

Interpretation of Gastronomic Traditions within Tourism*

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This article presents a current EU project on the interpretation of Gastronomic European cultural heritage. Europe's cultural heritage is highly diverse. This is by no means limited to museums, theatres, or castles; gastronomic traditions are also part of Europe's cultural heritage. As an essential part of the collective European memory, it is essential to preserve this diversity. From an economic perspective, the preservation of cultural heritage is a crucial task for the future. Within the EU, more than 300,000 people work in the cultural heritage sector; in addition, there are about 7.8 million jobs in the EU that correlate indirectly with cultural heritage (e.g., tourism). How could gastronomic traditions be used to support a sustainable tourism development?

Keywords: sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, methods of interpretation, gastronomic traditions, social identity

Introduction

Gastronomy is an integral part of tourist manifestations. Gastronomic traditions constitute one of several mirrors that reflect a community's way of life and belief systems. This relation is not only examined within tourism, but there is also a clear link to social psychology. Within social psychology, the social identity approach is evident. According to Tajfel (1978), a social identity can be defined as "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63). For example, a social identity could be constructed around a membership in a sports team (if this membership is subjectively important for the individual), but also in relation to a nationality or even a gastronomic tradition. But how can we grasp the term of gastronomic tradition?

In the research literature, neither the concept of gastronomic tradition nor the concept of traditional food is sufficiently defined. There are some terms used as synonyms of traditional food, such as "local food", "original food", "regional food", and "typical food". Vanhonacker et al. (2010) asked representative consumer samples from Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, and Spain how they would define the term of traditional food in

* **Acknowledgement:** This research was supported in part by a grant from the European Union.

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2007. By simple correspondence analysis the authors determined the following definition: A traditional food product is a product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, transmitted from one generation to another, made in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, naturally processed, and distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country (Vanhonacker et al., 2010, p. 472). For the research project methodology for the Interpretation of European cultural heritage through attractions in tourism (MIECAT), however, this definition was too exclusive as a starting point. Thus, the authors included various aspects in the definition of gastronomic traditions: traditional foods and beverages, methods of preparation, vessels for the preparation and traditions of food consumption, seating arrangements, social rides while eating, cultural taboos on nutrition (which can be seen as indicators of the ideology or belief system of a particular culture), as well as basic belief systems of that culture.

Interpretation Methods of Cultural Heritage and Gastronomic Traditions

The first social scientist who was concerned with the definition of the concept of heritage interpretation was Tilden (1957). According to him, heritage interpretation is “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information” (Tilden, 1957, p. 8). In contrast to Tilden (1957), the European Association for Heritage Interpretation is more focusing on the link which has to be established between the visitor and the historical site. According to the European Association for Heritage Interpretation, heritage interpretation methods represent a structured approach to non-formal learning, which aims to give people meaningful impressions of a particular “place” in their leisure time. A link is established between visitors and what they can discover in historical sites such as a nature reserve, a historical site, or a museum (European Association for Heritage Interpretation, 2019). In this relation, methods of interpretation must ensure central aspects: First, there needs to be a clarification of the relevance of the respective cultural heritage and second, there needs to be a reference to previous knowledge, individual experiences, and values of the visitors. If the link between the heritage side and the visitor is implemented in a didactical meaningful manner, it is possible to arouse curiosity and to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of tourists (European Association for Heritage Interpretation, 2019). In this relation, the methods of interpretation are critical. Coming back to the case of gastronomic traditions, we have on one side the gastronomic heritage (i.e., German Bread) and on the other side, the tourist with a special background, interests, belief systems, and values. The communication process between both sides is important and implemented within the methods of interpretations. Methods of interpretation are available in traditional forms (i.e., guided tour, audio guide) or they are supported through digital tools (i.e., Virtual Reality or Augmented Reality).

