situated in Saligny commune, Constanța County, between the Danube and the Sea, offers a form of hospitality rooted in household life, work and taste. Registered in 2023, the place was born from Mirela Mogilă's passion for cooking and from her desire to bring back to the table the taste of local and traditional products specific to the area. The household follows a simple motto: **"We work what we cook and we cook what we work."** The whole family is involved in the work, the cooking, the serving and the welcoming of guests.

What gives this place its value as a regenerative food destination is precisely this direct relationship between food, land and people. Mirela cooks with products from her own garden and household and the meals change according to the season and to what the yard can offer. There is no fixed menu: every weekend, food is prepared differently, following the model of the family table, with simple and flavourful dishes such as chicken stew with plenty of onions, polenta and pickles. In this way, visitors do not encounter a staged culinary performance, but a living, seasonal food culture shaped by the rhythm of the household and by the ingredients available at that moment.

La Mirela în Ogradă also creates the conditions for a more direct and meaningful encounter between hosts and visitors. Tourists can take part in the preparation of food together with the family, discovering ingredients, gestures and techniques through shared experience. Grain, flour, bread, vegetables, eggs, poultry and preserved foods become part of a story about patience, work, seasonality and respect for the ingredient. Set on a hilltop near Cernavodă, the place also offers a natural context for connecting food with landscape, agriculture and the history of the area.

Through its family dimension and its closeness to the land, *La Mirela în Ogradă* shows how a local gastronomic point can become something more than just a place to eat. It becomes a place where hospitality keeps value in the territory, where visitors are invited to slow down and participate, and where the identity of Dobrogea is experienced through cooking, tasting and sharing the table.

Cuibul de la Mare and La Colibe

Slow Hospitality between Village, Sea and Delta



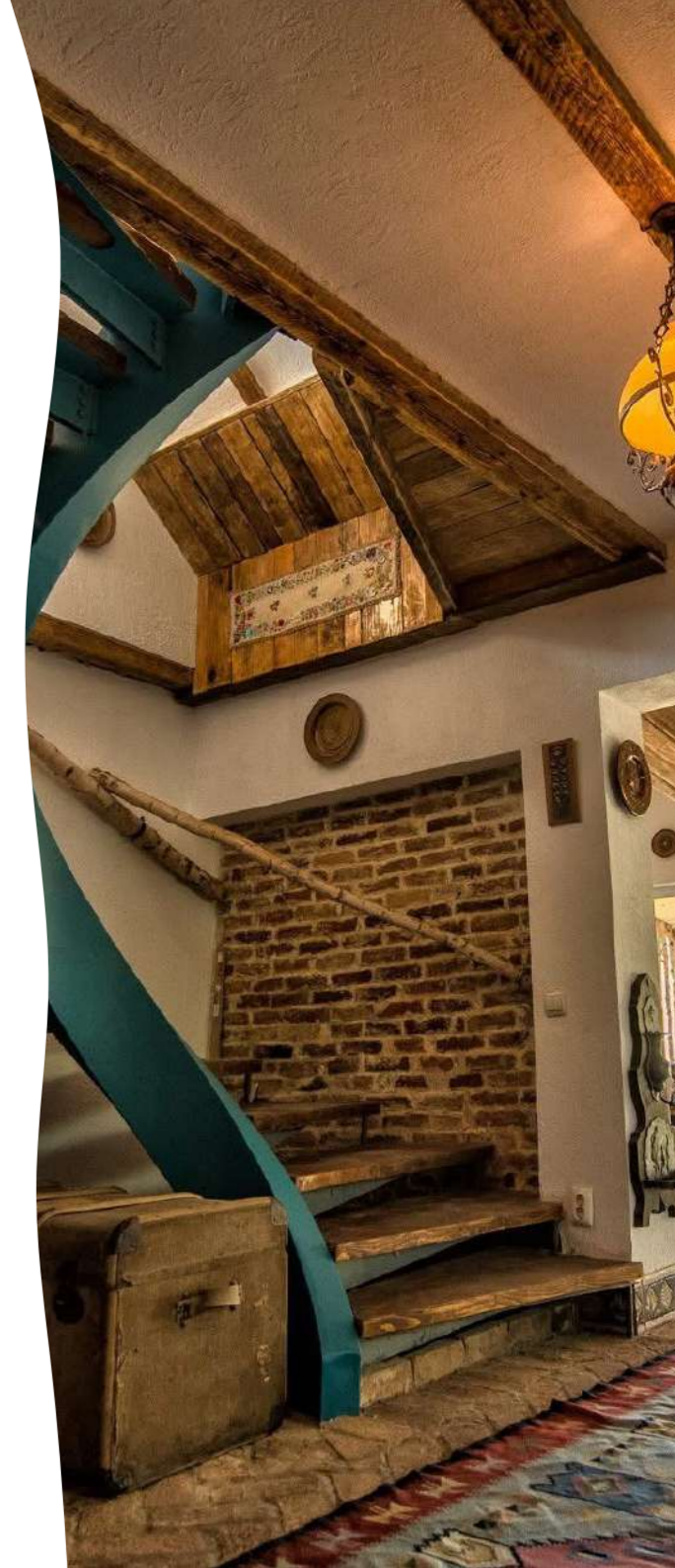
In the Corbu area, *Cuibul de la Mare* (The Nest By The Sea) and *La Colibe* (Among the Huts) represent two complementary forms of gastronomic tourism: one built around the guesthouse, the meal shared with the hosts and local products; the other around an ecological archaic hamlet, natural spaces and community experiences in the open air.

At *Cuibul de la Mare*, hospitality is built around a simple and coherent rural experience, close to the rhythm of Corbu village, to the landscape at the edge of the sea and to what the hosts call "the rhythm and order of village life." The meal becomes part of the experience of the place: fish from local fishermen, fresh vegetables from their own greenhouses, eggs and country poultry, cheeses from local producers, *zacuscă* and homemade jams. Dinner can be prepared in the courtyard, in a cauldron, in front of the visitors, turning cooking into a moment of closeness between hosts, guests and the local community.

La Colibe extends this philosophy into a format of rural ecotourism. Situated between Corbu and Vadu, the project is built as an archaic Romanian hamlet, with earth huts, plant-based shelters, natural dugouts and spaces made sustainably from local materials. The experience offered is one of returning to simplicity: accommodation in nature, meals under the open sky, a slow rhythm, open-air events and a careful relationship with the Dobrogean landscape.

Together, the two projects support the Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy through a model of slow tourism oriented towards quality, depth and local meaning. Visitors are not attracted through rapid consumption, but through experiences that bring them closer to food, people and place: breakfast with local products, meals cooked in a cauldron, stories about the village, local fishing, recovered objects, architecture inspired by the traditional household and events in which taste meets music, craft and nature.

This type of hospitality, deeply rooted in agrotourism, is exemplary for Dobrogea's tourism direction: smaller groups, seasonality, local products, visible cooking, handcrafted souvenirs, collaboration with producers and a more balanced relationship with the coast. *Cuibul de la Mare* and *La Colibe* show that Dobrogea can also be discovered beyond the beach, through meals set in courtyards, reimagined hamlets, stories about food and experiences that preserve the value of place.



Strategic “Regenerative Food Destinations” objectives under the Award

Developing year-round food experiences

Extending the tourism season through experiences rooted in gastronomy, cultural heritage, wine, nature, slow tourism, local communities and the rhythms of place.

Promoting local ingredients in tourism and hospitality

Encouraging restaurants, hotels and visitor experiences to use and promote local products, traditional dishes and the stories of producers and communities.

Strengthening regenerative tourism models

Supporting smaller-scale, higher-quality tourism experiences that keep value in the territory, respect local culture and protect natural and cultural resources.

Improving hospitality and storytelling

Helping hosts, restaurants, guides, chefs and tourism operators improve service quality, local sourcing, storytelling and the interpretation of Dobrogea’s food heritage.

Projects and actions under development

Welcome to the Farm Dobrogea



Inspired by the model developed in Catalonia – European Region of Gastronomy 2016 and World Region of Gastronomy 2025 – Dobrogea will adapt and test a regional Welcome to the Farm format, encouraging visits to farms, households, Local Gastronomic Points, vineyards and small food producers. The programme will bring visitors closer to the origin of food through guided visits, tastings, seasonal activities, storytelling and direct encounters with producers, helping transform rural knowledge and local food production into meaningful visitor experiences.

IGCAT Food Commitment with Restaurants and Chefs



Inspired by the [Signature Dish](#) initiative of Harghita – European Region of Gastronomy 2027, Dobrogea will promote the IGCAT Food Commitment together with local restaurants, chefs and hospitality operators. The action will support the use of local ingredients, the inclusion of traditional dishes and contemporary interpretations on menus, and the stronger valorisation of the stories behind products, producers and communities. Co-creation workshops with chefs, hosts, producers, guides and tourism operators will help improve quality, storytelling, collaboration and the overall visitor experience.

Local Breakfast / Local Brunch



Starting in 2026, Dobrogea will begin testing a Local Breakfast / Local Brunch format together with a small number of partner hotels. The pilot will encourage hotels to include local ingredients, traditional products and seasonal dishes in breakfast or brunch menus, while also making products from local producers visible at reception areas or dedicated visitor corners. The initiative can connect accommodation providers with partners from the region, helping visitors discover Dobrogea from the first meal of the day. Through tasting notes, producer stories, QR codes or small product displays, hotels can become gateways to the wider food territory, encouraging guests to visit producers, book local experiences and take regional products home. In this way, a simple breakfast can become part of a regenerative destination model, where hospitality supports local value chains and gives visitors a deeper sense of place.

