

# THE ROLE OF LOCAL PRODUCTS IN EDUCATION AND THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAM

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## **1. Introduction**

Environment, agriculture and health face serious challenges (climate change, unsustainable energy sources, intensive farming, etc.) in the world and in Hungary. For these reasons, it is advisable to create self-sufficient and sustainable local economies based on local products (Molnár 2010).

Many non-governmental organisations and institutions, producers and consumers alike work on bringing the products and consumers closer to each other. In Eger, the Institute of Geography and Environmental Sciences and the Innoregio Knowledge Centre of the Eszterházy Károly University have comprehensive researches in this field, and several local NGOs are involved in practical education and research work.

The European Union also strongly supports the areas of rural development, and provides an opportunity to study responses to environmental challenges in the field of education. In this article we describe the relationship between the Erasmus+ program and local products, which we have examined during a number of projects, based on non-formal learning methods.

## **2. The definition of local product**

Defining the phrase of „local product” is difficult. Many articles try to unravel this definition by examining the meaning of something being „local”. In connection with food, locality is usually defined by the rules of short supply chains, while local food has to be sold through these short supply chains. This defines the geographical distance between the place of production and the place of sale and the number of intermediaries between the producer and the consumer (Peters 2012).

We can say that there are many ways to define the borders of locality: natural, administrative, cultural, social, etc. points of view appear. This distance is defined in different way even on a national scale. In the USA every product is considered as local when selling it in the same state as it was produced. This means that in bigger states, like Texas, California or

Alaska, a product can be sold hundreds of kilometres from the place of its production (USDA 2008). Not even the European Union defined commonly a definition for local food, so these distances can range from 20 to 70 kilometres. In Hungary, the local products can be sold in „intra-region” borders, which means that the products can be sold in the county of production, in Budapest, and within a radius of 40 kilometres from the place of production, remaining within the national borders (52/2010. (IV. 30.) FVM DECREE).

The number of intermediaries also define short supply chains. In many countries, no actors can stand between the producer and the consumer, ensuring the direct sale. In Hungary, one intermediary is accepted. These create many ways to sell local products: through intermediaries (for example in restaurants), directly at the place of production, or at markets, even – directly or indirectly – with delivery options.

### **3. The role of local products in Eger**

Eger and its region is well-known for its wines. The Wine Region of Eger produces the famous Egri Bikavér (which is a Hungaricum), the Egri Csillag, the Debrői Hárslevelű, etc. Not only wines, but local food appears in the short supply area of Eger, which we understand by using the terms of the 52/2010. (IV. 30.) FVM DECREE. This territory of 4 counties and 206 settlements produces jams (traditional plum, strawberry jams and even more specific ones, such as blackberry, cornel, grape, quince, chili, onion, etc.), honey flavoured with herbs and chocolate, alcoholic beverages, cheese, syrups, oil, flour, quail eggs, etc.

We can taste and buy these food products at several markets and specific events in this area, like Bikavér Festival, Egri Csillag Festival, Magyarok Vására, and even Slow Food markets. We can also find these products in restaurants, local stores, or we can easily visit many producers at their place. For wine tasting, the best place to visit is the Szépasszony Valley (or Valley of the Beautiful Woman), where great wines are often served with local cheese or jams.

While discussing the topic of local products, we need to mention some handicraft products around Eger: some people produce sculptures, special toys, columns, wicker products, painted furnitures, and neolithic flint tools.

### **4. The role of Eger in Erasmus+ Programs**

Erasmus+ is the European Union’s program for education, training, youth and sport for the period of 2014-2020. It integrates seven previous EU funding schemes into a complex

program, including the Youth in Action Program (many NGOs in Eger have already implemented youth projects in the latter, which focused on local products).

In our study we examine the mobility project of the Erasmus+ program, aimed at the democratic participation of young people, developing the quality of youth-workforce, reaching underprivileged young people and developing competences and skills of young people through non-formal learning. NGOs, social enterprises, public institutions and informal groups can apply three times a year (Erasmus+ Ifjúság 2020).

The Institute of Geography and Environmental Sciences of Eszterházy Károly University has been working together with NGOs in Heves County for the last 15 years. The non-profit organisation of our institute is the Agria Geográfia Foundation, whose main task is the teaching, the research and the development of geography. Our professors volunteer in several organisations in Eger, and we have former students working and current students volunteering in almost every association or foundation.

