



INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

ALBA IULIA

June 2022





Authors:

Mr. Tudor Drâmbărean, project coordinator

Ms. Alexandra Crișan, Local expert

Mrs. Ioana Baba, PR and Communication manager

Co-producers:

ULG members - representatives of the University, NGOs, HORECA, Private companies, youngsters

Employees of the municipality from the Investment department and the Communication department

For the IAP, several resources were invested:

Logistic resources for the online /face to face meetings

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Foreword | 5 |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 6 |
| PART I - PRESENTATION OF CONTEXT AND PROCESS | 7 |
| 1.1. City context and definition of the initial policy change | 7 |
| Alba Iulia city profile and relevant challenges | 7 |
| Population statistics and demography | 8 |
| Mobility and rural farmers | 8 |
| Cultural context and local gastronomy | 8 |
| 1.2. The current state of play about the theme tackled by the Integrated Action Plan | 11 |
| Institutional context – roles and responsibilities of different agencies | 11 |
| Existing strategies and policies relevant to the food sector | 11 |
| 1.3. A brief explanation of how the problem has evolved since the start of the project, to set context | 14 |
| 1.4. Existing local partnerships, collaborations, and development vision of the Municipality | 16 |
| 1.5. The local context in terms of food and food supply: the public market in Alba Iulia | 17 |
| 1.6. The focus of the IAP | 18 |
| 1.7. Process of building the IAP and Local Support Group | 20 |
| Composition and role of URBACT Local Group and its role in the process of co-production and co-implementation | 20 |
| Role and impact of transnational exchange and learning | 21 |
| The Calendar of ULG - Alba Iulia meetings | 22 |
| PART II - ACTION PLAN | 23 |
| 2.1. Objectives, vision, and expected results of the IAP | 23 |
| 2.2. Action Table | 24 |
| 2.3. Small Scale Action in Alba Iulia | 28 |
| Description | 28 |
| Objectives | 29 |
| Activities | 30 |
| Results and deliverables | 31 |
| Added value | 31 |
| 2.4. Resourcing | 31 |
| 2.5. Framework for delivery | 32 |
| 2.6. Monitoring and evaluation framework | 32 |



| | |
|--|----|
| 2.7. Risk analysis | 33 |
| 2.8. Communications Strategy & Public Consultation | 34 |
| 2.9. IAP Governance | 34 |
| 2.10. Appendices and supporting information | 35 |
| 2.11. The future | 35 |



Acknowledgments

This document is the result of collaboration between Alba Iulia Municipality as a Food Corridors project partner, Food Corridors ULG members (representatives of the university, NGOs, HORECA, private companies, public entities, youngsters), and employees of the Municipality from the Technical department and the Communication department.

The document was revised under the supervision of Mr. Antonio Zafra, the lead expert on the Food Corridors project, with the contribution of Mr. Miguel Sousa, the ad-hoc expert.

Foreword

"In Alba Iulia and the surrounding villages we have so many ancestral resources in terms of food and food culture that our ambition and motivation to become the European gastronomic capital by 2030 are fully justified. We intend to capitalize, adapt, reinterpret and stylize the local gastronomy that for centuries has made the Mures Valley, Sebes Valley, or Ampoi Valley famous and proud, right up to the gateway of the Apuseni Mountains. Of course, we cannot do this without the involvement of the local small farmers, HoReCa representatives, and the entire local community, but we have assumed the role of a link in this courageous approach and I have no doubt that it will be a great success. We rely, among other things, on the experience gained in the Food Corridors project, which helped us to understand more clearly the infinite possibilities of exploiting this huge Romanian treasure." Official declaration of Mr. Gabriel Codru Pleșa, Mayor of Alba Iulia Municipality

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About URBACT

The URBACT program facilitates the sharing of knowledge and good practice between cities and other levels of government. The purpose is to promote integrated sustainable development and improve the effectiveness of regional and cohesion policy.

The 2014-2020 URBACT III program builds on URBACT I (2002-2006) and URBACT II (2007-2013). URBACT II had a wider thematic scope to promote exchange and learning on sustainable urban development among cities in the mainstream programs.

ALBA IULIA MUNICIPALITY

As a local public administration, Alba Iulia Municipality promotes the urban-rural connection in terms of local organic food products and raises awareness of the importance of healthy life and living conditions in the local community.

The URBACT LOCAL GROUP (ULG) included relevant local stakeholders who supported the project activities through know-how and expertise exchange with the management team.

The SMALL SCALE ACTION (SSA) was based on promoting permaculture and organic farming in Alba Iulia.

FOOD CORRIDORS project

Empowering rural & urban food connections within European regions, acronym FOOD CORRIDORS is an action planning network funded by URBACT III. The project encourages the transition to regional food systems by enabling urban-rural connections.

Lead Partner: Region of Coimbra, Portugal.

Partners: Larissa (Greece), Szecseny (Hungary), Union of Bassa Romagna Municipalities (Italy), Alba Iulia (Romania), BSC Kranj, and Gorenjska (Slovenia), Tartu (Estonia).

Implementation period: 2019 - 2022.

Total project value: 749.956,00€.

The budget allocated to Alba Iulia Municipality is 92.345,82 €, consisting of 78.494,02 € in ERDF funds and 13.851,89 € in local co-financing.

Website: <https://urbact.eu/food-corridors>

INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN (IAP)

The vision of the present IAP is to transform Alba Iulia into a European Gastronomic Destination by 2030, through a set of three objectives:

1. Increasing the attractiveness and visibility of Alba Iulia through creating a locally registered trademark of Alba Carolina Citadel and enabling HORECA collaboration by 2025,
2. Reducing local food poverty through partnering with the local hypermarkets and developing an efficient food waste policy by 2023,
3. Improving the local distribution of agri-food products through supporting the promotion of local agri-producers and better access to local markets by 2025.

The IAP reflects all URBACT Local Group members' knowledge and perspectives in addition to learning from the transnational exchange with other URBACT cities.

PART I - PRESENTATION OF CONTEXT AND PROCESS

1.1. City context and definition of the initial policy change

Alba Iulia city profile and relevant challenges

Alba Iulia Municipality is the local public administration focused on the sustainable development and well-being of its local community formed by over 74.000 inhabitants, by providing modern public services. The vision of the Municipality as a local authority is to become a more attractive city to live, work, and invest in by 2020. In achieving this vision, the Municipality is focused on four main strategic options: (SO1) Alba Iulia - a smart, accessible, and cohesive city, (SO2) Alba Iulia - a green city with efficient public services, (SO3) Alba Iulia - a competitive and creative city, and (SO4) Alba Iulia - a European cultural and tourist attraction. An interactive video regarding the local strategic development can be found here.

The vision of the present IAP is to transform Alba Iulia into a European Gastronomic Destination by 2030, which will directly contribute to the vision of the Municipality to become a more attractive city to live, work in, and invest in.



Fig. 1 - Description of the IAP executive summary

Population statistics and demography

Alba Iulia is the capital of Alba county, with a total population of Alba Iulia of over 74.000 inhabitants according to the most recent data provided by the National Institute of

Statistics. However, if the metropolitan level is taken into consideration, the population is about 90.000. The total area of Alba Iulia Municipality is 10.365 ha, of which the area of 2.058,43 ha is occupied by buildings, while the rest of the surface is represented by agricultural land and forests.



Fig. 2 – Metropolitan area (Alba Iulia city and Ciugud, Sântimbru, Ighiu, Cricău, Galda de Jos, Întregalde, and Mihălț villages)

Mobility and rural farmers

The metropolitan area is essential for both for the integrated development of the area as a competitive pole, but also for enhancing the connection between urban and rural areas. Taking into consideration that the local farmers live preponderant in the villages near Alba Iulia (Ciugud, Sântimbru, Ighiu, Cricău, Galda de Jos, Întregalde and Mihălț, etc.), the existing transportation infrastructure is essential as it enables the agri-urban-rural connection. The short distances together with the existence of a single public transport operator within the entire metropolitan area (a privately owned company that ensures the public transportation system), enable the physical connection between local farmers and the city of Alba Iulia. The main advantage of the existing public transportation system is that it provides integrated public passenger transport - interconnected transport services within a well-defined geographical area, having a single information provider service, a unique charging system, and a single transportation schedule. As a result, local farmers are encouraged to bring and sell within the city their local, organic products while the urban citizens can go to the countryside to shop locally.

Cultural context and local gastronomy

Alba Iulia is also the symbolic capital of the Romanian people, a symbol of unity of the nation and the spirit. Here, on 1 December 1918, the Union of Transylvania and mother country Romania took place, and thus, the Modern Romanian National State was born. It is the symbol city of Romanian unity as the unification of Romanian provinces took place here in 1918 and it is marketing itself as “the Other Capital”.

Alba Iulia has become a popular tourist attraction due to Alba Carolina Citadel which is listed as a Heritage Monument in Romania and part of the UNESCO Cultural World Heritage. An important turning point was the rehabilitation of the Citadel during the last years, which enabled local development. The existing cultural and historical heritage is therefore highly important, as the number of tourists highly increased along with the major infrastructure interventions made by the Municipality together with the strategic positioning of the city.

