



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Master's Degree Programme  
in Management

curricula

Innovation and Marketing

Final Thesis

**Venetian Culinary Heritage  
Management**

Exploring authenticity, tradition and innovation  
through a visual analysis

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Matriculation Number 879594

**Academic Year**

2023 / 2024



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## **Introduction**

Food is a cultural element that embodies identity, culture, history, and traditions. Preserving this heritage is crucial, however tradition often evolves alongside innovation. The key is understanding when innovation distorts tradition and when it enhances its qualities and characteristics. Additionally, it is important to determine whether tradition and authenticity are synonymous or have distinct meanings.

The Venetian context, with its rich culinary traditions and global influences, offer a perfect context to explore how food communicates the evolving identity of a tourist city. Indeed, the main objective of this thesis is to examine the Venetian culinary scene through a visual analysis of images displayed by a wide range of restaurants. In examining the pictures provided by these establishments, an attempt is made to discern the concept of tradition and authenticity they embody, how they portray Venetian culture, and how they integrate innovative elements alongside traditional ones.

The thesis is organized in a thoughtful sequence of chapters, each of which contributes to building an overall picture. Chapter I establishes a theoretical framework for understanding food as intangible cultural heritage. It emphasizes food's cultural significance, its role in transmitting cultural identity, and the importance of preserving culinary traditions. The chapter also examines the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in culinary heritage.

Chapter II focuses on culinary tourism, exploring how local cuisine shapes city identities and attracts visitors. It discusses how cities strategically leverage food culture to enhance destination positioning and attractiveness, and how traditional cuisine aligns with sustainability principles. This chapter introduces the concept of authenticity in gastronomy tourism.

Chapter III specifically delves into Venetian culinary traditions, tracing their historical evolution and cultural significance. Furthermore, the chapter presents an empirical study of the Venetian culinary landscape through a visual analysis of restaurant imagery, encompassing a wide range of dining establishments from luxury restaurants to traditional Bacari. This methodological approach examines how these venues portray Venetian culture, embody traditions, authenticity and innovation. The analysis is framed within the concept of optimal distinctiveness.



## CHAPTER I

### **Intangible cultural heritage and food traditions**

The goal of this chapter is to delve into the vital role that food plays within the framework of intangible cultural heritage. It aims to elucidate the intricate ways in which culinary practices are embedded within cultural traditions, serving as pivotal elements that define and enrich community identities. However, before delving into this exploration, the chapter clarifies the concept of intangible cultural heritage, distinguishing it from tangible heritage. Additionally, this chapter delves deeply into the crucial role of safeguarding and transmitting intangible cultural heritage across generations. It explores how such heritage is pivotal in promoting social cohesion, preserving biodiversity, and fostering sustainable development, underscoring its essential contributions to the continuity and vitality of cultures worldwide. Within this cultural framework, food plays a crucial role, embodying the cultural identity of communities and encapsulating collective memory and skills passed down through generations. The discussion, thus, focuses on food within the scope of intangible cultural heritage, demonstrating its significant role as a cultural element. Furthermore, by examining the broader implications of recognizing, protecting, and fostering culinary practices as heritage—such as those acknowledged by UNESCO like the Mediterranean diet—the chapter intends to provide insights into the significance of these practices in cultural preservation and appreciation. Lastly, the chapter seeks to explore and emphasize the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation in culinary heritage. It analyzes definitions and perceptions of Traditional Food Products within the European context, investigating how the consumer perceptions influence the definition of authenticity and tradition. The exploration aims to demonstrate that while culinary traditions are deeply rooted in the past, they continuously evolve, and such evolution is necessary for their survival and relevance. This understanding underscores the necessity for culinary traditions to embrace innovation without losing their inherent authenticity, ultimately supporting the argument that tradition and innovation are not antithetical but are complementary forces that can enrich cultural heritage when integrated thoughtfully.