To return to the gastronomic heritage, we must recognise that the diversity of food, food culture, food traditions, and nutritional knowledge has influenced the cultural traditions, architectural and landscape heritage in Europe. Globalised diets are an example of how important, it is to enhance and re-promote European food as a cultural heritage. Gastronomic heritage constitutes a part of cultural heritage (more precisely: intangible cultural heritage). According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2003), intangible cultural heritage means “customs, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills—and the associated instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces that communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals consider to be part of their cultural heritage”. Again, the subjective perspective of

individuals of a given culture in sense of social identity comes evident. More specifically, five areas fall within this form of cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003):

- oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage;
- performing arts;
- social customs, rituals, and festivals;
- knowledge and customs relating to nature and the universe;
- traditional craft techniques.

The categories “social customs, rituals and festivals” and “traditional craft techniques” are particularly relevant in case of the classification of gastronomic traditions (but also in some cases, e.g., “knowledge and customs relating to nature and the universe”).

To be listed as a gastronomic tradition on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, several conditions must be complied:

- current practice by a community;
- regional communication of identity and continuity;
- the intergenerational transmission according to the “master-pupil principle”;
- no pursuit of primarily purely economic interests (Gardizi, 2014; Deputy Press Officer of the German UNESCO Commission).

The reconstruction and conservation of cultural traditions, authentic cuisines, gastronomic customs and traditions at a local, regional, and national level are increasingly of interest to a wide public at EU level (Rivza, Kruzmentra, Foris, & Jeroscenkova, 2017). In 2014, the European Parliament states that gastronomy constitutes a part of our identity as well as European cultural heritage. In this way, an awareness of the diversity and quality of the regions, landscapes, and products that form the basis of European gastronomy must be created. An example can be seen in case of “the Region of Gastronomy Award” of the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT). The IGCAT aims to raise the awareness of the importance for regions to safeguard and promote distinct food, culture, arts, and sustainable tourism assets (IGCAT, 2020).

Due to this fact, the European Parliament (2014) recommended that gastronomy should be included in cultural initiatives and programs. As a complement, effects on healthy eating habits must also be assumed and relevant knowledge stocks should be integrated into the European education system. For example, the “mediterranean diet” offers a balanced and healthy combination of eating habits and a general lifestyle (European Parliament, 2014).

Gastronomic heritage can be contacted by any member of society under many different circumstances and illustrates, among other things, the national value that has been accumulated over many years. Rivza et al. (2017), for example, acknowledged the fact that studies in the context of reviving national and local traditions and preserving cultural and historical heritage are increasing worldwide. This trend also raises questions of locality and authenticity of gastronomic experiences.

Pursuant to the Convention on the Conservation of Intangible Property Cultural heritage, UNESCO (2003) maintained two lists and a register in which a cultural form of expression or a model project for the preservation of forms of expression can be included:

- Representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity;
- List of intangible cultural heritage in urgent need of conservation;

- Register of good practice examples.

In addition, there are the lists kept by the national UNESCO commissions for the respective country.

Examples for gastronomic traditions can be found within diverse contexts. The Neapolitan pizza-making was added to the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2017). One aim of this acknowledgement is to safeguard and raise awareness about forms of cultural heritage (passed down from generation to generation) before these traditions disappeared. Pizzaiuolo is more than a slice of sustenance; it is a form of artistry with a deep history baked right in. Pizzaiuolo "fosters social gatherings and intergenerational exchange" (UNESCO, 2017).

The interpretation methods regarding gastronomic are highly diverse (i.e., tastings, workshops, and festivals). Two examples should be introduced shortly.

The German bread culture is acknowledged as intangible cultural heritage since 2014 (categories "social customs, rituals and festivals", "knowledge and customs relating to nature and the universe", and "traditional craft techniques"; UNESCO, 2014). The uniqueness in its diversity is recognized worldwide (Deutsches Brotinstitut, 2018). The regional diversity of bread within Germany is primarily due to the special soil and climate conditions as well as the respective political, historical, and geographical development of Germany. Current trends are the increasing use of almost forgotten original cereals, such as einkorn, emmer, and spelt. There is an almost infinite variety of bread forms caused by different forming and baking processes (German UNESCO Commission, 2018). Acknowledging this diversity, visitors of the Museum of Bread and Art can enjoy guided tours, audio guides, and exhibitions on a variety of topics as well as baking and creative activities. For example, baking events are offered on certain occasions, such as Christmas, Easter, or autumn. Since 2019, another part is added to the initial museum concept. Within this section of the museum, visitors are able to see paintings (i.e., Picasso, Rembrandt) concerned with the relationship between nutrition and humans. There are cultural dimensions involved within both sections: The focus lies on the understanding and interpreting the world around the humans (i.e., the exploration of the spaces in between stereotypes and popular conceptions). A holistic approach of interpretation is given within this interpretation of a gastronomic tradition (BR24, 2019).