Festival of Dobrogea Gastronomy



The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences of Ovidius University of Constanța will strengthen this regional network through the academic and professional training of students in Geography, Tourism Geography, Agriculture and Horticulture. Students are involved in activities that allow them to understand the relationship between agriculture and tourism, such as visits to farms and specialised tourism units, participation in gastronomic events and interaction with local producers. They observe how local agricultural products become an integral part of the visitor experience within Dobrogea’s multi-ethnic gastronomy, while also contributing to the promotion of the region’s cultural identity. FSNSA’s participation in long-standing festivals, such as the Festival of Dobrogean Gastronomy and Fish or events dedicated to Dobrogean wine, offers students the opportunity to interact directly with the public, promote local products and understand the importance of agri-food marketing.

From visitor experiences, the programme moves towards citizen participation, strengthening the bridges between urban and rural communities, producers and consumers, schools and local heritage.



Urban and Rural Citizen Engagement



In Dobrogea, reconnecting urban and rural life is not only a matter of mobility or access, but of rebuilding relationships between people, food, landscape and community. In a region where local identity has long been shaped by villages, fisheries, farms, gardens, markets and shared food traditions, this connection remains essential for social cohesion and for the long-term vitality of local food systems.

This is one of the areas in which Dobrogea's strengths and needs meet most clearly, because it brings together two realities that need to be more meaningfully connected: urban communities that are increasingly distant from the origin of food, and rural communities that still hold valuable knowledge, practices and resources. Bringing these worlds closer creates opportunities not only for education and responsible consumption, but also for stronger local economies, greater visibility for producers and a renewed sense of belonging.

Under the umbrella of this project, Dobrogea aims to strengthen initiatives that bring the countryside into the city and the city closer to rural life through food, participation and shared experience. In this way, citizen engagement becomes an active force in shaping healthier, more connected and more resilient communities across the region.



The Traditional Fishing Village of Tulcea

A bridge between the city and the living culture of the Delta



Situated on the edge of the city of Tulcea, on the road out towards Mahmudia, the Traditional Fishing Village of Tulcea is one of the places where the urban public can come into direct contact with the architecture, crafts, gastronomy and atmosphere of the communities of the Danube Delta. Spread over approximately 3 hectares, the site brings together traditional houses, a village buffet, a fish kitchen, windmills, an information centre and a thematic park organised along three main alleys that attempt to recreate the branches of the Danube, with representative buildings placed along them for localities such as Sfântu Gheorghe, Chilia, Ceatalchioi, Mila 23, Periprava, Crişan, Jurilovca, Murighiol, Sulina and Letea.

The houses are painted in the traditional colours of the northern Dobrogean region: white, blue and green, and are covered with reed, according to tradition, offering visitors a coherent and accessible image of the world of the fishing village. In this way, the place functions as an introduction to the culture and traditions of the Danube Delta, bringing closer to the city a heritage that would otherwise remain dispersed across the territory.

Through the events regularly organised here, such as art camps, craft workshops, festivals and events dedicated to local heritage, the Fishing Village becomes a meeting place for communities, residents, children, tourists and bearers of tradition. Festivals hosted here,

such as Scrumbiu de Rusalii, show the potential of this place to bring together cultural heritage, local gastronomy and the atmosphere of the Delta in an accessible and participatory format.

Within the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, the Traditional Fishing Village of Tulcea has an important role in reconnecting urban and rural life, the public and the living heritage of the Delta, offering a space in which food, architecture, crafts and the stories of the place can be understood together, as part of the same regional identity.

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Students reconnecting Rural and Urban life



The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (FSNSA) of Ovidius University of Constanţa contributes to reconnecting urban and rural life by bringing students closer to the real source of food. Through practical activities in rural areas and on farms, students gain a direct understanding of agricultural processes and become ambassadors of rural life within the urban spaces where they study and live.

Students from the Tourism Geography programme at FSNSA can also become involved in promoting local natural heritage through internships as tour guides within Dobrogea's gastronomic destinations.

FSNSA's participation in fairs, exhibitions and festivals allows students to learn how to facilitate dialogue between producers and consumers, promote local products and encourage responsible consumption through the development of short supply chains.

At the same time, its activity contributes to the valorisation of rural areas as a tourism destination and to its promotion as a cultural resource, with a role not only in agri-food production, but also in the sustainable economic and social development of Dobrogea, through close collaboration between tourism and agriculture.

FSNSA at the Festival of Fishing Traditions and Gastronomy

FSNSA's participation with its own stand at the Festival of Fishing Traditions and Gastronomy, in collaboration with the Murfatlar Research and Development Station for Viticulture and Winemaking, created a direct meeting point between students, the public, local gastronomy and Dobrogean wine. The activity supports dialogue around local products, responsible consumption and the cultural value of regional food.

Training future local guides

Through the Dobrogea infotrip in Constanţa, Histria and Corbu, Tourism Geography students learned from local professionals about cultural heritage, guided tours and visitor experiences. Such activities prepare students to interpret Dobrogea for visitors as a living territory shaped by food, landscape, history and community.



Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association Danube Delta at the Dinner Table



The Association Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 played a pioneering role in connecting gastronomy, fishing culture and sustainable tourism. Starting from the realities of Delta villages, it helped develop models capable of preserving local identity while creating direct economic opportunities for residents.

One of these initiatives was pescaturism (fishing-tourism), allowing fishermen to guide visitors through the Delta while sharing local ecological knowledge, fishing practices and everyday cultural life. Travelling slowly by lotca or canotca, visitors experience the Delta as a living cultural territory rather than simply a protected landscape.

From this same philosophy emerged the concept of Local Gastronomic Points (Puncte Gastronomice Locale – PGL), first initiated in the Danube Delta through the efforts of the Association Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 and later expanded nationally. These small-scale family kitchens allow local families to prepare and serve traditional meals using local ingredients and recipes within a simplified legal framework. Fish soups, smoked fish and reed-fire cooking techniques thus become expressions of cultural continuity and local entrepreneurship.

Today, there are over 1000 PGLs on the national scale. The annual PGL fairs and conferences in Tulcea bring together cooks, fishermen, producers, researchers and institutions, strengthening a wider network dedicated to sustainable gastronomy, community-led tourism and the preservation of local traditions.





A Boat That Became a Movement

Many of the association's initiatives originate from the canotca – the hybrid rowing boat imagined by Ivan Patzaichin together with architect Teodor Frolu. Inspired by the traditional boat of the Danube Delta, the lotca, yet adapted for modern recreational rowing, the canotca became both practical tool and symbol: a vehicle for ecological mobility, slow tourism and renewed connections between people and water landscapes.

Around it emerged the wider Rowmania movement, bringing together festivals, rowing events, educational programmes and ecological initiatives across Romania. Through the annual Rowmania events and the Ivan Patzaichin Festival, rowing becomes a cultural language connecting sport, gastronomy, music, crafts and environmental awareness.

Education remains central to this vision. Through the "Pathfinders of the Waters" network and canotca-building workshops, children learn traditional craftsmanship, ecology and teamwork while reconnecting with the Delta's intangible heritage. Internationally recognised through the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards, the project demonstrates how heritage can become an active educational resource and a tool for strengthening community ties.



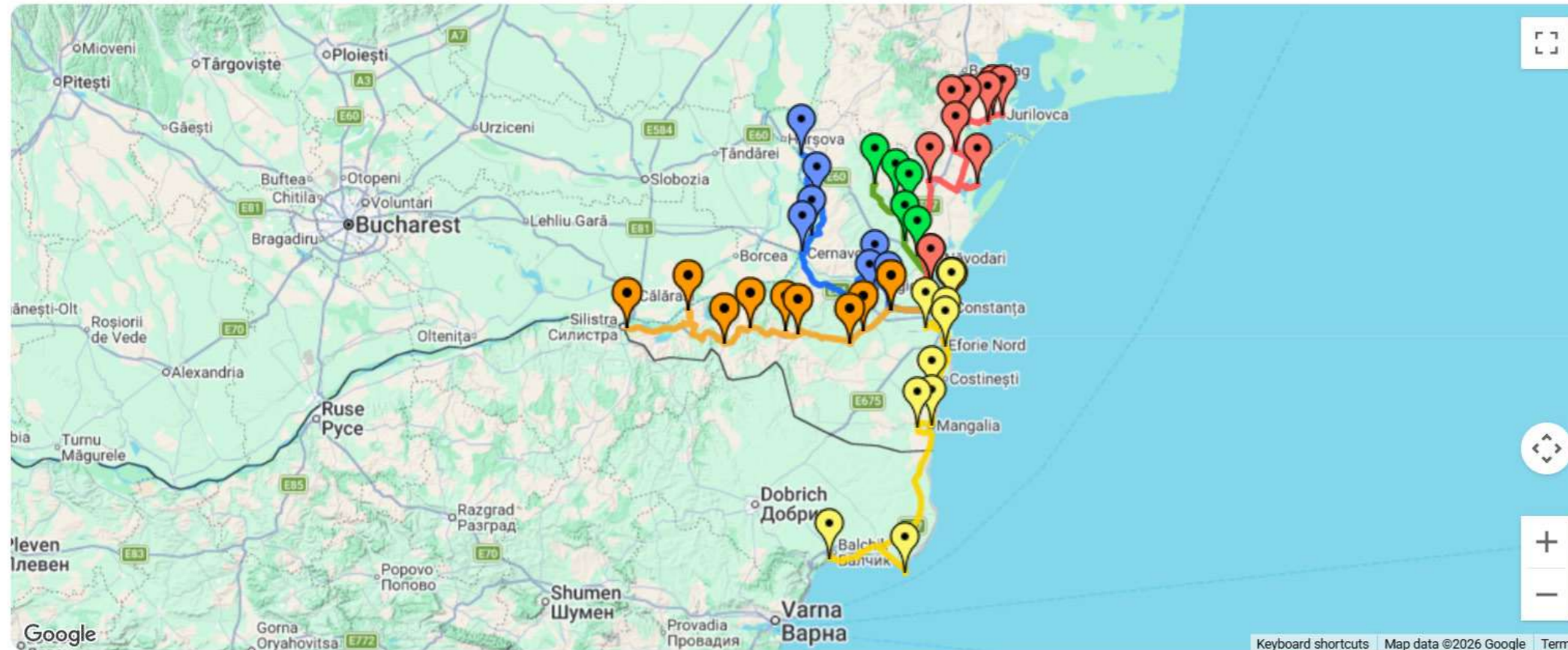
2019, Rowmania FEST – Viorel Gheorghe – boatbuilding workshop for kids