Due to the socio-economic development during the last years, the HORECA industry flourished following the increased private investments, and visitors in the city increased too which positively impacted the local economy. Gastronomy and local wines are developing in parallel with the increase in tourists and visitors. There are local resources for food and drinks production, while environmentally friendly, ecological agriculture food and wine would get an even higher value.

Agriculture industry

Key sectors of economic activity in Alba county, according to their importance. Employment by sectors: Agriculture & Forestry: 1,5%; Industry: 27,3%; Constructing field: 7,9%; Commerce, hotels and restaurants (tourism): 17,9%; Transport & telecommunications: 7,3%; Financial activities & real estate transactions: 2,8%; Public administration: 13,1%; Educational system: 6,8%; Health system: 6,4%; Other types of activities: 9,0%.

According to data about Romanian farming, from the Agricultural Ministry (2016), 228.100 ha of land was cultivated with a total production of 3.3 million tons of vegetables. Romania was amongst the largest exporters of cereals at the EU level in the last years. In the fruit sector, Romania had 138.000 ha, with a total production of 1.2 million tons.

In 2018, Romania had the lowest food prices among EU countries, 34.6 percent lower than the EU average (Eurostat). However Romanian farmers are not organised since there is a chronic deficit of cooperatives and associations at the farmers and agri-food producers level. The Romanian Government, for its part, is developing a commercial platform dedicated to small farmers. At the Alba Iulia level and around the city (Functional Urban Area area) there are several big companies where most of the jobs are concentrated. The 4 biggest employers in the food area in Alba Iulia are Solina, Prefera, Transavia, Albalact, and ELIT.

Agricultural activities in the area have diminished significantly in the last two decades. This is evidenced by the decrease of agricultural area in the municipality by more than 500 hectares over this period, one of the causes being the fast urbanisation.

Supply and Demand

At the local level, the majority of the population buys their food from local supermarkets/hypermarkets. These vendors typically acquire the food from other countries, and even other continents, thereby contributing negatively to the effects of climate change while the quality of the agri-products is not always the best for public health. Moreover, not many locally produced foods and agri-products can be found in the local supermarkets while for the local small producers, the only opportunity to sell their products is direct via the 2 small agri-markets which function in the city. Therefore the supply chain of products at a local level is quite weak, The current legislative framework is not supportive of shorter supply chains, nor does it contribute to the development of local

producers associations at the FUA level, which would support a “locally produced – locally consumed” vision.

Main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

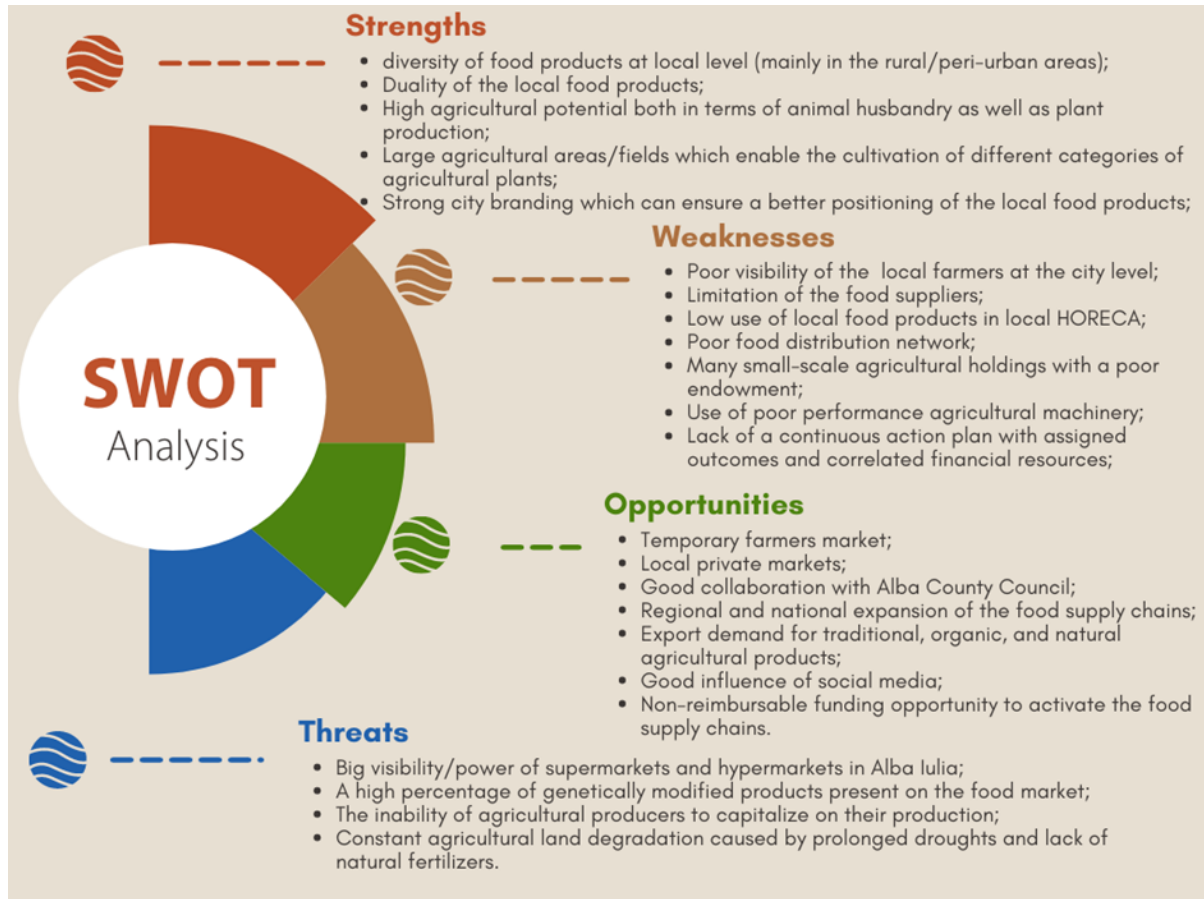


Fig. 3 - SWOT analysis

The Municipality has identified some changes to be achieved at the local level as a result of the implementation of the Integrated Action Plan: a better connection between the rural-urban food chain networks, reducing carbon footprint due to the encouragement of local consumption instead of imports and better access to fresh food for local inhabitants.

Food and beverage industry in the Covid-19 context

The pandemic crisis seriously affected the performance and stability of the SMEs belonging to the food and beverage industry in Romania, during 2020 to 2021. National lockdown and severe containment measures had a drastic impact on tourism and hospitality, with a domino effect on several industries, including HoReCa and SMEs in the food sector. While hotels were temporarily suspended or closed, operating on loss due to tourism drop, or temporarily transformed into quarantine centres, most restaurants continued to survive by switching to delivery and takeaway services, as the demand for food consumed at home increased during the Covid-19 period..

The rapid spread of Covid 19 generated disequilibrium in the food market's supply and demand and also considerable disruptions in the supply and distribution chains for the food and beverage sector. The implications reflect a change in commodity prices and a high demand for digital adaptation and green growth for SMEs to remain active in the

business. While the immediate governmental intervention did prove to save many SMEs in the short term and eventually lower the unemployment rate, some critics argue that the support policies were inefficiently targeted and may cause a credit crunch which will affect large companies. Two years later, the HoReCa industry still needs governmental support as SMEs continue to struggle with the implications of Covid-19.

The way that the household consumption shifted in a short time also affected the food industry. Due to new, drastic social and health restrictions, which became a resilience test on behavioral changes for businesses, consumers switched to home cooking and shopping from stores closer to their homes. Studies show that after the Covid-19 burst, Romanian people were interested in cooking more at home and ordering less ready-made foods while being concerned about a healthy lifestyle and nutrition. The same studies indicate that consumer preferences changed as a result of diminished incomes provoked by the pandemic.

1.2. The current state of play about the theme tackled by the Integrated Action Plan

Institutional context – roles and responsibilities of different agencies

- Alba Iulia Municipality - county capital and main promoter of the county at the national level. Owner of the first Branding Manual in Romania for a city and implementer of several transnational EU projects in the area of tourism, gastronomy, and rural-urban links. Also implemented the “Gradinescu” project in partnership with Kaufland Romania.
- Alba County Council - main promoter of the County's agricultural and touristic potential and organiser of several promotion events on an annual basis.
- CRFIR - Government Agency for financing Rural investments through EU and national funding
- Direction for Agriculture Alba - Government body overseeing the implementation of the Agriculture and Rural policy at the County level.
- “1 Decembrie 1918 University Alba Iulia” - main academic body at County level with various academic activities in the area of marketing, land measurement, and tourism activities.

Existing strategies and policies relevant to the food sector

To ensure integrated sustainable development of the city of Alba Iulia, the present IAP is aligned with relevant local, county, regional, national, and European strategies.