Although not yet recognised as intangible cultural heritage, Smalahove from Norway demonstrates how earlier traditions can be relegated to the background, so that a predominantly commercial aspect dominates the interpretation. On the other hand, even in this context the experience of local cuisine remains as an opportunity to discover a novel perspective on a (former) culinary tradition. "Smalahove" should be understood as a typical food. The dish (or "Voss sheep's head meal") is a relic of Nordic gastronomy (salted, smoked, and cooked sheep's head). Due to a lack of resources, it was common to eat every edible part of the sheep. The traditional preparation methods varied from region to region. In Voss, the sheep's head is not skinned. The fur is simply removed by rolling a hot iron rod over the skin. This takes place in a special building with an open fireplace ("eldhus"). The sheep's face remains its light brown colour. After this procedure, the head is divided into two parts by an axe and the internal organs except for the eyes and the tongue are removed (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009). The head needs to be cleaned, salted, and dried for some days. Then it will be smouldered on a cold smoke of fresh juniper, dry oak or alder (procedure shown according to Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009). After this process, the sheep's head could be preserved for many months. All sheep's heads should be eaten until the last Sunday of Advent, called "Skoltasondag" or "Skitnesondag". The consumption of the last head was part of a ritual in preparation for Christmas. In recent decades, the increase in general well-being, the restructuring of

rural areas as well as a change in eating habits have led to the abandonment of several traditional dishes in Norway. Smalahove has disappeared from the everyday menu (except for Voss). Therefore, the sheep's head is considered a local tradition of Voss, although it is more of a national gastronomic tradition (e.g., Fusche, 1994). Now, Smalahove has gained a renaissance and as a commercial product, it contributed to the image creation of Voss as a famous tourist destination. Today, the preparation, distribution, and consumption of Smalahove are different from the former tradition; the interpretation methods changed. The former gastronomic tradition is reinterpreted. Within families of this area, the sheep's head is only consumed on special occasions. As a tourist attraction, Smalahove is now served with alcoholic beverages (e.g., a special, sweet, and thick microbrewery beer, Smalahove øl, or a special Sheep's head Aquavit) to facilitate the eating of this dish. Many other products and events have been developed in the context of the former gastronomic tradition of Smalahove (e.g., books, songs, cartoons, restaurants, accessories, earrings, the annual Sheep Head Release; Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009). This culinary dish still contains the celebration of shared cultural values, although it is alienated from its former purpose (i.e., dealing with scarcity of resources and the need to produce long-lasting food). The people of Voss still use Smalahove as a reflection on past values, even though the staging frightening eccentric features of this dish transforms the former everyday sheep scope into an extreme food adventure (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009).

EU-Project “MIECAT”: Project Objectives, Methods, and Tasks

In a three-year Erasmus⁺-funded research project (MIECAT methodology for the interpretation of European cultural heritage through attractions in tourism), six European universities are developing a study module: the University of Applied Sciences (FHM, Germany), the University of Economics in Prague (Czech Republic), the University of Economics in Bratislava (Slovakia), the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (Romania), the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland (Austria), and the Universidad Europea de Madrid (Spain). The primary result of the project is the development of an international module including an elaboration of various sub-themes of European cultural heritage (Fine Art, architecture, local customs, music, religious/ethnographic attractions, and gastronomic traditions), the identification of tourist needs (i.e., segmentation of diverse touristic markets), the investigation of Best practices regarding the interpretation of the European cultural heritage and the development of a toolbox of methods suitable for the interpretation of cultural heritage. The module is intended to prepare students of tourism study programmes for the task of imparting knowledge about cultural heritage to tourists in order to support its continuance, but also to make use of cultural heritage in order to sustainably promote the development of tourism, including rural destinations. On the other hand, students will develop a methodological competence to adapt the learned competencies to diverse contexts. The sustainability of the project is ensured by means of three project results:

- Syllabus (formulation of contents, didactics, and methods for teaching and learning about the interpretation of European cultural heritage for tourist attractions to guarantee the implementation of the module at the six universities);
- Handbook (production of an e-book on European cultural heritage, the methods of its interpretation, and transfer strategies for tourism markets)
- Guideline for tourism companies (with a focus on the conception and implementation of tourist attractions: i.e., best practice approaches, analysis of tourist needs, market segmentation, and event management).

Interpretation of Gastronomic Traditions as a Mean for a Sustainable Tourism Development within Rural Areas

Gastronomy is an integral part of tourist manifestations. For example, Pulido-Fernández, Cárdenas-García, and Carrillo-Hidalgo (2016) were able to show that gastronomic activities account for 12.7% of the most important activities in the destination.

It is precisely through the transfer of knowledge and experience of gastronomic traditions that these can be kept alive, but there is also potential to promote tourism development, especially in rural areas. In addition, gastronomy is not only a source of cultural well-being, but also a source of economic well-being for the respective region. Promoting gastronomic heritage in rural areas helps local farmers as well as small business owners (Rivza et al., 2017, p. 175). To highlight the relationship between economy and heritage interpretation of gastronomic traditions, a focus on the intersections of gastronomic traditions (as a travel motif in the sense of culinary tourism) with different areas of tourism science is necessary (in accordance to Fritz & Wagner, 2015; see Figure 1).

Gastronomic Cultural Tourism

Examples for gastronomic cultural tourism are some parts of adventure tourism (i.e., Smalahove and the Annual Sheep's Head Release). In this context, holiday planning is a voluntary decision, so it is also a voluntary one when it comes to entering into something unknown. Strange, unknown food and drinks arouse curiosity. The focus is on the consumption of novel foods and beverages, regardless of whether they actually taste delicious (Long, 2004). The culture of a country/destination is probably the strongest distinction between the respective culinary customs and peculiarities (Chen, 2012, p. 428.). The further away the culture visited, the higher the likelihood that the cuisine of a country's/destination's will be perceived as strangely. In addition, adventure tourism has the potential to attract tourists for whom gastronomic traditions itself are not a primary travel motif. Also, wine tourism and "Gourmet" tourism fall in this category.

Cultural Heritage Tourism

Within cultural heritage tourism culinary habits from past days can be experienced very directly by tourists (cf. Museum for Bread and Art Ulm). Methods of interpretation in this area could be, i.e., tastings, workshops, activities, or presentations.

Agrotourism. The Agrotourism is sharpening the knowledge of cultural and landscape heritage, offering regional support and promoting rural development (European Parliament, 2014). Tourists can visit farms, cheese dairies and fish farms and directly participate in everyday agricultural life (e.g., harvesting work). The food from the farms (fruit, vegetable, meat, etc.) can be consumed by visitors directly on the farms while promoting to the economic success of the farms.

Sustainable tourism. In the sense of a sustainable tourism, on the one side, the promotion of active participation in the culture of the destination/region (i.e., regional cuisine, local products and activities and services of the regional culinary network) is implemented for the tourists. The understanding of a regional cultural can be encouraged while creating a regionally typical and sustainable holiday experience for the tourist. Also, the cultural wealth of a region (i.e., respect for historical heritage, region-specific culture and traditions and particularly strengthen regional identity in rural areas) is fostered. On the other side, there is a contribution to ensuring the competitiveness of tourist destinations. New jobs could be implemented (i.e., by involving the

regional population directly in the interpretation process). Income is generated within the destination and a promotion of local prosperity is given.