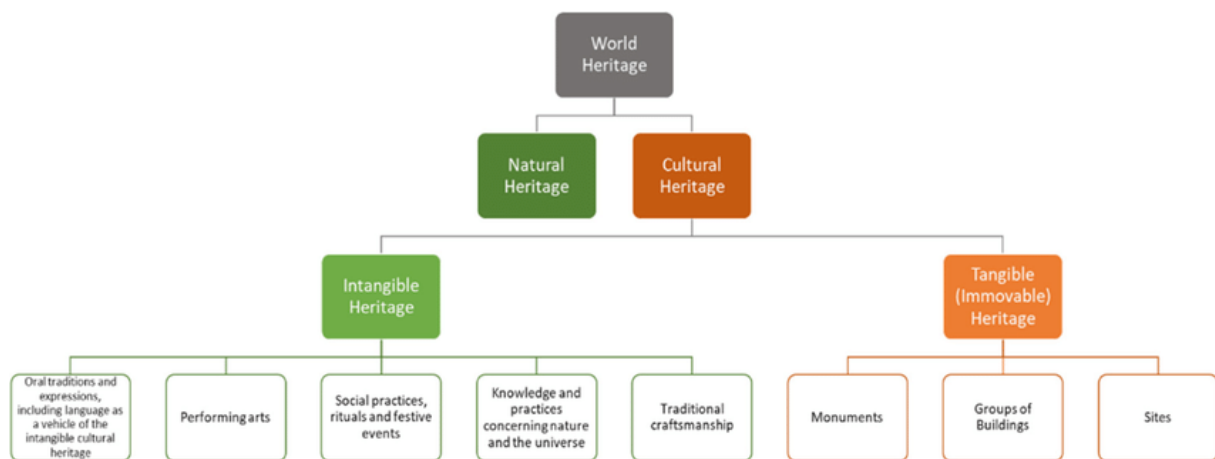
## **1.1 Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)**

Cultural heritage, in its comprehensive form, is an intricate pattern of physical artifacts and structures on one side, and practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills on the other. It encompasses a multitude of expressions that range from physical monuments and historic sites to time-honored traditions, performing arts, and knowledge passed down through generations. Given the breadth of this concept, categorizing cultural heritage into tangible and intangible components, while useful for classification, has prompted discussions about the nuances that such distinction carries. Careful examination reveals an indivisible link between them: artifacts and traditions are bound together by the deeper meanings and the historical context they represent. Whether it is the craftsmanship of a piece of pottery or the ritualistic dance performance, every aspect of heritage carries a weight that extends beyond its immediate physical or observable characteristics. The rich interplay between these domains requires an integrated approach to grasp the complexities involved in heritage preservation and management. This approach helps to examine the impact of cultural heritage on community identities, strengthen social ties, and reinforce a sense of belonging. Further, the value of cultural heritage is a vital contributor to economic prosperity and social well-being. The economic considerations link closely with sustainable development, where intangible cultural heritage is increasingly seen as a vital component of sustainable practices, informing policies and contributing to harmonious social progression. The international focus on this subject was significantly sharpened by the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. The treaty widened the global discourse on the significance of safeguarding these traditions and introduced a series of measures and ethical principles aimed at comprehensively protecting the living expressions of culture. Heritage manifests itself in various forms, each requiring specific strategies to ensure its survival in the face of modernization and globalization. Preserving cultural heritage, is about both maintaining continuity with the past and enriching the present, ensuring a resilient, diverse, and sustainable future for all communities.



### 1.1.1 The concept of cultural heritage: tangible and intangible

Cultural heritage, as defined by UNESCO, is a legacy derived from past cultures, maintained in the present, and bestowed upon future generations. It stands as a repository of knowledge, values, and traditions, concurrently reflecting a society's identity and supporting its historical narrative.<sup>1</sup> This heritage is categorically divided into two types: tangible and intangible (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** UNESCO Cultural Heritage Classification. *Source:* Petti et al., 2020

Tangible cultural heritage consists of physical artifacts and structures transmitted by various cultures. It includes buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art, and artifacts, which are considered valuable for their inherent artistic or historical worth and also as a means of connecting generations through a shared past. These tangible forms serve as concrete milestones of human creativity and innovation and are often the most visible and celebrated aspects of cultural heritage. Intangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, extends beyond the physical manifestations of culture into the social practices, beliefs, rituals, and artistic expressions that are passed down through generations. It is manifested in practices such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and the knowledge and skills required to produce traditional crafts. These practices are not static

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO.