Foto: Școala Gimnazială Mila 23



█ Eco-History
 █ Gastronomy & Archeology
 █ Spirituality
 █ Danube & Memories
 █ Regality & Seaside



Via DobroGetica

Digital and Cultural Connection between Urban and Rural



Via DobroGetica can contribute to the Dobrogea 2029 programme as a route that reconnects people with territory, local communities and the cultural landscapes of the region. By linking villages, heritage sites, natural areas and local hosts, it creates opportunities for slower, more meaningful forms of discovery rooted in place.

Within the candidacy, this type of route can support citizen involvement by bringing visibility to local communities, encouraging encounters between visitors and residents, and strengthening the connection between mobility, heritage, food and regional identity.

Strategic “Urban and Rural Citizen Engagement” objectives under the Award

Reconnecting citizens with the origin of food

Creating opportunities for urban residents, visitors and young people to understand where food comes from, who produces it and how local choices influence health, environment and regional economies.

Supporting rural communities as active cultural actors

Recognising villages, fishing communities, farms and households not only as places of production, but as bearers of knowledge, hospitality, food heritage and regional identity.

Bringing rural knowledge into urban life

Supporting events, markets, workshops, festivals and educational formats that bring producers, fishermen, farmers, artisans and local hosts closer to urban audiences.

Building social cohesion through food and participation

Using food events, community meals, volunteering, festivals, student activities and shared experiences to connect generations, territories and communities across Dobrogea.

Encouraging direct links between producers and consumers

Strengthening short supply chains, producer visibility, direct sales, Local Gastronomic Points, farmers' markets and collaborations with hotels, restaurants, schools and cultural institutions.

Projects and actions under development

Dobrogea Local Producers Corners

Dobrogea will implement dedicated local producer corners in selected hotels, cultural venues, visitor centres and public events. These corners will make regional products more visible to residents and visitors through curated displays, tasting notes, QR stories and information about where products can be bought or experienced. The action will support small producers, wineries, artisan food makers and craft initiatives, while turning everyday visitor touchpoints into gateways towards rural communities and local food stories.

Urban–Rural Food Encounters

Under the Award, Dobrogea will develop a programme of encounters between producers and urban communities through markets, school activities, public tastings, workshops, fairs and community events. Farmers, fishermen, Local Gastronomic Points, chefs, students and citizens will be invited to meet around seasonal products, traditional recipes, responsible consumption and the stories behind food. The aim is to bring the countryside into the city and the city closer to rural life, strengthening trust, visibility and social connection.

Urban–Rural School Food Bridges

Dobrogea will develop, with Carol I Commercial College in Constanța, supported by the Constanța County School Inspectorate and regional partners, an educational and community-based format designed to reconnect young people with rural food systems, local producers and the origin of food.

The initiative will bring together several practical activities: **From Farm to City**: students present rural products, producer stories and food traditions in urban school or public settings; **Adopt a Local Producer**: student teams visit, document and promote a small local producer through interviews, photos, posters, digital materials or mini-campaigns; **Community Gastronomic Routes**: students map local food points, producers, traditional households, farms, fisheries and cultural landmarks into simple visitor routes; and **Rural Week in School**: a format in which schools host exhibitions, tastings, presentations and workshops dedicated to rural food heritage.

SMEs and Local Producers – Keeping Value in the Region

Small and medium-sized enterprises, local producers, artisans, hosts, wineries, Local Gastronomic Points and family-run initiatives are essential to the Dobrogea 2029 programme. They give the region its authenticity, sustain local economies and carry forward the knowledge, products and skills that shape its gastronomic identity.

The candidacy aims to support these actors not only through visibility, but through participation in events, thematic routes, collaborative formats, co-creation workshops and stronger connections with tourism, hospitality and cultural promotion. In this way, the programme seeks to create more opportunities for local products and services to reach wider audiences while keeping value within the region.

Under the umbrella of Dobrogea 2029, special attention will be given to strengthening networks of local producers and small businesses, encouraging quality, storytelling, short supply chains and forms of cooperation that help local initiatives grow in a sustainable and regionally coherent way.

Once people begin to reconnect through food, the conversation naturally moves closer to daily life: health, habits, nature, community and the choices that make a place better to live in. This is where well-being becomes part of Dobrogea's food story.



Well-being and Healthier Living



In Dobrogea, well-being is closely connected to food, nature, local knowledge and the quality of the environments in which people live. Healthier living is not understood only in terms of nutrition, but as a wider relationship between what people eat, how food is produced, how communities care for natural resources and how daily life can remain connected to balance, seasonality and place.

This focus area is especially relevant for Dobrogea because the region brings together many of the conditions that support a healthier way of life: local and seasonal food, traditions of home cooking, access to natural landscapes, balneal resources, outdoor living and a strong connection between food culture and community life. At the same time, it also highlights the need to encourage responsible consumption, reduce harmful environmental impact and promote healthier choices in ways that remain grounded in local reality.

Under the umbrella of this project, Dobrogea aims to strengthen initiatives that connect food, health, environment and quality of life through local products, educational actions, sustainable events, nature-based experiences and practices that support both personal well-being and the long-term resilience of communities.



Techirghiol

Health, Nature and the Living Tradition of Balneal Well-being



Techirghiol holds a distinctive place in Dobrogea's identity as a territory where health, nature and local knowledge have long been connected. Situated on the Black Sea coast, between Techirghiol, Eforie Nord and Eforie Sud, Lake Techirghiol is the largest saline lake in Romania and one of the region's most valuable natural therapeutic resources.

Its saline water and sapropelic mud, recognised for their healing, remineralising, soothing and regenerative properties, have shaped over time a strong tradition of balneal well-being rooted in natural factors, preventive care and recovery. The lake's therapeutic value has been the subject of numerous studies across different fields of research, and its reputation continues to link Dobrogea with a culture of health that grows directly from place.

What makes Techirghiol especially relevant for this focus area is the way in which natural resource, scientific interest and everyday well-being come together in a single landscape. The lake is not only a natural landmark, but a living expression of how local environments can support healthier living through care practices, slower rhythms and a more direct relationship between body, nature and recovery.

For Dobrogea, Techirghiol offers an important foundation for a broader vision of well-being, one that connects natural therapeutic resources, local knowledge and quality of life. Under the umbrella of this project, this legacy can be further connected with contemporary wellness initiatives, local products, educational actions and responsible visitor experiences, helping position healthier living as a meaningful part of the region's future.





Careless Beauty

Natural Care, Tradition
and Well-being



Founded in 1992 by Elena Oancea, a chemist and aesthetician from Tulcea County, Careless Beauty is a Romanian family business built around the use of plants, natural extracts and traditional knowledge. Careless Beauty is a brand dedicated to 100% natural dermato-cosmetics made from Romanian flora.

Careless Beauty holds three invention patents and brings together tradition and innovation by combining ancestral knowledge of plants with scientific research. Its products are developed without synthetic chemicals and are natural, non-invasive and sustainable alternatives for skin care and well-being.

Within the Dobrogea 2029 programme, Careless Beauty can illustrate how well-being is connected not only to food, but also to local plants, family knowledge, women-led entrepreneurship and the responsible use of natural resources. Its treatments and products show how nature, science and care can become part of a broader regional story about healthier living, rooted in the resources and traditions of Dobrogea.

TECHIR

Local Resources, Contemporary Well-being



TECHIR is a declaration of love for a place, for nature and for the therapeutic potential of Romania's natural resources. Created by Oana Stan, co-founder of TECHIR and a native of Techirghiol, the brand began with a question she asked in 2011, while still a business student: why should her hometown not have its own product line based on the resources of the lake? Inspired by the example of Europe's historic thermal towns, she turned that idea into a local business with long-term vision.