At the local level

The present IAP/strategy is aligned with the priorities of the 2014-2023 Integrated Urban Development (IUDS) Strategy of Alba Iulia, through general objective no. 1 (Promotion of intersectoral tourism in partnership with economic operators, Supporting and promoting traditional crafts, Creating cultural routes), which is focused on sustainable and smart growth and economic competitiveness; general objective no. 2 (health and social services) which aims a social, performant and inclusive development of the city and general objective no. 5 (Program 13.8: Markets for agricultural products) which is focused on a sustainable, clean and clean urban environment. Moreover, the IAP is also aligned with the IUDS Strategy of Alba Iulia for the period 2023-2030 which was recently adopted by the Local Council (April 2022).

One of the objectives presented in the new, updated IUDS of Alba Iulia, which includes a chapter dedicated to economy and research, is focusing on transforming Alba Iulia into a pole of economic development and innovative research, by:

- Boosting economic growth by stimulating investment;

- Improving the quality of life;
- Developing and increasing local economic competitiveness;
- Supporting and maintaining a dynamic entrepreneurial culture by creating a favourable environment;
- Economic development by strengthening the capacity of research, education, development, innovation;
- Strategic planning.

The present IAP is aligned with these specific objectives.



Fig. 4&5 - Action measures for enhancing circular economy

Temporary activities such as markets are presented as an opportunity for play and practice within the study made by Gehl Architects - "Alba Iulia towards a city for people", together with festivals, and exhibitions, which can enable street entertainment.

One of the major interventions included in the General Urbanistic Plan (GUP) 2012-2022 refers to new agricultural/grocery markets and also the extension of key road infrastructure which will enable the connection with the rural villages located near Alba Iulia.

One of the intervention areas described in the Alba Iulia Project Prioritisation for 2014-2020 is urban regeneration, which includes a program for producing local markets. The same development strategy highlights some information on the agriculture and the food industry, with a few sub-branches (meat production and processing, milk and cheese products, ice cream, condiments, fish products, bakery), with a total business output of 300 mils. Euro/year, providing around 3.000 jobs, including over 2.600 for the residents in the city, being from this perspective the biggest employing industrial activity. The food

industry tends to concentrate in Galda de Jos (Oiejdea), Santimbru, Alba Iulia and Sebeş city, meaning the ZUF area of Alba Iulia Municipality.

The food and beverages SMEs represent about 33% of the local retail sector.

| Industrial sub-sector | Total employed residents in Alba Iulia |
|---|--|
| Food and beverages | 1636 |
| Textiles and garments | 1274 |
| Leather and footwear | 945 |
| Wood processing and furniture | 588 |
| Ceramics and building materials | 945 |
| Automotive | 170 |
| Metallurgy | 293 |
| Metal processing, machinery & equipment | 937 |
| Electrical equipment | 303 |
| Plastic and rubber | 27 |
| Paper & printing | 101 |
| Chemistry | 37 |

Data source: Borg Design Database

Fig. 7 - Classification of the employed residents in Alba Iulia on type of industrial subsector

At county level

- Alba County Development Strategy for the period 2021-2027 ([link](#)): through Strategic Objective 2, the strategy aims for integrated and continuous development of the factors that ensure the increase of the quality of life in the urban and rural areas of the county. Strategic objective 3 within the strategy is focused on ensuring a clean, resilient, and safe environment for the sustainable development of the county, maintaining the quality of the landscape, and increasing its attractiveness for residents and tourists.
- Strategy for promoting Alba County as a destination for investors 2018-2023 ([link](#)):
- Organisation and coordination of the economic promotion activity of the county through enabling local partners for economic promotion: Local Action Groups (GAL), associations of producers, professional associations; building local networks for promotion;
- Elaboration of information materials for the economic promotion of Alba County through a set of promotional materials (local products, handicrafts, ceramics, wood, decorative objects, food, posters, flyers) specific to Alba County to be distributed in different promotion events;
- Organisation of events to promote the business environment in Alba County through thematic fairs/events (Gardener event, Tasty Alba, Roses Day, Apulum Agraria), with the participation of companies, members of professional associations of producers of traditional and organic products, growers of vegetables and horticultural material, winegrowers, livestock breeders from county level and local action groups;
- On-line platforms/resource platforms.
- STRATEGY OF ALBA COUNTY REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES OF PUBLIC UTILITIES 2018-2023 ([link](#)): all measures proposed through this strategy will highly enhance the agrotourism in Alba county, which directly impacts the urban-rural connection in terms of the food industry.

At the regional level

The Development Strategy for the Centre Region, for the period 2021-2027 focuses on rural development, agriculture, and forestry by enhancing the agri-food sector and improving the professional training of farmers, and the developing social, cultural-recreational infrastructure and support for community development.

At national level

- Strategy for the development of the agri-food sector on medium and long term 2020-2030
- Promotion of ecological agriculture, food industry, and food waste at the level of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Promotion of agri-food products at the level of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

At European level

- The Farm to Fork Strategy within the European Green Deal - the organic action plan
- 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals - SDG2, SDG3, SDG11, SDG12, SDG13

Alba Iulia - Becoming a Gender Equal City

As a signatory of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, Alba Iulia Municipality is committed to “recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of a high standard of physical and mental health, and affirms that access to good quality health care and medical treatment and preventative health care for women and men is essential for the realisation of this right”. Also, the Municipality recognizes “its responsibility to work towards a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment in its area, including local policies in relation to waste, noise, air quality, biodiversity and the impact of climate change” . Both principles are aligned with the priorities of the Gender Equal City initiative elaborated and promoted by URBACT.

As food is an essential component of good health, the Municipality will focus on promoting women's entrepreneurship in the field of food production and supply. All public procurement procedures on supplying food in local daycares/kindergartens will aim for local, organic food while ensuring transparency, objectivity, and impartiality. Furthermore, the Municipality will prioritize the access of female businesswomen in the local public market by ensuring product visibility and safe working conditions. The Municipality will promote within its marketing strategy all local food production businesses that are aligned to sustainable principles and initiatives in the food sector, gastronomy, tourism, and related fields.

1.3. A brief explanation of how the problem has evolved since the start of the project, to set context

Alba Iulia is now trying to leverage the stage represented by the citadel Vauban Alba Carolina, with events and tourist attractions to lure tourists to visit and also to return to the city. The Vauban Citadel is unique in the world for its artistic patterns and is historically important in Romania. The entire citadel has become a stage, a diamond that needs to be discovered, and that the local community wishes to valorize.

Alba Iulia is situated in an area where numerous food companies are present, but which do not cooperate in an integrated way to support local gastronomy. For example, they do

not have an official association of producers at a local-regional level to make their voice heard. Furthermore, they do not usually even sell locally, for example to HORECA actors. They are more interested in distributing products to bigger cities. Also, most restaurants and supermarkets in the city do not receive locally produced products. Instead, they usually sell products produced in other parts of the country. In addition to this, the local agri-food producers are usually too small to enter big super/hypermarket chains. As a result, they tend to rely only on selling directly via the local agri-food markets, which do not provide them an opportunity for a sustained profit, which in turn would enable them to grow and sell more products.

The result of this circularity is that local consumers are mostly dependent on the big supermarkets which most of the time sell products produced in other countries. The supermarkets do not promote the “locally produced” philosophy and rely on large external providers of agri-products that lack a connection to the local area and are focused on making excessively high profits. As a consequence, many local producers and local consumers are not happy about the situation, given that locally produced agri-foods are usually of higher quality than those found in the supermarket - but they are not as accessible. In addition, they have a smaller carbon footprint than those brought in from other countries/continents.

After the Gastronomic Cities project a new association called HORES ALBA was founded in Alba Iulia. This involved different members representing the HORECA sector in Alba Iulia. However, its reach is limited and local producers are not well represented at the local and county level. Additionally, the local HORECA stakeholders are not cooperating well enough at the moment to contribute efficiently to the perspectives for sustainable tourism development, or for integrating local food producers into their food chains.

One of the main consequences following this situation is the low level of services offered to tourists/customers and the huge variance in service standards for services provided by the different HORECA actors. Another consequence is the low communication between the HORECA actors who find it difficult to cooperate due to low levels of trust. This, in turn, leads to a low level of implication in the development of new touristic products at the local level. The Municipality also finds it difficult to encourage the different stakeholders to get involved in the development of local tourism and to cooperate toward this objective. However, there are successful initiatives at the county level which promote the local products on the market. For example, “Țara Vinului” Association (The Country of the Wine) brings together 4 regions in Alba County (Alba, Aiud, Sebeș-Apold, Târnave).

As regards food waste there is no strategy at the local level (or even national level) and there is a clear need for improvement in this area. Romania is one of the biggest producers of food waste in Europe although it has one of the highest costs for food per capita.

The municipality has made efforts in recent years to promote integrated food-production systems along with the other communes in the AIDA area. These efforts have been initiated by the municipality together with the County Council. The municipality also supported the start-ups in the gastronomic field through the implementation of various ESF-financed projects.

The municipality supported the creation of integrated public transport in the AIDA area (metropolitan area) to support mobility in the peri-urban areas of the city thus encouraging mobility also for goods and services in the food area. Moreover, each year the

municipality organizes various gastronomic and agricultural fairs and agri-food markets in the city in partnership with the County Council and other institutions/organizations.