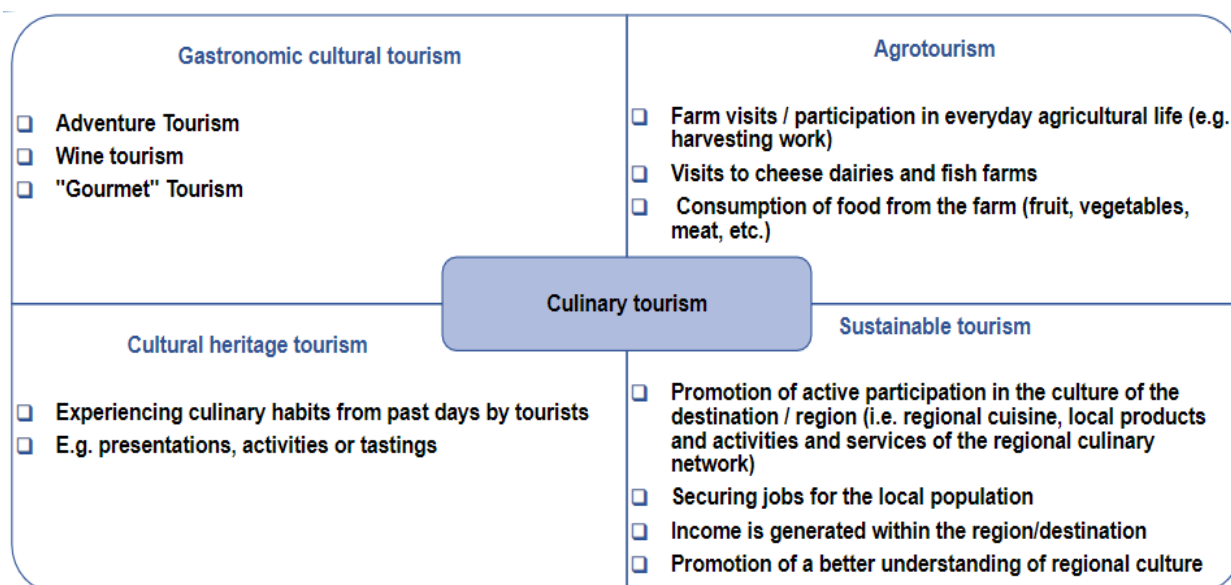


Figure 1. Intersections of culinary tourism with other tourism sectors (Source: own illustration according to Fritz & Wagner, 2015).

Conclusion

Methods of interpretation of gastronomic traditions constitute a mean for promoting a sustainable tourism development especially within rural areas. If interpretation methods are implemented in a meaningful way, it is possible to foster the local economy. Nevertheless, there needs to be critical discussion if “new” forms of interpretation of heritage (i.e., Virtual and Augmented Reality) could also have an influence on the interpretation of gastronomic heritage and how these forms can affect experience. Moreover, as happened in many other industries and in the private sector, technology is not just a mean to carry out activities with the mere introduction of some fancy new tools. The real disruption and value creation materialises when new “business models” are imagined, leveraging new tech developments. In other words, it is not a matter of replacing, for instance, paper and pen with a tablet, but of re-imaging the way experiences are presented to the customer (in this case the tourist) or the promoter of the culinary tradition itself. The risk of excluding technologies could jeopardise any attempt to keep culinary traditions alive in a world where diets are tend toward “green” standards (cruelty-free, vegetarian, healthy, low carbs, etc.) and where the younger generation experiences every aspect of reality in a “phygital” way. The development of apps and games for contest to prepare recipes, the use of “on the fly” technologies, like AI-based apps or AR, which can provide information about its traditions and cultural links with a simple picture to the food, are just a few examples how there is still a long way to go for an intangible but very important and contemporary part of the cultural heritage of the European landscape. Methods of interpretation, in today’s “instagrammed”, filtered society, play more than ever a key role in making culinary traditions and tourism built around them economically more sustainable and more attractive in the medium and long term, and in preserving the richness and diversity of European culture for many generations.

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