Born from the desire to bring closer the natural benefits of the Techirghiol area, TECHIR is the first and only brand of cosmetic and therapeutic products enriched with saline water and sapropelic mud from Lake Techirghiol, ingredients whose healing, remineralising, soothing and regenerative properties have been recognised for centuries. Over time, the brand has developed over 100 products centred on the idea of accessible well-being at home, transforming classical balneal rituals into modern solutions that can be easily integrated into everyday life.

What distinguishes TECHIR is the way in which it has brought together tradition and innovation. The benefits long associated with the resources of Techirghiol have been reinterpreted through contemporary formulations, modern production standards and current design, offering consumers a

credible local alternative in the field of well-being. In this way, TECHIR shows that natural heritage can become economically relevant and competitive when approached strategically.

An important pillar of the company is also education for the future. Through the editorial and educational platform *Miracole de zi cu zi* (Everyday Miracles), TECHIR has expanded its mission beyond products, promoting holistic development and conscious self-care through articles, podcasts, interviews and materials created together with specialists in nutrition, sport, yoga, pilates, psychology, emotional balance, skincare, personal organisation and financial development. At the same time, the TECHIR factory welcomes pupils, children and young people every year in educational and entrepreneurial discovery contexts, offering concrete examples of local production, the valorisation of Romanian resources, innovation and responsibility in business.

For Dobrogea, TECHIR offers a strong example of how a place-based resource can support a broader culture of healthier living, one that connects natural therapeutic factors, prevention, self-care, local production and education. Under the umbrella of this project, such initiatives can help position well-being not only as a personal practice, but as a meaningful part of the region's identity and long-term development.



Strategic “Well-being and Healthier Living” objectives under the Award

Promoting healthier local and seasonal food choices

Encouraging residents, visitors, schools and hospitality actors to value local, fresh, seasonal and responsibly produced food as part of a balanced lifestyle.

Encouraging preventive and holistic approaches to well-being

Promoting practices that connect food, movement, nature, self-care, traditional knowledge and community life.

Connecting well-being with nature and place

Positioning Dobrogea’s natural therapeutic resources, landscapes, outdoor living, food culture and local knowledge as part of a wider vision of health and quality of life.

Creating everyday spaces for healthier living

Supporting small, practical actions such as school gardens, orchards, green spaces, outdoor learning, responsible food events and educational activities linked to food, nature and health.

Reducing environmental impact on food and health

Supporting awareness around plastic pollution, waste reduction, responsible consumption and the connection between clean environments, healthy ecosystems and safe food.

Projects and actions under development

Techirghiol Well-being Route



Building on the natural therapeutic value of Lake Techirghiol and the contemporary example of TECHIR, Dobrogea can develop a well-being route that connects balneal heritage, local natural resources, responsible self-care, outdoor experiences and food culture. The route can include visits, educational content, local products, wellness experiences and storytelling around the relationship between place, body, nature and recovery.

Food, Environment and Healthier Choices Campaign



Starting from the educational work of FSNSA, Mare Nostrum, FONT CT and other partners, Dobrogea can develop a public awareness campaign linking local food, health and environmental responsibility. Building on formats such as the **Local Food Challenge**, the campaign can be activated in schools, events, festivals, hotels and public spaces through workshops, cooking activities, local ingredient discovery, youth challenges and conversations about nutrition, seasonality, plastic reduction, food waste, responsible consumption and the impact of pollution on marine ecosystems and the food chain.

Green Campuses and Community Orchards



Building on the Ovidius Orchard activity, where FSNSA students planted fruit trees on the university campus, Dobrogea can encourage similar small-scale actions in schools, universities, community spaces and public institutions. These orchards and green food spaces can become practical tools for learning about seasonality, biodiversity, local fruit varieties, care for nature and the connection between everyday environments and well-being

Beyond balneal and wellness resources, healthier living in Dobrogea also depends on education, food choices and everyday contact with nature.





Governance and partnerships



Governance for Dobrogea Candidate European Region of Gastronomy 2029 is built on a simple principle: a region defined by diversity can only be represented credibly through shared responsibility. The project's governance structure has taken shape through a coordination consortium that already brings together public institutions, destination management, education, research, heritage and civil society, while remaining open to further expansion as the regional partnership continues to grow. In this way, the programme creates a common framework designed to ensure strategic direction, operational clarity, cross-sector cooperation and long-term impact.

At this stage, the coordination consortium includes UNPR RSE, Năvodari City Hall, Tulcea Destination Management Organisation, Eco Danube Delta County Destination Management Organisation, National College of Arts Queen Mary, the County School Inspectorate, National Heritage Institute, National Institute for Marine Research and Development "Grigore Antipa", Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association, and Kirvad Tour. Around this core structure, the candidacy already brings together a wider network of more than 60 partners, including producers, private operators, cultural actors and NGOs contributing to the development of the programme. This growing partnership reflects both the cross-sector nature of the project and its capacity to build a broader regional alliance around a shared long-term vision.





Regional Stakeholders Committee

A formal Regional Stakeholders Committee is being established as the strategic body of the candidacy. It will bring together representatives of the public sector, private and commercial actors, education and research organisations, heritage institutions and civil society, ensuring that the programme is shaped through dialogue across sectors and territories. In practical terms, this means that actors such as Năvodari City Hall, DMO Tulcea, DMO Eco “Delta Dunarii”, the County School Inspectorate, the National Heritage Institute and the Ivan Patzaichin Association contribute not in parallel, but within a shared framework of direction and responsibility.

Executive coordination and programme delivery

The operational delivery of the programme will be coordinated by UNPR RSE together with an Executive Coordination Team working in close connection with the Regional Stakeholders Committee. This team will oversee planning, implementation, partner coordination, communication, monitoring and reporting, while ensuring continuity between the preparation phase, the title year and the longer-term legacy of the programme. Its role is to connect the strategic level with day-to-day delivery and to support collaboration between institutions with different profiles, from destination management and education to research, culture and community action.

Political, private and civic commitment

The candidacy is supported by a partnership model that combines political endorsement, institutional support, civic engagement and the growing involvement of private and commercial actors. Public institutions provide legitimacy, coordination and integration into wider development strategies. Private operators, producers and cultural entrepreneurs contribute through concrete initiatives, services and experiences aligned with the principles of sustainability. Civil society organisations, including partners such as the Ivan Patzaichin Association, play an essential role in community activation, citizen engagement and outreach towards local communities across the region.

Academic and research contribution

Academic and research institutions are part of the governance framework as active partners contributing expertise, documentation, knowledge transfer and specialist input. In the current consortium, this dimension is already represented through institutions such as the National Heritage Institute and the National Institute for Marine Research and Development “Grigore Antipa”, alongside educational actors including County School Inspectorate, National College of Arts and Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. Their contribution strengthens the programme’s capacity to remain evidence-based, locally grounded and relevant across its cultural, environmental and educational dimensions, while also supporting the training of future professionals connected to sustainable agriculture, tourism, natural heritage and local development.

Building on this contribution, the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences will support the educational dimension of the programme through applied learning activities connected to sustainable agriculture, local products, tourism, environmental protection and rural development. Its future plans include the expansion of collaborations with tourism entrepreneurs, farmers, local processors, research institutions and organisations active in the agri-food, tourism and environmental fields, as

well as the development of workshops, training sessions, field activities and participation in regional events dedicated to gastronomy, Dobrogean wine and sustainable tourism. At the same time, the faculty will continue to develop its international partnerships, especially through Erasmus+ and the European inter-university consortium ARTEMIS, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange, student mobility and the training of future professionals able to promote Dobrogea as a destination with European relevance. Through these formats, students and other learners will come into direct contact with farms, producers, natural heritage and local food practices, helping the programme build greater awareness of nutrition, health, sustainability and the cultural value of regional food.

This role is further supported by study paths that already connect food, agriculture, tourism and sustainability, including courses such as Eco-foods, Traditional Dobrogean Products in the Context of European Policies, Sustainable Agricultural Technologies, Organic Agriculture, Viticulture, Oenology, Rural Economy, Ecotourism and Tourism Marketing.

Partnership development

The governance model is conceived as an open and evolving structure. While the current consortium forms the core of the candidacy, the partnership will continue to expand through the formal inclusion of additional public authorities, private operators, producer networks, academic institutions and third sector organisations. This approach reflects the ambition to expand on the title-year programme and use it as a springboard for building a durable regional alliance around gastronomy, sustainability, culture and quality of life.

Coordination mechanisms

Coordination will be supported through regular meetings of the Regional Stakeholders Committee and the Executive Coordination Team, thematic workshops revolving around the IGCAT focus areas, and shared communication and reporting tools. This structure is intended to ensure transparency, partner alignment and a continuous flow of information between strategic, operational and community levels of the programme.

This governance model reflects Dobrogea’s commitment to building the programme through shared responsibility, practical cooperation and long-term regional value.

Local, regional and European partnerships

At the local level, the programme is built through collaboration between municipalities, destination management structures, schools, cultural institutions, NGOs, producers, private operators and community-based initiatives. This connects public action with everyday practice and ensures that the programme remains grounded in the realities of the region.