In the educational area, the municipality supported the implementation of relevant projects in partnership with supermarkets and NGOs, one great example being the “Grădinescu” project (<https://gradinescu.ro/project/gradina-din-cetate-alba-iulia/>). The initial focus of the Integrated Action Plan for Alba Iulia is to promote better-integrated food chains at the local level and to contribute to the better integration of agri-food channels at the city-regional level while reducing food waste. This should ensure better access to locally produced high-quality products for its citizens, in line with the EU and national strategies, policies, and regulations in the field. Bearing this objective in mind, Alba Iulia wishes to learn from the other Food Corridors project partners and, share its own good practices in the field of the agri-food sector, to become a more sustainable city focused on the general wellbeing of its citizens.

The Covid-19 pandemic highly impacted the Food Corridors project at the local level since the beginning of the project, as the transnational meetings were organised online (not physical), the SSA proposed initially by the Municipality was changed in order to ensure similar objectives but adapted to the new pandemic context, ULG meetings were also organised online or in smaller groups, numerous online communication tools were suggested to be used in the process of project implementation, etc. All these mitigation measures required more time and resources to ensure the quality and quantity of the project results and deliverables. However, the effort made by the management team overcame the unexpected circumstances and challenges and successfully managed the project implementation.

1.4. Existing local partnerships, collaborations, and development vision of the Municipality

By signing the Covenant of Mayors in partnership with the Alba Local Agency for Energy (ALEA), along with the main activities of the Sustainable Energy Action Plan, Alba Iulia committed itself to reduce 24% the CO2 emissions until 2020, compared to the reference year 2008. This commitment is the local government's response regarding energy and the environment with the intent to counter the challenges posed by the urban development of the municipality in recent years: the environmental pollution induced by accelerated development, the management of the expanding traffic network, the constructions boom, the urban waste management, the need for public utility services of decent quality.

The Action Plan for Sustainable Energy and Climate of Alba Iulia for 2030 (SICAP) outlines that increasing temperatures will destabilise the local climate that will negatively impact the local agriculture (such as reduction of agricultural production as a result of the lack of water in the soil, heat, climatic variations incompatible with the development of culture or climate or Wild and forest fires amid periods of very high air temperatures). The Sustainable Urban Logistic Plan (SULP) of the Municipality is based on identifying feasible solutions for the local implementation of sustainable logistics and energy efficiency measures, with benefits on the last mile food supply chain. The Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan was revised in 2022 and promotes rural-urban mobility and, indirectly, the development of agricultural connections with the peri-urban regions of the city.

In 2021, Alba Iulia Municipality was awarded the title of ‘Sustainable Community - European Energy Award’ for projects implemented and being implemented, in the field of energy efficiency. The award was granted by the Swiss Embassy. Alba Iulia is the first

municipality in Transylvania certified according to the European Energy Award system, launched for the first time in Switzerland under the name “Energierstadt”. Also in July 2021, the Municipality signed the European Commission’s Green City Accord, a movement of European mayors committed to making cities cleaner and healthier. It aims to improve the quality of life for all Europeans and accelerate the implementation of relevant EU environmental laws related to major challenges such as air, water, and noise pollution, protecting nature and biodiversity to improve waste management and support the circular economy.

1.5. The local context in terms of food and food supply: the public market in Alba Iulia



Fig. 8 - Public market managed by Alba Iulia Municipality

The public market is managed by Alba Iulia Municipality through the public service “Local patrimony administration”, Fair and Market Management, and Stray Dog Management Service and is located in the city centre, in the near proximity of the city hall, thus ensuring favourable accessibility to all citizens. The market is open every day, between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. The total surface occupied by the market is about 4.504 sqm, which includes a covered area of 1.534,33 sqm. The agro-food hall is located in the basement of the administrative building (city hall) and has a net area of 694 sqm.

According to the Local Council Decision no. 349/2018, the monthly subscriptions for market stalls vary from 9 to 13 euros to which a symbolic tax is added, depending on the occupied surface (0,6 euro/sqm/day). The fees applicable to traders carrying out their seasonal activity, as well as the rates for renting the scales are those set annually by the Council Local of Alba Iulia by the decision on the approval of the levels for taxable amounts, local taxes, and fees, other taxes, special taxes, and fines.

Most of the food products existent in the public market are sold by local farmers from Alba Iulia and surrounding villages. However, food products from other counties are also present locally, in a smaller percentage. The types of products in the public market include

agricultural products from agricultural producers, vegetables and fruits from companies, family associations, individuals authorised, household products - within a limit of 10% of the market area, food products, non-food products - within a limit of 10% of the market area, flowers, seedlings, seeds, trees.

There are also parallel or complementary agro-activities:

- The Temporary Farmers Market is managed by Alba Iulia Municipality in collaboration with Alba County Council to support local food production and consumption. The goods from the market - which are 100% obtained and packaged by the producers (local farmers from Alba county) - include fruits, vegetables, honey and bee products, and milk and dairy products. The temporary market provides the local producers the opportunity to promote and sell their products at a fair price directly to the consumers, with no intermediaries. The market is organised every Friday, between 7.00 and 13.00, in the “Cetate” neighbourhood ([link](#) here). 20 folding tables were recently purchased by the Municipality in order to stimulate the development of both permanent and temporary markets within the local community.
- Other 2 private markets, one located also in “Cetate” neighbourhood ([link](#) here) and one in the industrial area of the city.

Strengths and difficulties encountered by the public food market:

- 1) Municipal perception: the public market facilitates the access of the local community to healthy food and furthermore to a healthy lifestyle, which is one of the main objectives of the Municipality as a local public authority.
- 2) Perception of producers/vendors: good positioning of the market, a high number of consumers, good profit.
- 3) Perception of consumers: higher prices of products than in the hypermarkets.

Pandemic impact: The market trend was negative during 2020 due to pandemics. Some local companies which used to carry out daily/physical activities in the market focused on on-demand food delivery (mainly through social media). However, as time passed and restrictions were lifted, the citizens/consumers started to visit the market again and, gradually, got back to the normal trend.

In terms of immediate challenges ahead, a potential future wave of COVID19 can enable restrictions again, influencing also the public market facilities, considering the short and medium-term. In the long term, one can indicate enabling and maintaining sustainability in the local food policies, food consumption, and reducing food waste at the local level.

In conclusion, the public market managed by the Municipality represents one of the main centre points at the local level where the need for locally produced, healthy food is ensured by the local farmers. Enabling the public market through a series of actions proposed within the present IAP can boost the urban-rural connection in terms of local food products and raise awareness on the importance of healthy life and living conditions in the local community.

1.6. The focus of the IAP

We would like to stress that the process followed to produce this Integrated Action Plan has been shaped by the circumstances arising from the outbreak and subsequent development of the Covid-19 pandemic, with all the imbalances and challenges that this has brought about. All in all, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of

ensuring access to healthy and locally produced food for everyone and the risks underlying a globalised food system that is not exempt from various negative externalities.

In the context where the planet's population will reach 8 billion, and urbanisation is overgrowing, cities face the challenge of providing their citizens with clean air, access to healthy and sufficient food, employment, housing, etc. These are among the basic priorities outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which help frame the New Urban Agenda.

FOOD CORRIDORS is a network of European cities committed to designing food plans that extend from the urban and peri-urban areas through a corridor that facilitates an urban-rural re-connection. This approach enhances production and consumption environments based on a base of economic, social, and environmental sustainability integrated into development policies.

This Integrated Action Plan developed within the framework of the FOOD CORRIDORS network comes at a critical moment of change for the EU, launching a new Common Agricultural Policy and an ambitious proposal such as the European Farm to Fork Strategy all within the scope of the European Green Deal.

The themes and sub-themes presented below connect with the problems and challenges faced by partners along with the FOOD CORRIDORS network. In the following chapters, these connections will be made visible and their relation to the actions to be locally implemented and how these could be facilitated.

Alba Iulia is not widely known at the European level but is known well enough at the national level. Accordingly, the local authorities need to develop a coherent approach to attracting the tourists and convince them that it is worth staying longer than a quick visit to the Vauban Citadel. Leveraging the gastronomy and local traditions of the area will likely be important to achieving that goal.

Small Scale Activity (SSA) implemented within the Food Corridors project: This activity consisted of the organisation of a series of workshops on urban gardening and permaculture, aimed at involving the city's local farmers in activities related to sustainable food production. This enabled the participants to learn about the food process in their own proximity within the city boundaries, and about producing and selling locally their own products. The concepts and feasibility of roof-top urban gardens and vertical gardens were also taken into consideration in an institutional building of the municipality.

Potential for change: The motivation for joining this consortium was to learn from other experienced partners in this field and how to valorize the local gastronomic heritage and the food systems in order to contribute to the sustainable development of the local community through tourism-based activities.

Through the previous URBACT project "Gastronomic Cities", the municipality developed an Action Plan which foresaw an improvement of the food sector and related areas at the local level. Most of the solutions proposed through that Action Plan were implemented successfully while others will be implemented in the near future. For the development of the Food Corridors IAP, it will be necessary to adjust the implementation of some tasks taking into account the general objectives of the city, the promotion of a qualified gastronomic tourism offering, and the objectives of the project FOOD CORRIDORS. This

should facilitate the process of creating a new Integrated Action Plan for Food Corridors project supported by a varied group of local actors and capable of proposing realistic and efficient actions to achieve the proposed objectives.