relics of the past but are dynamically recreated by communities in response to their environment and their interaction with nature and history.<sup>2</sup>

Tangible and intangible heritages are two integral facets of cultural legacy, each marked by distinct attributes, yet undeniably part of a singular, inseparable whole. The interplay of these heritages is evident in the fact that tangible heritage often necessitates intangible elements for its interpretation and understanding. For example, a sacred text remains merely script unless the stories, teachings, and contexts which it represents are also embraced. Similarly, a historical building or site gains its full significance when complemented by the knowledge of the customs, rituals, and events that took place within or around it.<sup>3</sup> This symbiosis extends to the point where tangible cultural heritage may become the site for the performance of intangible heritage practices, thus transforming both into public goods that reflect a community's appropriation of its cultural heritage.<sup>4</sup>

UNESCO's classification acknowledges both tangible and intangible heritage as indispensable to cultural identity and emphasizes the need for their protection and promotion. Nonetheless, discernable distinctions exist in the methodologies of valuation, selection, and conservation of these two strands of heritage, necessitating tailored approaches to ensure their enduring legacy.

The assessment of tangible heritage value to determine which physical artifacts and locations merit preservation has evolved significantly. Initial criteria were often shaped by their aesthetic values or their capacity to symbolize a particular historical narrative. Today, heritage selection processes are more inclusive, taking into account the social, spiritual, and communal values that material heritage embodies. The World Heritage Convention's criteria for designating World Heritage Sites, for instance, combine considerations of both outstanding universal value and the need for physical conservation, which are applied not only to monuments but also to landscapes and historical sites.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, evaluation of intangible heritage is centered on

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<sup>2</sup> Hennessy, K., & Fraser, S. (2012). From intangible expression to digital cultural heritage. *Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage*, 33-45.

<sup>3</sup> Zagato, L. (2015). The notion of "Heritage Community" in the Council of Europe's Faro Convention. Its impact on the European legal framework. *Markus Tauschek (eds.) Between Imagined Communities and Communities of Practice*, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Arizpe, L. (2004). Intangible cultural heritage, diversity and coherence. *Museum international*, 56(1-2), 130-136.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad, Y. (2006). The scope and definitions of heritage: from tangible to intangible. *International journal of heritage studies*, 12(3), 292-300.

assessing its significance to the cultural identity of a community, nation, or group. The criteria for safeguarding intangible heritage focus on community recognition, transmission mechanisms, and the risk of disappearing should the practice fall out of use. However, the categorization of these elements is complex due to their inherently fluid and evolving character.<sup>6</sup>

One of the greatest challenges in the field of tangible heritage is the delicate balance between preservation, accessibility, and use. Material artifacts are vulnerable to deterioration due to environmental factors, human activity, and the passage of time. Consequently, conservators face the task of maintaining these artifacts while also adapting them to contemporary uses that can breathe new life into them without compromising their integrity.<sup>7</sup> Unlike tangible heritage, intangible aspects cannot be conserved through physical means alone. Efforts to safeguard intangible heritage require active participation and transmission within communities. One of the pivotal challenges is documenting and protecting such heritage in a manner that does not freeze it in time or strip away its evolving nature. The goal is to enable living traditions to continue to adapt and thrive in their native contexts and modern-day environments.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, while tangible heritage can be safeguarded through conservation practices and is frequently addressed by preventive measures against physical degradation, intangible heritage is ephemeral and continually recreated by communities and groups; it requires the consistent and active participation of its bearers for its preservation. Therefore, the community's role in practicing, articulating, and transmitting this heritage to successive generations is paramount for its continued existence.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, intangible heritage is intimately tied to the broader narrative of community identity, functioning as a conduit for shared memories, values, and beliefs. It plays a critical role in fostering community resilience, affirming social cohesion, and contributing to a sense of belonging and continuity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2004). Intangible heritage as metacultural production1. *Museum international*, 56(1-2), 52-65.

<sup>7</sup> Ito, N. (2003). Intangible cultural heritage involved in tangible cultural heritage.

<sup>8</sup> Munjeri, D. (2004). Tangible and intangible heritage: From difference to convergence. *Museum international*, 56(1-2), 12-20.