At regional level, the candidacy creates a framework for closer cooperation between actors across Dobrogea, linking Constanța and Tulcea, the Danube and the Black Sea, urban centres and rural communities. It also builds on a partnership of collaboration with **Banat**

European Region of Gastronomy 2028 and Harghita European Region of Gastronomy 2027, through which the three regions aim to represent Romania together at international level and to develop similar programmes adapted to the specificity of each territory. In this way, the programme supports the emergence of a more coherent regional identity, while encouraging shared formats, common visibility and stronger territorial connections.

At European and international level, Dobrogea positions itself within the wider network of the **European Region of Gastronomy Platform**, guided by IGCAT. The candidacy aims to contribute to and

benefit from exchanges of knowledge, study visits, international visibility and collaborative initiatives, while adapting relevant models and good practices to the specific reality of the region. Through its extensive partner network, Dobrogea also intends to participate actively in IGCAT’s international initiatives and competitions, including the **European Young Chef Award**, the **World Food Gift Challenge**, the **Food Film Menu**, the **Top Websites for Foodie Travellers Award** and other Platform activities that support visibility, learning and international cooperation.



Ambassadors and community visibility

The candidacy is also supported by a group of regional ambassadors who help increase visibility, strengthen public engagement and communicate the values of the programme through credible, place-based storytelling. Coming from fields such as gastronomy, culture, heritage, tourism, education and community life, they contribute to shaping a recognisable public voice for Dobrogea and to connecting different audiences with the region’s food, landscapes and cultural diversity. In this way, the ambassadors give the programme a human voice, bringing it closer to the public through stories, people and experiences that can travel naturally across different communities and audiences.



Ivona Potzaichin-Rusu
President of the Association
Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23



Cristian Cealera
Historian, writer and guide
to Dobrogean memory

As president of the Association Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23, Ivona Potzaichin-Rusu continues the work initiated by her father, the legendary Romanian sprint canoeist and Olympic champion, **Ivan Patzaichin**, with the aim to foster Danube Delta’s communities to find their own, best development paths. The Association constantly seeks new ways of leveraging Romania’s bodies of water, while focusing on Delta’s fragile nature and rich biodiversity – which represent both assets and challenges, in dire need to be preserved. Ivona has been working alongside her father for the Association’s projects since the setup of the organisation, and is now stewarding many of them. The Association was instrumental in designing the legislative framework of the Local Gastronomic Points and launching the network that is now counting about 1000 units all over Romania. The first one, though, is located in Mila 23, in the heart of the Danube Delta, at the location of the Ivan Patzaichin Museum, where Ivona used to spend school holidays not so long ago. Ivona’s credo is that gastronomy may and should act as a bridge between traditional heritage and modern sustainable development, the living proof that tradition is a resource for the future.

Cristian Cealera is a historian, writer, museum educator and guide at the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța. A graduate in Law and PhD in History, with research on the ancient religious cults of Roman Dobrogea, he combines legal rigour, historical research and the ability to turn heritage into an experience accessible to the wider public. His earlier work as a legal adviser and journalist is reflected today in the vivid, clear and captivating way he tells Dobrogea’s stories.

Through his guided tours, Cristian Cealera brings old Constanța back to life through its seafronts, squares, historic buildings, archaeological sites and the communities that shaped the city’s identity.

His editorial activity complements this mission of recovering local memory. Cristian Cealera is the author of: *Black Sea Stories* series, historical novels *At the Edge of the Empire – Origins and Independence Square – Memories of That Day*, *The British Community of Kustendjie (1857–1882) – Portraits from the Past* and coordinator of *Dobrogea 145 – from the Greeks of Miletus to the Millennials generation*.

Within the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Cristian Cealera gives historical depth to the region’s gastronomic story.

**Cosmin Văru**

Architect, creator of experiences and promoter of Dobrogean hospitality



Cosmin Văru did not discover Dobrogea through books, but by living it: through people, places, materials, wind, light and the slow rhythm of seaside villages. An architect by profession, he chose to work with the territory, creating spaces rooted in nature, community and memory.

This vision is reflected in Cuibul de la Mare, created in Corbu with his family. Starting from an old household, the place became a traditional guesthouse. Wood, stone, recovered objects and restored furniture create a warm setting, while the table remains central: food is cooked “as for a family”, with yard vegetables, local products, fish from Corbu fishermen and nearby dairy.

Through La Colibe, an archaic ecological Romanian hamlet, Cosmin takes this search further. Between Corbu, Vadu and road to the Delta, a former agricultural space is becoming a holiday hamlet built around simplicity, recovered objects, food prepared in front of the guests and a link between contemporary comfort and rural memory.

For Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Cosmin sees gastronomy as place, table, fire, community and rhythm. Through what he creates, Dobrogea becomes not only a destination, but a way of dwelling, welcoming and sharing.

**Octavian Băloi**

Chef of seasonality, local identity and farm-to-table experience



Octavian Băloi is a Romanian chef known especially along the coast, where he has built his reputation through honest, seasonal cuisine deeply rooted in local products. His work is closely connected to Rozmarine, a restaurant that has become a reference point for those seeking a contemporary interpretation of Romanian gastronomy.

Combining modern technique with respect for tradition, Octavian promotes a philosophy close to farm-to-table, working with local producers and seasonal ingredients. His plates reinterpret classic Romanian dishes through contemporary cooking, careful plating and unexpected textures and flavours. This direction brought him the Romanian Best Chef Farm to Table 2026 distinction, confirming his role as a promoter of responsible gastronomy connected to territory and local ingredients.

As chef and gastronomic entrepreneur, he shapes both the cuisine and identity of Rozmarine, while his events, collaborations, media appearances and educational workshops, including the Local Food Challenge, bring younger generations closer to authentic taste, local ingredients and a more conscious relationship with food.

For Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Octavian Băloi brings the voice of a chef who sees cooking as a way of telling stories through ingredients, places and people.

**Cosmin Dragomir**

The Voice of Romanian Gastronomic Heritage



Cosmin Dragomir is a journalist, writer and gastronomy activist. Since 2017, he has dedicated himself exclusively to gastronomic journalism and research. He launched GastroArt, the first magazine in Romania dedicated to research into gastronomy and hospitality, followed later by the publishing house of the same name, devoted to the same industries.

He is a co-initiator of the law establishing the National Day of Romanian Gastronomy and Wines, and co-organiser of the National Congress of Gastronomy and Wine. He has organised hundreds of culinary education events, including debates, conferences and tasting sessions. He writes constantly on several platforms and hosts **DISPUTANDUM**, a podcast about tastes.

He has published the individual volumes *The Zacuscă Curator* (2021) and *The Sarmale Collector* (2024), as well as, together with Adriana Sohodoleanu, the books *Sweet Romania: A History of Our Desserts* (2022) and *Sărut mâna pentru masă, carte de(șpre) bucate / Thank You for the Meal: A Book About Food and Dishes* (2025). He is currently working on the book *La noi și bătaia se mănâncă – manifest gastronomic împotriva violenței / In Romania, Even Beatings Are Eaten: A Gastronomic Manifesto Against Violence* and, together with Cristian Cetățeanu, on the volume *O istorie a cafelei la români / A History of Coffee Among Romanians*, both forthcoming in 2027.

**Bianca Folescu**

Artisan, cultural host and keeper of Dobrogean memory



Bianca Folescu is the founder of Suvenir din Dobrogea and one of the liveliest voices of northern Dobrogea’s rural heritage. In Vișina, Jurilovca commune, she transformed an old house purchased in 2011 into a traditional household and house-museum dedicated to local memory, Tulcea traditions and Dobrogea’s multiculturalism. Described as a “living museum,” the place includes a garden, orchard, event spaces, craft workshops and objects recreating houses from the past.

At Suvenir din Dobrogea, Bianca has created an encounter with the Dobrogean village. The collection includes found, donated or acquired objects, Romanian, Bulgarian and Lipovan costumes, multicultural elements, a weaving loom, lace, macramé and rural craft objects.

Her activity brings together craftsmanship, non-formal education and hospitality. She cooks, paints, sews, embroiders, knits, recovers old objects and organises workshops for children and adults, including handicrafts and mărțișor making with Dobrogean motifs. Through courtyard events, Bulgarian, Aromanian, Lipovan, Tatar, Ukrainian, Italian and Romanian communities meet through dishes, costumes, music, dances and objects.

Within Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Bianca turns rural heritage into learning, participation and traditions passed on, showing that regional identity lives in open courtyards, handmade objects and shared gestures.



Diana Slav

Cultural guide, sommelier and storyteller of multicultural Dobrogea



Diana Slav is one of the voices that have helped change the way Constanța is discovered: not only as a seaside city, but as a historical, multicultural and gastronomic space. A Law graduate, passionate about history, legends and stories, she began creating guided experiences in old Constanța in 2013, becoming the initiator of Constanța Walking Tour, one of the best-known walking tours on the Black Sea coast.

Her tours bring to life old streets, architecture, archaeological heritage, Greek and Armenian merchants' houses, places of worship and the communities that made Constanța a place of coexistence, turning multiculturalism into a step-by-step experience through buildings, urban legends, tastes, customs and hospitality. Constanța Walking Tour has gained strong public recognition on TripAdvisor since 2015.

In recent years, Diana has focused on gastronomic and wine tourism, becoming a WSET Level 3 certified sommelier through the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, based in London. She collaborates with Dobrogean wineries and presents wine as “another form of history”, shaped by soil, sun, salinity, local varieties and the Danube-Black Sea landscape.

Within Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Diana connects built heritage with the table, wine with territory and communities with memory.