Some interesting elements that have emerged after the visit to Alba Iulia by the Lead Partner and Lead Expert are the following:

- The municipal market is a dynamic asset that requires support and encouragement to maintain its character and to mitigate observed risks, such as the general ageing of producers. Facilitating the arrival of these products present on the market to the HORECA sector is a challenge that will need to be overcome if AIM wants to create a solid base to sustain a gastronomic tourism offering;
- Encouraging the transformation of products on an artisanal scale is also necessary, facilitating collective equipment and creating cooperation networks through collective routes or brands;
- Initiatives such as “Grădinescu” show that small proposals can be a relevant resource for change, from an educational and social point of view. AIM manages the infrastructure (E.g. school canteens, social canteen, aged care home, and markets) and hence has the capacity/ competence to implement policies in the thematic area of FOOD CORRIDORS. As indicated in the attached table (Assets and Barriers), AIM has provided explanations about the political support and availability of human and material resources in relation to the project.

Finally, a series of basic indicators are proposed to be followed by Alba Iulia Municipality:

- Level of effective political commitment to the project’s implementation (participation in local and transnational meetings, taking political and technical responsibility in departments, vertical and horizontal cooperation, availability of economic resources, etc.).
- Real participation of actors from a territorial radius beyond the municipality (participation in ULG activities, inclusion in IAP actions, etc.)
- Stability of the Local Group beyond the project implementation period.
- Creation and dissemination of a map of the territorial system (urban and rural) of food production, transformation, distribution, consumption, and reuse.
- Reinforcement of keystones in the short food supply chain (markets, local shops, traditional products, etc.)
- Reduction of a monitored percentage of food waste.
- Effective increase in the number of restaurants with a certain supply of local products.

1.7. Process of building the IAP and Local Support Group

Composition and role of URBACT Local Group and its role in the process of co-production and co-implementation

An IAP, within the frame proposed by the URBACT Programme, is a concise document defining actions to be implemented, covering the planned timings, implementation responsibilities, costs, funding sources, monitoring indicators, and risk assessment of the actions. Inspired by the URBACT methodology, based on the development of two consecutive Phases, the second one containing three differentiated stages, we have followed this route to build the IAP:

1. Activation (May-December 2020)
2. Planning Actions (January-December 2021)
3. Planning implementation & IAP Final (January-August 2022)

Under the guidance of an Ad Hoc Expert and the support of the Lead Expert of the network, an ongoing capacity-building process has taken place, according to the URBACT

general outline for the co-production of the IAP. Throughout 2021, different training sessions were organised within the various transnational meetings. Similarly, during the e-University organised by URBACT in January 2022, knowledge has been shared regarding essential aspects of the IAP production process, such as risk analysis, financing, monitoring, and evaluation of results. In a complementary way, these and other contents have been expanded throughout the transnational meetings organised by the project in 2022 until the final version of the IAP. In parallel, through different meetings, this learning and availability of resources have been put at the service of the Local Group that has collaborated on the definition of the IAP itself.

Role and impact of transnational exchange and learning

The focus for Alba Iulia is to promote better-integrated food chains at the local level and to contribute to the better integration of agri-food channels at the city level. This should ensure better access to locally high-quality products for its citizens, in line with the EU and national regulations in the field. Bearing this objective in mind, Alba Iulia wishes to learn from the other Food Corridors project partners and, share its own good practices in the field of the agri-food sector, to become a more sustainable city focused on the wellbeing of its citizens. Mainly due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Work Plan of the network and the work of each partner have had to be readapted flexibly throughout the entire development of Phase II (May 2020 - August 2022).

Following the URBACT guidance, the transnational learning and exchange activity is combined with a participatory process, giving shape to a Local Group that accompanies the process throughout the project, culminating in the production of the Integrated Action Plan. Once again, it is worth mentioning the significant impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the development of this participatory process. This has made frequent contact and interaction, as initially designed, problematic. However, the Local Group has been present throughout the project especially through online means of communication.

AIM has identified some profiles related to entities and institutions that may form part of the FOOD CORRIDORS ULG: Local food and beverage associations; Local HO-RE-CA representatives; Public institutions such as Alba Directorate of Public Health, Alba Chamber of Commerce and Industry, etc.; Private companies who produce food and/or beverage at the local level; Private entrepreneurs in the field of food production from the surrounding villages; 1st of December 1918 Alba Iulia University; Alba Iulia Public Transport Company; Local NGOs/associations acting in the field of food waste management; Local cooperatives of agro-farmers from the local-regional level and other NGOs in the food-drinks area (E.g. Wine Route Association); Local schools/high schools, schools of trade, vocational schools, etc.; Representatives of local mass media.

For the Food Corridors project, the ULG is composed of old and new stakeholders, considering the previous URBACT funded project Gastronomic Cities. The ULG is coordinated by Dramborean Tudor, the Project Manager.

CORE GROUP OF FOOD CORRIDORS

| Name, surname | Role/expertise | Institution/Organisation/Field of activity |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Ovidiu Negrea | President of Alba Wine Country | Local producers (wine producers, bread producers, sweets producers) |

| | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Elena Stoia | Manager of Grădinescu area | Grădinescu Alba Iulia - the urban community garden |
| Cosmin Maties | Management in NGO sector | HORES Alba - Local HORECA Association |
| Dan Lungu | Public administration | Ciugud Commune/village - e-commerce platform for the agri-food sector |
| Nicolae Marginean | Communication and dissemination | Regional Development Agency Centre - Managing authority for EU funds |
| Calin Maties | Business management in private sector | Pita de Santimbru - bread production/Member of the Senate of Romania |
| Delia Cristescu | Executive Director | Social Department of Alba Iulia Municipality |
| Vasile Beres | Head of Service | Public Markets and veterinary controls of the Municipality |

Due to the pandemic situation, the face-to-face ULG meetings initially planned could not take place. The communication and collaboration between ULG members took place online via email, skype, zoom, and also telephone calls. During the project implementation process, the Municipality managed to organise 4 ULG meetings prior to the implementation of the SSA within the project.

The Calendar of ULG - Alba Iulia meetings

7 October 2020: Meeting organised with the Food Corridors team, representative of local agri-food markets in Alba Iulia, representative of Grădinescu project – Urban community garden.

9 November 2020: Meeting organised with the Food Corridors team, representative of the Social Assistance Department

22 January 2021: Meeting to establish details for SSA implementation with representatives of Grădinescu – Urban community garden.

5 June 2021: Discussion about the SSA implementation, review, and monitorization.

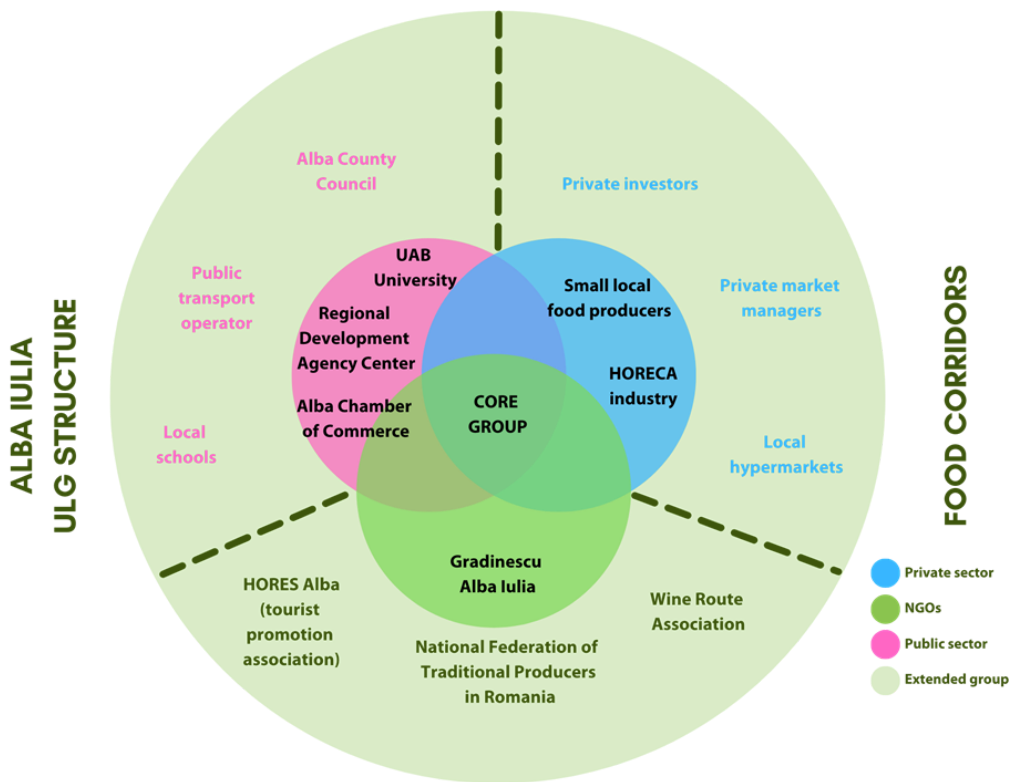


Fig. 9 - Extended Urban Local Group of the Food Corridors project



Fig. 10 - IAP process in Food Corridors project

PART II - ACTION PLAN

2.1. Objectives, vision, and expected results of the IAP

Our vision is to transform Alba Iulia into a European Gastronomic Destination by 2030. The vision of the present IAP is aligned with the current vision of the Municipality, which is to become a more attractive city to live, work, and invest in. According to our vision, our city designed a Roadmap for the design of this IAP, based on the following objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timebound):