If we look at the success of Erasmus+ programs between 2014 and 2019, we can see that a significant number of educational programs are implemented by Eger-based NGOs, and Eger is relatively the most successful applicant county seat (*Table1*). Seven organisations implemented projects in Eger, and in most of them, project leaders majored in geography (the Erasmus+ Youth program supports young people to carry out important practical work and to develop programs) (*Table2*). One of the main reasons for the large number of successful programs is that these organisations cooperate and compete (co-opetition) with each other, which helps them constantly evolve their skills and expertise.

When it comes to the projects, a significant number of cross-border young people came to Hungary (the colleges and students of Beregszász, Ungvár and Sepsiszentgyörgy are outstanding). During these six years (2014-2019), more than 1,000 young people participated in our programs. We had participants from every neighbouring countries and many young people came from Poland as well, but we also had Lithuanian participants. A strong civilian network and cooperation has developed in the Carpathian-basin among Hungarian youth, and this does not exclude non-Hungarian participants: lately, Ukrainian and Ruthenian nationalities have been involved in the events. The projects are implemented in rural settlements, mostly in Heves county: Felsőtárkány and Noszvaj-Várkút, but some programs took place at Mogyoróska (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county; Zemplén-mountain). The Kárpátikum Foundation has already implemented its latest program in Transylvania, and it is planning to keep this venue in the future as well, because nature and society live in closer harmony here – this enables participants

to study local products extensively. We are also planning to organise Erasmus+ programs in Subcarpathia.

*Table 1: Awarded Erasmus+ Youth Mobility tenders in Hungarian County Seats and Budapest (2014-2019)*

County seats and Budapest	Total number of tenders awarded (pcs)	County seats and Budapest	Number of tenders awarded per 1000 person (pcs)
Budapest	226	Eger	0,832
Debrecen	83	Debrecen	0,412
Eger	44	Nyíregyháza	0,334
Szeged	44	Szeged	0,274
Nyíregyháza	39	Kaposvár	0,228
Pécs	29	Veszprém	0,218
Kecskemét	20	Pécs	0,203
Kaposvár	14	Kecskemét	0,181
Veszprém	13	Székesfehérvár	0,134
Székesfehérvár	13	Budapest	0,129
Békéscsaba	6	Szekszárd	0,126
Szekszárd	4	Békéscsaba	0,102
Miskolc	4	Szolnok	0,028
Győr	3	Miskolc	0,026
Szolnok	2	Győr	0,023
Tatabánya	1	Tatabánya	0,015

*Source: Own editing, based on data from*

*<http://www.eplusifjusag.hu/hu/applicants/results>, 2020*

*Table 2: Awarded Erasmus+ Youth Mobility tenders by NGOs from Eger*

Organisations/Years	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Altogether
Agria Geográfia Foundation	1	1	3	0	0	1	6
H-Union Covenant	0	2	3	1	1	0	7
Kaptárkő Association	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Kárpátikum Foundation	2	3	0	3	2	2	12
Hungarian Special Art Workshop Association	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Terragora Rural Development Community	1	0	2	2	1	2	8
Ugar Association	0	1	1	2	1	3	8
Altogether	5	7	10	8	5	9	44

*Source: Own editing, based on data from*

*<http://www.eplusifjusag.hu/hu/applicants/results>, 2020*

## **5. The appearance of local products in Erasmus+ projects**

During the Erasmus+ Youth Mobility Projects, we measure the development of key competences of the participating young people through non-formal and informal learning methods. Developing science competences is one of our most important goals, as after high school, young people perform worse and worse year after year in various surveys. Our aim is to make them be able to act locally (for example buying local products) and to think in a somewhat global way. The most difficult task in entrepreneurial competences is to make a positive change. Initiative skills are generally not the strength of young people in the Carpathian region, and we try to help them find local business opportunities where they can succeed in the future. 'Learning to learn' and highlighting its importance will always be important in any project so that young people can apply the new knowledge and skills at home, in their workplace, in education, and later in a business where they can work with local products, too. Interpersonal and civic competences give young people the opportunity to learn and embrace different cultures to help individuals integrate into communities. Digital and mathematical competences are present throughout our project to enhance logical and critical thinking. Foreign language competence development is also important, and that is why several events are delivered in English.