Daniela and Marian Sterea

Rural hosts and promoters of the Lipovan village



Daniela and Marian Sterea are the creators of the Lipovenesc project in Jurilovca, an initiative born from a return to village life and from the desire to keep alive the memory of the Lipovan community in northern Dobrogea. After years spent in the city, the two chose to transform an old house and a Dobrogean courtyard into a living household, where traditions, nature, animals, courtyard cooking and the stories of the village come together in an authentic experience.

Photographers by profession and storytellers by vocation, Daniela and Marian document and bring into value Jurilovca: its traditional houses, its people, fishermen, housewives, crafts and community customs. The Lipovenesc project is described as a space for bringing back the stories of the village, built with natural materials and conceived as a meeting place between heritage, family and visitors.

The Lipovenesc courtyard has become a landmark for experiential tourism in Jurilovca. Here, visits for school classes, creative workshops for children, household tours, experiences for Green Week and Alternative Education Week, as well as meals with fish borscht are organised, in a setting where Lipovan traditions blend naturally with local hospitality.

The project also has a strong cultural and community dimension: the courtyard hosts concerts, meetings, events and workshops, while initiatives such as clay-building gatherings or the “Jurilovca Summer School” project show the couple’s concern for traditional architecture, education and the transmission of crafts.

Within the Dobrogea European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy, Daniela and Marian Sterea can contribute through a form of hospitality that is direct, warm and deeply local. Through Lipovenesc, they show how the Dobrogean village can become a space of learning, taste, play, memory and belonging.



Programme Framework and Public Engagement



The Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 candidacy envisions a year-round calendar that brings together the region's culinary traditions, multicultural heritage, and seasonal rhythms. Building on existing festivals and community celebrations, the initiative connects them under a shared narrative and regional identity, with each season anchored by a core activity around which all other events can be organized. The calendar also includes regional preselections for the various competitions organized by IGCAT.

The annual journey begins in spring, a season of renewal centered on fish traditions, Easter customs, and educational activities for pupils, students, and families. It continues into summer, the region's flagship tourism season, when the Dobrogea Mosaic Festival in Constanța is planned to celebrate gastronomy, crafts, music, and multicultural heritage. In autumn, the focus shifts to the harvest and Dobrogea's 2,500-year-old winemaking tradition through wine tastings and encounters with local producers. The year concludes in winter with Christmas markets and indoor cultural events showcasing festive foods, crafts, and traditions from across the region.

Together, these seasonal experiences position Dobrogea as a year-round destination, strengthening local producers and artisans and showcasing the region as a place where history, geography, and gastronomy come together.



Spring

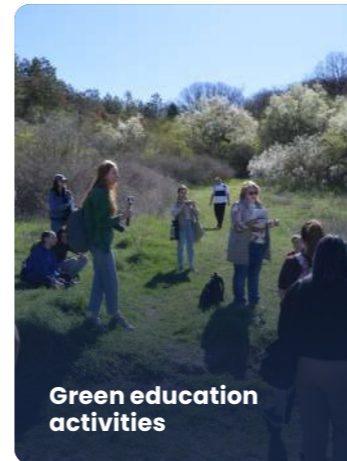
Heritage and Flavours Education Week is a festival planned to focus on education and intergenerational learning, aimed primarily at pupils, students, teachers, and families. Organized in collaboration with schools, universities, and cultural institutions, the event would introduce young people to Dobrogea's multicultural heritage through hands-on workshops, cooking demonstrations, storytelling sessions, and traditional music and dance. By combining gastronomy with educational activities, the festival would foster cultural awareness and strengthen connections between younger generations and the region's diverse communities.



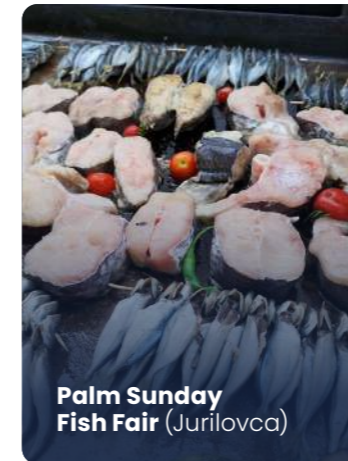
Fish traditions



Easter traditions



Green education activities



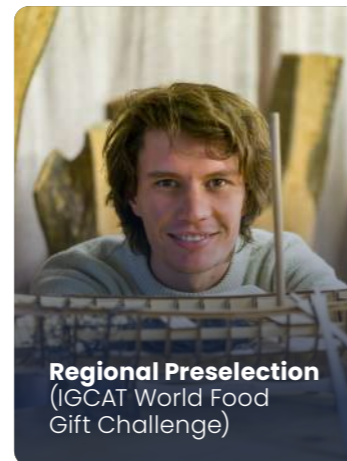
Palm Sunday Fish Fair (Jurilovca)



Spring Workshops (Suvenir din Dobrogea)



Pentecost Shad Festival (Scumbii de Rusalii)



Regional Preselection (IGCAT World Food Gift Challenge)

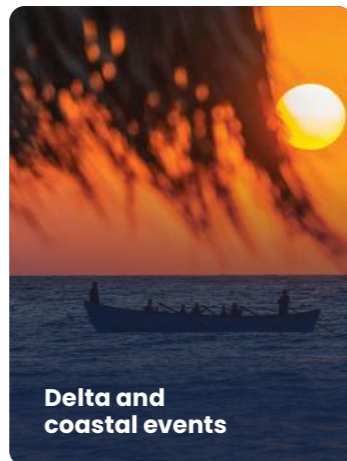


Regional Preselection (IGCAT International Food Film Menu Awards)



Summer

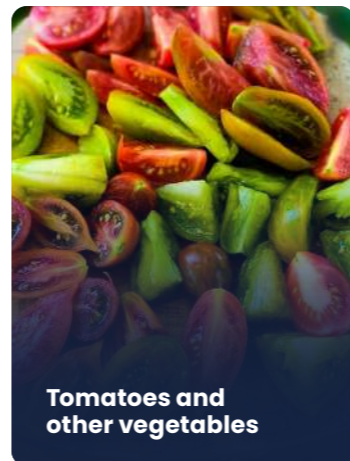
The Dobrogea Mosaic Festival is envisioned as the flagship summer event, hosted in Constanța and dedicated to celebrating the multicultural identity of Dobrogea. The festival would bring together all ethnic communities of the region, offering each a dedicated space to present its gastronomy, traditional clothing, crafts, music, and intangible cultural heritage. Visitors would discover Dobrogea through food tastings, storytelling, performances, and workshops. Beyond its main edition in Constanța, the festival could also travel to towns and villages across Dobrogea, enabling local communities to showcase their traditions and strengthening intercultural dialogue and heritage preservation.



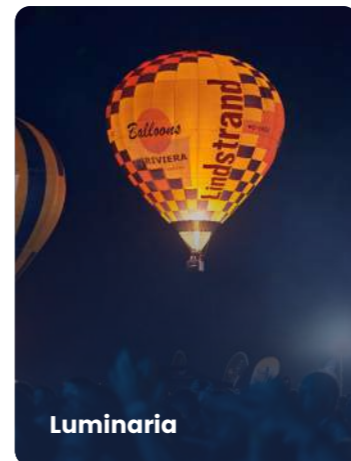
Delta and coastal events



Village gatherings



Tomatoes and other vegetables



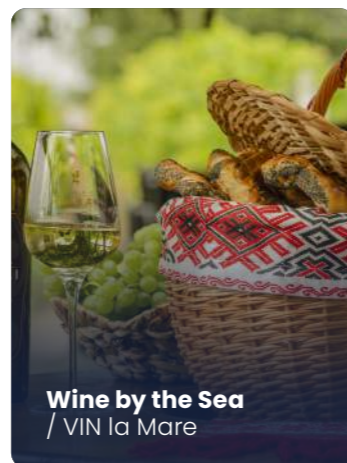
Luminaria



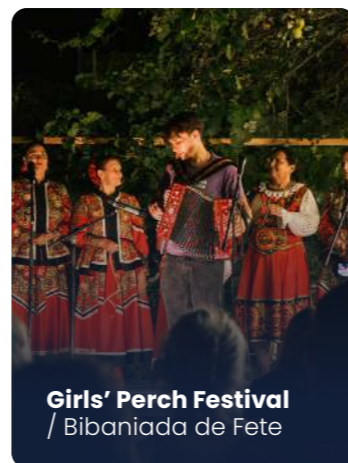
The Summer Garden
(Suvenir din Dobrogea)



Fair of Folk Craftsmen / Târgul Meșterilor Populari



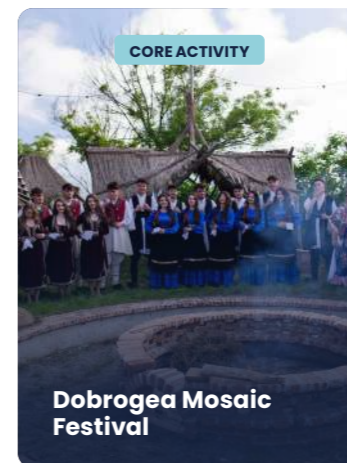
Wine by the Sea / VIN la Mare



Girls' Perch Festival / Bibaniada de Fete



Golden Fish Festival / Festivalul Peștișorul de Aur



CORE ACTIVITY

Dobrogea Mosaic Festival

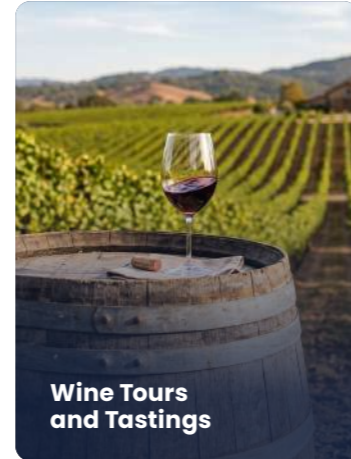


Autumn

The Harvest and Wine Festival is planned to celebrate Dobrogea's 2,500-year-old winemaking tradition and unique terroir. Designed for both tourists and local visitors, it brings together wineries, local producers, and cultural organizations to showcase the region through wine, gastronomy, music, and heritage, complemented by food pairings, traditional performances, artisan markets, and educational exhibits on biodiversity and sustainable agriculture.