01. Increase the attractiveness and visibility of Alba Iulia through a series of gastronomic and promotional mechanisms and tools to attract visitors by 2027

Actions:

- 1.1. Elaborate on a plan to create a locally registered trademark (with the brand and logo of the Vauban Citadel, similar to Tierra del Sabor (<http://www.tierradesabor.es/>) together with HORECA representatives and to enable gastronomic tourism based on a participatory approach and a common vision
- 1.2. Ensure a multiannual financial framework for creating a local-regional registered trademark and for implementing measures for ensuring the visibility of Alba Iulia with the participation of local HORECA, SMEs, and small farmers
- 1.3. Place branding through local food and tourism, as a result of the theme CULTURE IDENTITY & TERRITORIAL FOOD BRANDS
- 1.4. Enable the participation of the local community within the process

02. Reducing local food poverty through partnering with the local hypermarkets and developing an efficient food waste policy by 2027

Actions:

- 2.1. Initiate and facilitate better cooperation between local supermarkets and the Social Assistance Department to implement measures for reducing food poverty among vulnerable groups.
- 2.2. Identifying and connecting to the relevant hypermarkets at the local level interested in the food waste and food poverty topic.
- 2.3. Stimulate the creation of a food hub system, which brings together different food producers (in the urban and rural areas near Alba Iulia) under the same umbrella, to ensure local food distribution and promotion. A good example in Cluj-Napoca, Romania is Nod Verde (<https://nodverde.ro/despre-noi/>).
- 2.4. Develop programs, events, and workshops to raise awareness of the food waste topic.
- 2.5. Support local pedagogical farms where children get to know, observe and interact with animals.

03. Improving the local distribution of agri-food products through supporting the promotion of local agri-producers and better access to local markets by 2027.

Actions:

- 3.1. Support local farmers to better merchandize their products at the temporary volant market and provide training sessions for use of online tools such as <https://www.apozarulvirtual.ro/>.
- 3.2. Improving the logistic conditions at the local fresh market of the municipality for farmers to be able to sell their products also during winter times in optimum conditions ("hard" investment).
- 3.3. Improve access of small farmers to local HORECA to sell their products locally - 0 km products.
- 3.4. School Agri-labs: promoting educational agricultural actions at the local level through involving schools in events organised at the Grădinescu site.
- 3.5. Providing the supply of fruit, vegetables, milk, and dairy products in local schools and kindergartens from local or regional producers with products coming from the short supply chain, in compliance with public procurement legislation.

2.2. Action Table

Following the transnational online meetings within the Food Corridors project, the ULG meetings, and the SSA implementation, the Team of Alba Iulia municipality together with the ULG members developed a list of actions to be implemented during the 2021-2027 framework. The list of actions came after a thorough process and it represents a non-exhaustive list since other actions can be further developed during the implementation process. Further detailed information on each action is in the Table below:

| Objective 1. Increase the attractiveness and visibility of Alba Iulia through a series of gastronomic and promotional mechanisms and tools to attract visitors by 2027 | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| Description: The objective aims to increase the visibility of Alba Iulia municipality not only as a touristic destination but also as a gastronomic destination through a series of tools and measures that will be implemented at least until 2027. The municipality was the first in Romania to use city branding tools and to have a Branding Manual in place along with a city logo that was employed by most HORECA actors. Also, smart city and online tools will be employed for increasing the visibility of the city to be more visible at the national and even at the EU level as a sustainable touristic destination. | | | | | |
| Actions: | Time frame from: | Time frame to: | Team: | Blockers/ Concerns: | Resources needed: |
| 1.1.Elaborate on a plan to create a locally registered trademark (with the brand and logo of the Vauban Citadel, similar to Tierra del Sabor (http://www.tierradesabor.es/) together with HORECA representatives and to enable gastronomic tourism based on a participatory approach and a common vision | 2022 | 2024 | Municipal staff HORECA/SMEs Local producers | Lack of interest on the side of some SMEs Covid-19 could prolong the process due to new restrictions | Financial resources Human resources |
| 1.2.Ensure a multiannual financial framework for creating a local-regional registered trademark and for implementing measures for ensuring the visibility of Alba Iulia with the participation of local HORECA, SMEs, and small farmers | 2022 | 2027 | Municipal staff HORECA/SMEs | Lack of interest on the side of some SMEs Covid-19 could prolong the process due to new restrictions | Financial resources Human resources |
| 1.3.Place branding through local food and tourism, as a result of the theme CULTURE | 2022 | 2023 | Municipal staff HORECA/SMEs | Resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic | Financial resources Human |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| IDENTITY & TERRITORIAL FOOD BRANDS | | | Local Producers | Inability to disseminate sufficiently to end users/audiences | resources Physical Places |
| 1.4.Enable the participation of the local community within the process | 2022 | 2023 | Municipal staff HORECA/SMEs | Resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic Inability to disseminate sufficiently to end users/audiences | Human resources Financial resources |

| Objective 2. Reducing local food poverty through partnering with the local hypermarkets and developing an efficient food waste policy by 2027 | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|----------------------|--|--|---|
| Description: The municipality is committed not only to becoming a “greener” city but also to reducing food poverty and food waste through a series of mechanisms and local partnerships with local hypermarkets, NGOs and even citizens. This will be done at the same time while employing another important resource in the process - the human resource, meaning the local small farmers which know about raising awareness on the issue of food waste. | | | | | |
| Actions: | Time frame from | Time frame to | Team: | Blockers/ Concerns: | Resources needed: |
| 2.1. Initiate and facilitate better cooperation between local supermarkets and the Social Assistance Department to implement measures for reducing food poverty among vulnerable groups. | 2022 | 2024 | Municipal staff Local Hypermarkets Social Assistant Department staff NGOs | Reluctance from the side of the super/hyper markets Legislative drawbacks in the area of food waste | Human resources Physical space for food depositing |
| 2.2. Identifying and connecting to the relevant hypermarkets at the local level interested in the food waste and food poverty topic. | 2022 | 2023 | Municipal staff Local Hypermarkets Social Assistant Department staff NGOs | Reluctance from the side of the super/hyper markets Legislative drawbacks in the area of food waste | Human resources |
| 2.3. Stimulate the | 2022 | 2024 | Municipal staff | Reluctance | Human |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|--|---|--|
| creation of a food hub system, which brings together different food producers (in the urban and rural areas near Alba Iulia) under the same umbrella, to ensure local food distribution and promotion. A good example in Cluj-Napoca, Romania is Nod Verde (https://nodverde.ro/de-spre-noi/) | | | Local Hypermarkets Local Farmers NGOs | from the side of the local producers or local NGOs Legislative drawbacks in the area of food waste | resources Physical space Financial resources |
| 2.4. Develop programs, events, and workshops to raise awareness of the food waste topic. | 2022 | 2024 | Municipality staff NGOs Local Farmers | Resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic Lack of interest from the side of the citizens' | Human resources Financial resources |
| 2.5. Support local pedagogical farms where children get to know, observe and interact with animals. | 2022 | 2024 | Municipality staff Local farmers Schools | Resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic | Human resources |

| Objective 3. Improving the local distribution of agri-food products through supporting the promotion of local agri-producers and better access to local markets by 2027. | | | | | |
|--|------------|------|--|--|--|
| Description: Improving local logistics of agri-food products will increase consumption of locally-produced food products, which are healthier and have a lower carbon footprint. It will also reduce dependency on hypermarkets while supporting small producers locally. The municipality will have an important role in the process given that it manages the local fresh market. | | | | | |
| Actions | Time frame | | Team | Blockers/Concerns | Resources needed |
| | from | to | | | |
| 3.1. Support local farmers to better merchandize their products at the temporary volant market and provide training sessions for use of online tools such as | 2022 | 2026 | Municipal staff HORECA Local farmers | Food price in the retail market for HORECA | Financial resources Human resources |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|---|--|---|
| https://www.aprozarulv.irtual.ro/ | | | | | |
| 3.2. Improving the logistic conditions at the local fresh market of the municipality for farmers to be able to sell their products also during winter times in optimum conditions ("hard" investment) | 2025 | 2028 | Municipal staff | Priority projects of the Municipality | Financial resources |
| 3.3. Improve access of small farmers to local HORECA to sell their products locally - 0 km products | 2022 | 2030 | Municipal staff Local farmers | Presence of large super and hypermarkets | Financial resources Local food resources |
| 3.4. School Agri-labs: promoting educational agricultural actions at the local level through involving schools in events organised at the Grădinescu site | 2024 | 2030 | Municipal staff Alba County School Inspectorate Grădinescu management | Old national educational programs | Financial resources Physical public assets (such as Grădinescu site) |
| 3.5. Providing the supply of fruit, vegetables, milk, and dairy products in local schools and kindergartens from local or regional producers with products coming from the short supply chain, in compliance with public procurement legislation | 2023 | 2030 | Municipal staff Alba County Council Alba Local Council | Existing legislation | Specialized human resources Agile leadership of public entities |

2.3. Small Scale Action in Alba Iulia

Description

In 2021, the municipality of Alba Iulia implemented the Small Scale Action within Food Corridors project, which consisted of several workshops at the local level that local small producers were invited to attend.