During these 7-10-day-long programs (where we usually have 30-50 participants), local products appear almost every day. We can do some practical work mostly through visiting „good practices”, but in many cases entrepreneurs visit the venue to hold workshops for young people, prompting participants work in teams. The most important places where we work with local products are as follows: making apple and grape juice in Eger or marmalade in Noszvaj; baking pastries; making sausages and herbal teas; making strudle in Poroszló or cheese in Mikóháza at the Polyán Association; baking „chimney cake”; burning coal in Transylvania, etc.

In most cases, we have handicraft workshops where we create local products that young people can later build a business on: jewelry, mandalas, bath balls, soap making, engraving, rock polishing, making different home decor, etc.

Each participating country organises cultural evenings to discover and learn about each other's traditions, taste each other's local food and drinks, showcase their music, and develop cultural competence. In many cases, young people prepare a specialty of their country of origin or residence, and try to involve other groups in the preparation of the food, so that the peer

learning method comes to the fore. For example the Transylvanians prepare „miccs” or stew, Subcarpathians cook beetroot soup (borscs) and stuffed pasta (pelmenyi) and the Polish team prepares their famous zurek soup. During the cultural programs in the evening, young participants get an insight into diversity, in addition to learning about national traditions, many program elements also develop international values.

In the last days of the exchange programs, we conduct surveys measuring the changes in key competences for young people, asking what they consider to be the strengths of the program. We also collect their suggestions regarding the improvements to be made in future projects. In many cases, program elements are also classified from which we can draw conclusions about the global-local product relationship and the attitudes of young people from different countries towards local products. Besides the data, several interviews help to evaluate the results. *Table 3* summarises the results of a questionnaire survey of the last five exchange programs in Hungary of the Kárpátikum Foundation. These products were implemented in English, with topics related to sustainability, and a total of 196 young participants were interviewed between May 2018 and April 2019.

*Table 3: Evaluation of different program elements in the 5 Erasmus+ projects around Eger by the participants' place of residence (min: 1, max: 10)*

	Transylvania	Upper Hungary	Subcarpathia	Poland	Hungary	Altogether
Global food (Burger King)	6,8	9	n/a	9,9	9,5	9
Transylvanian meals	9,2	8,8	9,4	8,4	8,6	8,8
Upper Hungarian meals	8,7	8,7	n/a	8,6	8,9	8,7
Subcarpathian meals	9,5	n/a	9,4	n/a	9,4	9,4
Polish meals	9,4	9,1	n/a	9,7	9,5	9,5
Food from Eger	8,2	8,5	8,9	7,2	8,1	8
Drinks from Eger	9,7	9,4	9,8	9,8	9,2	9,7
Traditional canteen of Eger	8	7,9	8,1	6,5	7,2	7,5
Sausage making	9,8	9,5	9,9	8,8	9,5	9,4
Handicraft workshops	9,2	9,4	9,5	8,7	9	9,1
Altogether	8,6	8,9	9,3	8,6	8,9	8,9

*Source: Own editing*

In addition to the emphasis on local products, we also strive to bring global products to the projects, as young generations often prefer international meals (especially those who can rarely visit such restaurants because of their rural location). Global products are mostly

preferred by the Polish young people, while it is not very popular among Transylvanians. In case of local food, everybody preferred their own meals. In the positive direction, above-average points are mostly given from Subcarpathians, for whom the Erasmus+ program offers a possibility to travel besides studying. Polish young people give lower scores than average, due to the fact that they come from a different cultural background and encounter many unusual factors.

All in all, one of the main features of the Erasmus program (besides the international value system) is the presence of local factors in the projects. Many environmental challenges can be studied and solved in many ways during these projects.

## 6. Conclusion

Organisations implementing Erasmus+ programs in Eger are collaborating to develop the key competences of many young people in non-formal ways in our knowledge-based society, thereby contributing to their successful careers and life-long learning. They deal with local products in a variety of topics in project and team work, and use peer learning to find solutions for environmental challenges.

We have adapted Benjamin Franklin's quote from first person singular to first person plural to better express the essence of our programs and our mutual learning.

„Tell us and we'll forget;  
Show us and we'll may remember;  
Involve us and we'll learn.”

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