Harvest



Wine Tours and Tastings



Vegetables



Local producers and biodiversity



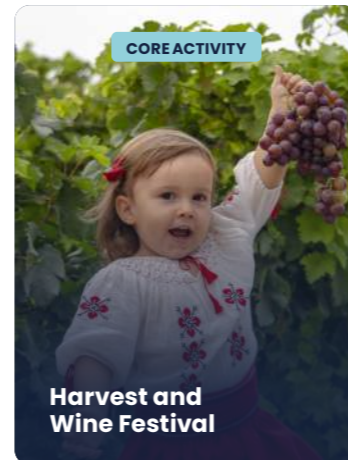
Ivan Patzaichin Rowmania Festival
/ Festivalul Ivan Patzaichin Rowmania



Romanian Sustainable Fish Festival / Festivalul Peștelui Durabil Românesc



Regional Preselection (IGCAT Young Chef Awards)

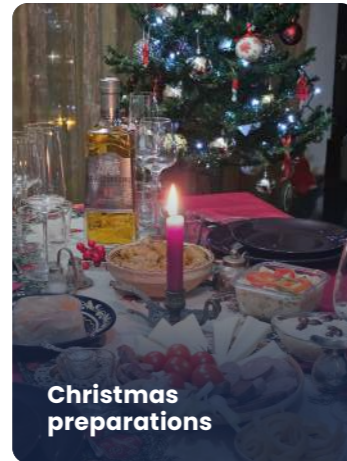


Harvest and Wine Festival

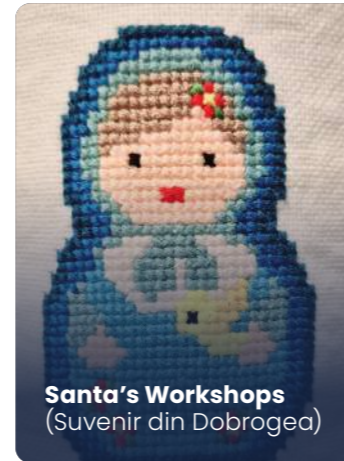


Winter

Building on existing Christmas markets and design fairs, the Winter Traditions and Christmas Market is planned as a festive celebration of Dobrogea's multicultural heritage and seasonal gastronomy. Organized in both urban and rural settings, it brings together local producers, artisans, and cultural organizations to showcase traditional foods, local wines, sweets, handmade crafts, and Christmas customs from all ethnic communities.



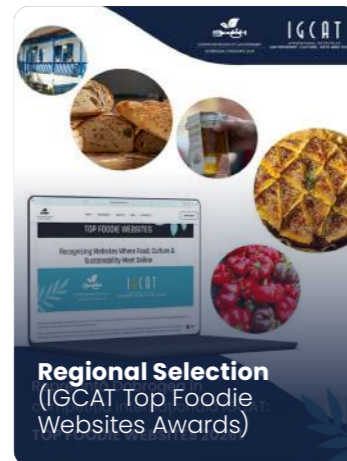
Christmas preparations



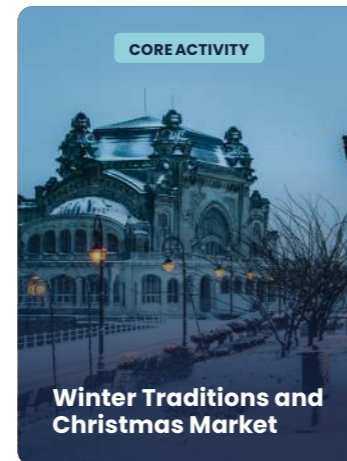
Santa's Workshops
(Suvenir din Dobrogea)



Iarmaroc Design Fair



Regional Selection
(IGCAT Top Foodie Websites Awards)



Winter Traditions and Christmas Market



Foto: Adrian Slea





Citizen Involvement

Dobrogea 2029 programme is conceived not only as a regional initiative for communities, but as a shared process developed together with them. Citizen involvement is therefore understood as an essential part of the candidacy, through which local people, producers, hosts, artisans, students, volunteers and community organisations contribute directly to the life, visibility and long-term relevance of the programme.

In Dobrogea, this participation can take many forms: from involvement in local events, workshops, educational activities and gastronomic experiences to the active role played by communities in preserving traditions, welcoming visitors and shaping the stories of place. Through this approach, the programme seeks to strengthen a sense of belonging, encourage dialogue between generations and territories, and create a stronger connection between public life, local identity and regional development.

The Traditional Fishing Village of Tulcea



The Traditional Fishing Village of Tulcea is one of the places where urban audiences can come into direct contact with the architecture, crafts, gastronomy and atmosphere of the Danube Delta communities. Through its traditional houses, public events, craft workshops and heritage-based activities, it creates an accessible meeting point between local people, visitors, children and bearers of tradition.

Within the Dobrogea 2029 candidacy, it plays an important role in reconnecting urban and rural life, offering a shared space where food, crafts, architecture and local memory can be experienced together as part of the region's living identity.

Local Gastronomic Points and the Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 model



Local Gastronomic Points create a direct connection between visitors, hosts, local food and community life. In Dobrogea, they offer small-scale experiences rooted in household cooking, local ingredients and the everyday rhythms of villages and fishing communities.

The work initiated and supported by the Ivan Patzaichin – Mila 23 Association has helped strengthen this direction by promoting local hospitality, community-based development and forms of tourism that keep value in the territory. Within the Dobrogea 2029 candidacy, this model supports citizen involvement by bringing people together around food, place and shared local identity.

Communication and Promotion Plan

From unknown to unmissable



The communication strategy for Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029 Candidate aims to transform a region with exceptional but fragmented visibility into a coherent, recognisable and internationally relevant food and cultural destination.

Under the concept **Flavours of Dobrogea: Ancient Roots, Living Waters, Timeless Taste**, gastronomy becomes the language through which the region tells its story: ancient landscapes, living waters, multicultural communities, rural knowledge, coastal hospitality and layered food traditions. The central message is clear:

Dobrogea is not a single flavour. It is a meeting point of roots, waters and cultures.

Communication will build local pride, invite national and international audiences to discover Dobrogea beyond the usual season and support IGCAT values through visible actions: food education, biodiversity, responsible tourism, innovation, urban-rural connection, well-being and sustainable local economies. These values will be communicated through people and practices: fishermen, farmers, chefs, artisans, teachers, researchers, entrepreneurs, guides and community hosts.

Brand and audiences



The project will work with specialists in communication, marketing, branding, design, SEO, digital strategy, video production and public relations. A communication and brand toolkit will define logo use, colour palette, typography, tone of voice, templates, visual guidelines, social media rules and multilingual key messages. All materials will respect IGCAT logo usage rules and the European Region of Gastronomy Candidate identity.

The tone of voice will be warm, intelligent and place-based, focused on authenticity, sensory detail and human experience: fish by the water, bread from the household, wine between the Danube and the Sea, old town stories, children learning through food and producers keeping heritage alive.

The campaign will address four main audiences: international tourists looking for food, nature, wine, slow tourism and heritage; local citizens invited to rediscover and promote their own region; producers, artisans, chefs, hospitality actors, SMEs and start-ups seeking visibility and market access; and public institutions, schools, universities, museums, NGOs and cultural actors supporting long-term impact.