The SSA proposed by the Alba Iulia municipality envisaged the following: Facilitating the local farmers to expertise in the area of organic farming and better connection with the food chains at the local level in Alba Iulia, through a series of workshops (training program) organised within the Grădinescu area.

Argument: Small farmers/producers in Alba Iulia need support. They are competing against supermarkets and hypermarkets and have no chance of a fair fight unless

supported and thought about how to better compete in the food market. On the other hand, the customers have little access to good quality local products, thus resorting to what supermarkets provide, even if according to surveys the majority of consumers would opt for local food products instead of imported products.

The SSA idea was defined and proposed by the Municipality's team within the Food Corridors project based on the success of the Grădinescu project which started in 2018 and managed to attract and actively engage visitors in the heart of the city. Taking into consideration the outcomes of the Grădinescu project and the good collaborations with local farmers and representatives of the agricultural field, the SSA idea was further designed by the Municipality team in collaboration with the representatives of the Grădinescu project and representatives of the Local Support Group, who were invited to take part and provide relevant input for a successful implementation of the SSA at the local level.

Also, there is a great need for local farmers to learn about novel techniques for small organic farming (as demand increased dramatically in recent years), product merchandising, and selling directly to local shops in the city, from real experts in the field. This approach would be in line with current European Regulations, Directives, and Strategies in the area of rural development and climate change. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, local farmers suffered greatly from complete lockdown, closing of local farms and food fairs, and difficulty in selling their products, reducing their distribution lines significantly. Many of them went bankrupt in 2020 and had to close their activity permanently.

The SSA of Alba Iulia is part of the IAP Roadmap and is very much related to the local challenge of empowering local small farmers by facilitating access and connections between local producers and customers, also providing local nearby farmers better access to local markets, providing better expertise and novel skills for increasing their agro-products quality and diversity, facilitating better cooperation among themselves, increasing their visibility at the local level, etc.

Given the above arguments, we proposed through our SSA to organise a training session consisting of a series of 4 workshops during the April-August period within the Grădinescu area, where local farmers from Alba Iulia and the surrounding area would benefit from acquiring new knowledge and expertise which would help them not only overcome the current pandemic effects but also to increase their production and learn about new techniques of organic farming. Another objective was for the local farmers to learn about selling more efficiently and even building associations/cooperatives (forbidden during Communist times and difficult to rebuild in the present) which would strengthen their power of negotiation when selling to local supermarkets.

Given the Covid-19 pandemic, things have become even more complicated for local farmers in 2020 since most of the agro-trade fairs and local markets have been closed, thus reducing their distribution channels considerably to almost none for the producers while the Government support has been lagging towards the small producers without concrete measures to support their revitalization. Moreover, the customers are dependent on the supermarkets with no real alternative to consuming locally produced agro-products and no concrete possibilities to "support" local farmers by buying their products. Due to the pandemic restrictions imposed, local consumers have relied almost

entirely on the supermarkets given that the supermarkets were not closed down during the restrictions compared to agro-fares and even local food markets.

The Grădinescu project (site) is an amazing project (public-private partnership) where children from local schools, along with agriculture passionates, come and learn about agriculture and permaculture in an innovative and practical way (<https://gradinescu.ro/project/gradina-din-cetate-alba-iulia/>). We proposed to have the workshops at the Grădinescu site given the specificity of the activities taking place there about the objectives of the SSA, but also to increase the visibility of the site to all the schools in the city and all the relevant stakeholders. In this regard, we want to increase the operational capacity of the Grădinescu area by acquiring several appliances/tools and products which can be used by the farmers to learn about novel techniques during the workshops. Also, we envisage promoting the workshops online through the online channels of the municipality and also of the Grădinescu project to increase visibility and raise awareness about the importance of the subject approach for potentially interested farmers.

Objectives

- Facilitating access of at least 15 local farmers/producers to expertise in the area of organic farming (but also in other fields such as: selling and merchandising agro-products, creating associations and cooperations with other farmers, increasing their visibility at the local level, increasing local supply chains of agro-foods, empowering farmers to cooperate better with local-regional authorities, etc) by organising a series of 4 workshops over a period of 5 months (April - August 2021);
- Increasing access of the 75.000 local citizens in Alba Iulia and the surrounding villages (ZUF area - around 120.000 inhabitants) to locally produced agro-products that are healthy and fresh through empowering at least 15 farmers to develop better distribution channels locally and to start selling their products locally by the end of 2021; In achieving this objective, one can highlight a distinct outcome of facilitating access of youth to local learning activities of agriculture.
- Increasing visibility and capacity of Grădinescu area/project - which is an innovative concept where schoolchildren learn about permaculture and organic farming - by organising 1 promotional web campaign on local social media (Facebook) over a period of 1-3 months dedicated to the school children of the 10 schools in Alba Iulia;
- Transforming Alba Iulia into a regional hotspot for local farmers and into a good practice example at national level by producing 1 video which promotes the project and SSA actions and outcomes and summarises the organised workshops and by disseminating the material during the over the implementation period of the project. The video will be posted on all the online channels/social media of the Municipality.

Activities

A1. Establishing a calendar for the workshops by AIM Team together with the ULG: AIM Team will create a calendar for the 4-5 workshops in accordance with the needs of the local farmers.

A2. Organising a tender for services in the area of workshops/events with a specialised firm: AIM will organise a tender for acquiring the services of a specialised firm that will provide all the necessary support for delivering the 4 workshops and the study visit at a local farm

A3. Organising the 1st event - the introductory permaculture course during 5-6 June 2021. The event was a real success and 20 people (young farmers, agriculture passionate people, communicators, etc) participated in the event which lasted 2 whole days.

A4. Organising the 2nd event - a study visit on the 26th of June 2021 at a vegetable farm and a wine-producing facility in the outskirts of the municipality of Alba Iulia, to enhance know-how transfer in permaculture. The participating farmers also benefited from new experiences and practical info provided by the representatives of the 2 agricultural units.

A5. Organising the 3rd event - a workshop related to the process of drying aromatic plants, vegetables, and fruits within the plant's dehydrator took place on the 22nd of July 2022

A6. Organising the 4th event on the 5th of August 2021: Workshop on compost: how it is made and how to use it.

A7. Organisation of the 5th event - seeds swapping and workshop on the 11 of September 2021, an event through which people of all ages are invited at the Grădinescu site to exchange their seeds with other persons active in the field of agriculture/permaculture

A8. Organising a web promotional campaign to increase the visibility of the Grădinescu site over a period of 2 months a web-based promotional campaign (Social media ads/Facebook, etc) in order to increase the visibility of the site amongst local farmers but also amongst school children locally

A9. Finalisation of SSA with a short Report with results

- AIM Team elaborated a short Report of the SSA that was presented to the project consortium, Lead expert, ad-hoc Lead expert, and also to the local community.

Results and deliverables

- 4 workshops organised with experts in the field of permaculture and organic farming with at least 15 local farmers/producers as attendants during the months April-August
- More than 122 participants attended the SSA events, including the study visit which was organised to enable know-how exchange
- 1 Facebook/social media campaign for the 4 workshops but also for increasing visibility of the other main activities of the Grădinescu site in relation with the local farmers and local school children. More than 40.159 people reached by the Food Corridors targeted Facebook campaign (246.036 total impressions).
- 1 visit to a local farm organised as a good practice for local farmers where they can learn new concepts about permaculture and organic farming.
- 1 video was produced related to the SSA implementation;

Added value

- increased capacity for local farmers in the area of permaculture and organic farming but also raised visibility;
- increased cooperation amongst local farmers, increased knowledge and expertise about production methods, selling and merchandising agri-products;
- increased access of urban citizens to locally produced agro-products that are healthy and fresh made;
- strengthened connections between the municipality and local producers;
- raised awareness of the Grădinescu project in the area of local school children, given the high importance of continuing the teaching process among school children regarding agriculture and permaculture.