Communication architecture

Digital platform

Main hub for information, storytelling and discovery

Tools

Multilingual website, interactive map, shared calendar, media library, Get involved section

Main outputs

Routes, PGLs, producers, restaurants, accommodation, heritage spots, artisan studios, events, partner profiles

Connected content

Link physical places and products to stories

Tools

QR codes, NFC, API or embeddable map/bi, HIBOX digital layer

Main outputs

Digital stories, booking links, product narratives, partners' website integration

Editorial content

Make Dobrogea easy to understand and remember

Tools

Recipes, interviews, producer stories, ambassador videos, short films, podcast

Main outputs

Meet the Maker, Taste the Story, presentation video in several languages

Social and community channels

Build reach, participation and fast mobilisation

Tools

Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp groups, Facebook communities

Main outputs

Events, reels, podcast, local updates, stakeholder coordination, volunteer mobilisation

Newsletter

Maintain regular contact with residents, partners, media and visitors

Tools

Email updates

Main outputs

Events, new routes, producer stories, calls for participation, international opportunities, behind-the-scenes progress

Offline visibility

Reach visitors and local communities beyond digital channels

Tools

TV, radio, press, posters, fairs, conferences, public presentations, school and museum activations, community boards

Main outputs

Local awareness, stakeholder engagement, national and international media visibility

Participation in local and international festivals and events

Promote Dobrogea as a destination of tourism, slow tourism and multiculturality

Tools

Gastronomy, tourism, culture and sustainability festivals; national and international fairs; conferences; activation areas; tasting corners; cultural showcases

Main outputs

Increased destination visibility, new partnerships, media exposure, promotion of routes, local products, slow tourism experiences and multicultural heritage

Partner toolkit

Ensure coherent communication across the ecosystem

Tools

Logo rules, templates, captions, posters, QR codes, key messages, media materials

Main outputs

Consistent use by hotels, restaurants, museums, wineries, PGLs, producers and institutions

Visitor touchpoints

Turn discovery into action

Tools

Hotel materials, route cards, catalogues, product displays, HIBOX, travel agency and tour platform partnerships

Main outputs

Bookable routes, tastings, workshops, farm visits, wine experiences, PGL meals

Print and physical presence

Create tangible access to the project

Tools

Bilingual printed and digital catalogue, product labels, physical tags, information point

Main outputs

Catalogue distributed at fairs, museums, hotels and meetings; public gateway with maps, videos, products and booking support

Campaigns and activations

The communication calendar will be structured through recurring campaigns. **Proud of Dobrogea** will build local pride among citizens, schools, institutions, businesses and cultural actors. **Road to 2029** will communicate milestones, partners, ambassadors, routes, events, flagship projects and behind-the-scenes progress.

Flavours of Dobrogea Passport will create a gamified treasure hunt through stamps, QR check-ins or digital points collected at partner locations, PGLs, museums, wineries, markets, restaurants and events. **Dobrogea Food Gift Campaign** will promote curated baskets, HIBOX editions and selected local products for delegations, international guests, Erasmus projects, conferences, business events and tourism packages. **Taste Dobrogea in Hotels** will bring routes, products and experiences into accommodation spaces, while **Young Voices of Dobrogea** will connect schools, youth organisations and NGOs with food education, European values, sustainability, Green Deal themes and responsible consumption.

Media, influencers and international promotion

The campaign will work with influencers, bloggers and creators in travel, gastronomy, wine, culture, sustainability, family tourism and visual storytelling. Media trips and creator visits will be organised around routes, PGLs, producers, festivals, Delta experiences, wine tourism, food gifts and multicultural gastronomy.

Dobrogea will also be promoted through activation areas at national and international events dedicated to gastronomy, tourism, culture, economy, technology, start-ups and sustainability. These activations may include tastings, product showcases, HIBOX presentations, ambassador talks, film screenings, chef demonstrations and networking with producers and hospitality operators.

Cooperation with Harghita and Banat

Dobrogea's communication will be developed in dialogue with Harghita European Region of Gastronomy 2027 and Banat European Region of Gastronomy 2028, under the umbrella of the IGCAT Platform, creating a three-year Romanian narrative arc. The three regions can communicate Romania as a country of distinct food territories, linking mountains, forests, plains, rivers, Delta and sea.

This cooperation allows each region to remain faithful to its own identity, while contributing to a shared national story about food, culture, landscape and hospitality. Joint communication may include hand-over moments, co-branded conference participation, chef and storyteller exchanges, shared international promotion, rotating press trips and campaigns such as Taste of Romania: Regions of Gastronomy and Danube to Sea.

Beyond communication, the partnership can support practical collaboration between stakeholders through common projects and shared formats such as Romanian Regions of Gastronomy Food Gift, producer exchanges, study visits, collaboration between educational centres, joint training for young chefs and hospitality students, shared sponsorships and joint presentations in IGCAT contexts. In this way, the three regions can strengthen one another while increasing Romania's visibility within the European Region of Gastronomy network.

Economic Provision / Budget

The estimated budget for **Dobrogea – European Region of Gastronomy 2029** is structured as a practical implementation framework, designed to turn the regional vision into visible public programmes, stronger local value chains, digital and educational tools, international visibility and a lasting legacy for communities, producers and visitors.



Total estimated budget (2025–2030): 5,000,000 EUR



This structure finances both the visible public layer of **Dobrogea 2029** and the deeper ecosystem behind it: education, producers, local products, digital innovation, responsible tourism, community participation and international visibility. It keeps the budget focused on delivery and legacy, ensuring that the title year becomes a platform for long-term regional cooperation.

The budget is based on the active support and contribution of all stakeholders and partners involved in the project, combining institutional commitment, private-sector engagement, community participation and in-kind resources.

Legacy and Long-term Impact

Dobrogea 2029 is designed as the beginning of a longer regional process, not as a programme limited to one title year. Its legacy will be measured by what remains active after 2029: stronger partnerships, better cooperation, practical tools for education and tourism, visible local products, and a clearer regional identity built around food, landscape, heritage and community.

A stronger regional framework



One of the most important results will be the habit of working together. Dobrogea still needs a more coherent framework connecting Constanța and Tulcea, coast and delta, urban and rural communities, public institutions, schools, universities, producers, cultural organisations, NGOs and private actors. The candidacy creates this common table and turns gastronomy into a shared language for regional development.

Education rooted in place



The partnerships built with schools, universities, museums and community organisations will continue through workshops, field activities, guided visits, training formats, apprenticeships and public learning experiences. The aim is to leave behind young people who understand local food, natural resources, cultural diversity and responsible choices not as abstract themes, but as part of everyday life in Dobrogea.

Living heritage kept in practice



Dobrogea’s recipes, rituals, crafts, food knowledge and community traditions need visibility, but also use. The legacy of the programme will support formats where these traditions remain practiced and socially meaningful: community events, storytelling, intergenerational encounters, demonstrations, workshops and living heritage spaces. Preservation should not mean placing heritage behind glass, but keeping it alive through people who still cook, build, fish, farm, host and teach.

Local food in everyday hospitality



Dobrogea 2029 will also aim to make local food more present beyond festivals and special events. The longer-term impact should be visible in restaurant menus, hotel breakfasts, local producer corners, food gifts, routes, wine experiences and visitor encounters.

A more balanced destination



By supporting cultural tourism, rural and nature-based experiences, balneal resources, wine routes, community hospitality and low-impact forms of travel, Dobrogea can move beyond a mainly seasonal image.

European Cooperation and Shared Learning



At European level, the legacy will continue through the IGCAT network and through cooperation with candidate and awarded regions. These exchanges will help Dobrogea remain part of wider conversations about sustainable development, living heritage, authentic travel and the future of regional food cultures.

Closing Note

Dobrogea 2029 began from a simple conviction: this region has the resources, the people, the stories and the strength to become a European reference for gastronomy, culture, tourism and sustainable regional development. What started as an initiative has gradually become a shared regional project, bringing together public authorities, institutions, producers, schools, universities, cultural organisations, researchers, entrepreneurs, chefs, hosts, communities and civil society.

As initiator and coordinator of this candidacy, the National Union of Romanian Employers – Southeast Region sees Dobrogea 2029 as a responsibility to support local producers, to give visibility to communities, to connect economic development with heritage and to build a stronger regional identity based on cooperation, trust and long-term vision.

This bid book is the result of many voices, each adding a part of Dobrogea's story. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all partners, contributors and supporters who believed in this project, shared their knowledge, opened their institutions and communities, offered time, ideas,

documents, stories and encouragement. This process reminded us that real development happens through people and with people. Their involvement shows that Dobrogea already has what every strong region needs: people willing to work together for something larger than themselves.

The process has already created a foundation that must be carried forward. Dobrogea 2029 is an invitation to continue building together: with respect for the past, responsibility for the present and confidence in the future of this extraordinary region between the Danube and the Black Sea, the place we call home.



Carmen Ispas

Executive Manager of
Dobrogea 2029 Candidate
Region Project

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge all partners, institutions, organisations and individual contributors who provided information, documentation, photographs, expertise and support for this bid book. Their contributions helped document the landscapes, communities, food heritage, projects and ambitions that shape Dobrogea 2029.

Photo Credits

Unless otherwise stated, all photographs used in this bid book were provided by project partners, local contributors and institutions involved in the Dobrogea 2029 candidacy.

Bibliography and Sources

The bid book was developed using information, data and documentation provided by project partners, public institutions, research organisations, cultural institutions, educational institutions, local producers and community stakeholders.

Main sources include:

1. Dafinoiu, C. V., Nedelcu, V. C., & Pascale, L. E. (2025). Peisajul cultural dobrogean. O altfel de monografie / Dobrogea's Cultural Landscape. A Different View. Ovidius University Press.
2. Laetitia Arleziana Casangiu Siea. Gastronomiă-Vector al valorificării mostenirii culturale și interculturale/ Gastronomy as a Vector for Valorising Cultural and Intercultural Heritage. Mega-Cluj Napoca
3. Adriana Sohodoleanu și Cosmin Dragomir. Sărut-mâna pentru masă! Carte de(spre) bucate/ Thank You for the Meal! A Book About Food
4. The National Institute of Heritage. Gustul Dobrogei/ Taste of Dobruja. Mega-Cluj Napoca

Bid book design and visual concept: Dragoș Bălășoiu (Crop Studio SRL)





EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY

DOBROGEA CANDIDATE 2029