2.4. Resourcing

- 1.1 Elaborate on a plan to create a locally registered trademark (with the brand and logo of the Vauban Citadel, similar to Tierra del Sabor (<http://www.tierradesabor.es/>) together with HORECA representatives and to enable gastronomic tourism based on a participatory approach and a common vision.
- 1.2. Ensure a multiannual financial framework for creating a local-regional registered trademark and for implementing measures for ensuring the visibility of Alba Iulia with the participation of local HORECA, SMEs, and small farmers.
- 1.3. Place branding through local food and tourism, as a result of the theme CULTURE IDENTITY & TERRITORIAL FOOD BRANDS.
- 1.4. Enable the participation of the local community within the process.
- 2.1. Initiate and facilitate better cooperation between local supermarkets and the Social Assistance Department to implement measures for reducing food poverty among vulnerable groups.
- 2.2. Identifying and connecting to the relevant hypermarkets at the local level interested in the food waste and food poverty topic.
- 2.3. Stimulate the creation of a food hub system, which brings together different food producers (in the urban and rural areas near Alba Iulia) under the same umbrella, to ensure local food distribution and promotion. A good example in Cluj-Napoca, Romania is Nod Verde (<https://nodverde.ro/despre-noi/>).
- 2.4. Develop programs, events, and workshops to raise awareness of the food waste topic.
- 2.5. Support local pedagogical farms where children get to know, observe and interact with animals.
- 3.1. Support local farmers to better merchandize their products at the temporary volant market and provide training sessions for use of online tools such as <https://www.apozarulvirtual.ro/>.
- 3.2. Improving the logistic conditions at the local fresh market of the municipality for farmers to be able to sell their products also during winter times in optimum conditions ("hard" investment).
- 3.3. Improve access of small farmers to local HORECA to sell their products locally - 0 km products.
- 3.4. School Agri-labs: promoting educational agricultural actions at the local level through involving schools in events organised at the Gradinescu site.
- 3.5. Providing the supply of fruit, vegetables, milk, and dairy products in local schools and kindergartens from local or regional producers with products coming from the short supply chain, in compliance with public procurement legislation.

Resources will be assured for these actions to be implemented by the municipality within the next financial framework period 2021-2030 in line with the other objectives of the Integrated Strategy of Urban Development of Alba Iulia Municipality.

We estimate the need of 500.000 Euros to make this IAP reality while the physical investment at the local market will bear the highest cost (80%). Some of the costs will be born also by private sector actors but also through innovative funding schemes (e.g.crowdfunding).

For these solutions, a number of funding sources will be identified such as local budget, national budget, ERDF funding, crowdfunding, private funding, public-private funding, low-interest funds, etc. For some of the measures, innovative instruments such as crowdfunding or crowdsourcing will be employed.

Some solutions will require physical space, others just staff to implement them in a digital format, others both types of resources. There will also be synergies created with other actions implemented at the municipality level, such as EU-funded projects through programs such as Horizon Europe, Interreg Europe, URBACT, Urban Innovative Actions, etc. Resources that will be required to make this happen such as staff, physical infrastructure (offices, buildings, open spaces, etc.), capital, and revenue expenditure, bearing in mind some actions do not need a budget, but could be about structural changes.

2.5. Framework for delivery

A Resource-Based View was performed on the resources and competencies identified within the Municipality, taking into consideration the physical, financial and human resources. The focus is to identify valuable, rare, and inimitable strategic capabilities supported by the organisation, which represent a basis for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage and ensuring the title of European Gastronomic Destination. Dynamic capabilities, defined as the organisation's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments were taken into consideration. The core of the activities will be coordinated and monitored by the Food Corridors management team, considering the experience and knowledge acquired over the years in the field of non-reimbursable funding.

Following a VRIO (Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, supported by the Organisation) evaluation of the identified strategic capabilities, marketing and local tourism development and partnership development are considered to create sustainable competitive advantage and can lead to transforming Alba Iulia into a European Gastronomic Destination by 2030.

However, Alba Iulia Municipality found major support in the representatives of the Grădinescu project, a group of people active in different fields of activities but having the same passion for organic farming, permaculture, and ecological agriculture. This successful collaboration was demonstrated by the results and outputs of the Small Scale Action implementation, considering the size of the city. The Municipality will continue to collaborate with the representatives of the Grădinescu project, as this dynamic collaboration will enhance the sustainability of the Food Corridors project.

Also, local stakeholders are essential in the delivery framework of the project as they share different perspectives and know-how on the topic. The Municipality is focused on enhancing this external and very productive relationship with the stakeholders in the long term, by organising ULG meetings based on the IAP vision and planned actions, involving them in other similar and/or complementary activities, and by obtaining

non-reimbursable funding for food projects. General monitoring and coordination of the IAP implementation will be ensured by the municipal team, along with regular updates and revisions of the action plan, demonstrating flexibility and agility.

2.6. Monitoring and evaluation framework

The monitoring framework will be based on the following monitoring indicators, as follows:

Objective 1: Increase the attractiveness and visibility of Alba Iulia through a series of gastronomic and promotional mechanisms and tools to attract visitors by 2027

Monitoring indicators:

- number of organised public cultural and gastronomic events
- number of people reached by organising and dissemination these cultural and gastronomic events
- number of promotional materials that increase the visibility of the city and local gastronomy
- number of promotion and dissemination activities.

Objective 2: Reducing local food poverty through partnering with the local hypermarkets and developing an efficient food waste policy by 2027

Monitoring indicators:

- number of established partnerships with local food retailers and relevant public/private entities
- number of implemented food waste actions
- the number of people reached by the implemented food waste actions, including local schools, NGOs, HORECA representatives, etc.

Objective 3: Improving the local distribution of agri-food products through supporting the promotion of local agri-producers and better access to local markets by 2027.

Monitoring indicators:

- number of implemented projects which enhance access and distribution of local food products to the consumers (infrastructure, digital apps, etc.)
- number of promotion campaigns on local agri-producers and food products.

2.7. Risk analysis

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>R1. The pandemic situation</p> | <p>Risk type: Operational, Technical Probability: High Intensity: High Mitigation Plan: The main challenge is to adapt to the measures imposed by the authorities in the covid context. risk control measures. Moving the main activities online, increasing the capacity of the human resources involved to use digital tools, and finding innovative solutions to maintain the interest of stakeholders even if the situation is stressful</p> |
| <p>R2. The risk of amending national legislation thus puts in danger the smooth running of the project in case of inability to rapid adaptation to new regulations.</p> | <p>Risk type: Operational Probability: Low Intensity: Low Mitigation Plan: Responsibility of the management team and the Public procurement experts from the Municipality to be up to date and constantly informed of legislative changes. The Municipality will make the best decisions regarding the procedures that it is necessary to apply in the eventuality of</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | legislative changes and will promptly apply these procedures. |
| R3. The risk that the stakeholders lose their interest in implementing the actions initially established | <p>Risk type: Behavioural Probability: Low Intensity: Low Mitigation Plan: The management team will elaborate a good strategy for promoting and informing the stakeholders about the advantages of being involved in IAP.</p> |
| R4. The risk that the management of the institution will change and the new management will not agree with the actions proposed in this IAP | <p>Risk type: Operational, Staff Probability: Medium Intensity: Medium Mitigation Plan: The management team will promote the IAP to the local councilors and the new management of the institution, in order to ensure its strong support.</p> |
| R5. Financial Risk since some of the actions envisaged by the municipality foresees budget allocation | <p>Risk type: Financial Probability: Low Intensity: Medium Mitigation Plan: The municipality will plan some of the actions in its annual budget. Moreover, alternative funding sources such as EU funds, low-interest loans, etc will be taken into consideration.</p> |

2.8. Communications Strategy & Public Consultation

The communication strategy, which is aligned with the proposed outcomes and outputs, will enable stakeholder engagement at the local and rural levels and also communication with local mass media to increase the visibility of the actions proposed through actions of the IAP.

Main objectives:

- to formulate effective dissemination and awareness-raising strategy in wider audiences (policymakers, NGOs, developers, trainers of key personnel, civil society, and local communities)
- to engage key stakeholders through targeted dissemination activities including public events, training, workshops, press releases, and social media;
- to use national partners in Romania to disseminate the project results.

A key objective of communication is to provide concrete tools for the project beneficiaries, stakeholders, and policymakers, which will enable a better understanding in terms of discrimination issues.

The Municipality will elaborate on articles and press releases. The dissemination will be ensured through:

- the official website of Alba Iulia Municipality (www.apulum.ro);
- the social media channels of Alba Iulia Municipality (www.facebook.com/primariaalbaiulia, www.turism.apulum.ro, www.facebook.com/viziteazaalbaiulia, www.facebook.com/visitalbaiulia, www.youtube.com/channel/UCmrOm12dsXHqcS3GpO0W2zw);
- email exchanges/informal meetings/virtual meetings with the ULG members of the Food Corridors project;

-
- email exchanges/informal meetings/virtual meetings with the public and private entities at the local level, relevant for the IAP.

The digital communication tools will be considered the main focus for broader dissemination of the activities, in light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic events.

2.9. IAP Governance

The actions proposed through this present IAP will be closely coordinated and monitored by the Food Corridors management team within the Alba Iulia Municipality, after the project implementation, in close collaboration with the technical staff within the Municipality and relevant members of the ULG.

2.10. Appendices and supporting information

Food Corridors SSA Video in Alba Iulia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=od_inycTnyo

Alba Carolina Citadel (<http://www.visitalbaiulia.city/>)

Rehabilitation of Alba Carolina Citadel and impact on the local economy:

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/romania/rehabilitation-of-alba-iulias-urban-heritage-transforms-the-city-and-its-economy),

<https://investinalbaiulia.city/>