<sup>9</sup> Coombe, R. J. (2009). First Nations' intangible cultural heritage concerns: prospects for protection of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions in international law.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, L. (2015). Intangible Heritage: A challenge to the authorised heritage discourse?. *Revista d'etnologia de Catalunya*, (40), 133-142.

ICH is marked by its recreation and reinterpretation by communities. It is recreated with every narration, performance, and ritual, demonstrating a culture's adaptability and resilience.<sup>11</sup> This "living" aspect of ICH emphasizes the practices, representations, expressions and knowledge systems passed down through generations, which communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage and identity, laying the foundation for social cohesion and mutual understanding.<sup>12</sup> Social cohesion is cultivated within communities partly through shared cultural practices and rituals which, in turn, foster a collective identity and a sense of belonging. These intangible cultural practices serve as a powerful adhesive, binding individuals through common values, languages, histories, and artistic expressions. As such, they organize communities and their relationships, significantly contributing to social capital and the quality of life by providing a framework for participation and engagement.<sup>13</sup> Cooperative and collaborative relationships, which find their expression within the ICH framework, improve community ties. These relationships are not limited to communal activities but extend to include broader societal engagement, such as fostering integration and encouraging associations, crowdfunding projects, and other forms of collective economic productivity.<sup>14</sup> ICH also plays a significant role in building social capital due to its inherent associations with collective identity and shared subliminal dispositions towards particular perceptions and practices. These shared practices, which can range from harvest festivals to local celebrations, enable community focus and offer opportunities for interaction, expression, and involvement, contributing to the intangible wealth that holds societies together. Community participation in the sustenance of ICH emerges from a sense of connectedness between individuals and their cultural environment—what can be termed as 'person-place bonding.' This bonding encourages engagement in preserving the ICH of a community and stimulates awareness and creativity, thus safeguarding the cultural ecosystem.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sector, C. (2006). Expert Meeting on Community Involvement in Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage: Towards the Implementation of the 2003 Convention.

<sup>12</sup> Lenzerini, F. (2011). Intangible cultural heritage: The living culture of peoples. *European Journal of International Law*, 22(1), 101-120.

<sup>13</sup> Nocca, F. (2017). The role of cultural heritage in sustainable development Multidimensional indicators as decision-making tool. *Sustainability*, 9(10), 1882.

<sup>14</sup> Turnpenny, M. (2004). Cultural heritage, an ill-defined concept? A call for joined-up policy. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10(3), 295-307

<sup>15</sup> Tan, S. K., Tan, S. H., Kok, Y. S., & Choon, S. W. (2018). Sense of place and sustainability of intangible cultural heritage—The case of George Town and Melaka. *Tourism Management*, 67, 376-387.

The conservation of both physical artifacts and intangible cultural elements can contribute to economic growth. However, this must be managed in such a way that the heritage does not become commodified at the expense of its cultural significance or become so removed from its community context that it loses its value as a living part of contemporary society.<sup>16</sup>

The conservation of historic buildings, monuments, and archaeological sites often becomes a catalyst for tourism, attracting visitors interested in cultural experiences and history. This influx of tourists can, in turn, stimulate the development of related services and industries, such as hospitality, food and beverage, retail, and cultural crafts, which create jobs and generate income.<sup>17</sup> Tourists are drawn to authentic and well-maintained sites, leading to increased revenue through entrance fees, guided tours, and educational programs. The sustained appeal of heritage sites depends on their condition, which necessitates ongoing investment in preservation practices. In turn, these investments are recouped through the enduring economic value generated by these attractions.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the preservation of tangible heritage within urban environments has been shown to stimulate investment in surrounding areas, essentially acting as an anchor for urban revitalization efforts. Additionally, preservation activities can be labor-intensive and often require specialized skills in traditional building techniques, artisanry, and restoration work. The training and employment of artisans and craftspeople support the maintenance of traditional skills, contributing to the preservation of heritage craft industries. These professions, while preserving cultural practices, also create stable jobs and contribute to the local economy.<sup>19</sup> The preservation of tangible cultural heritage is strategically employed by countries as part of broader economic development plans. By integrating heritage conservation into economic policies, nations leverage their historic and cultural assets to support sustainable development.

The preservation of ICH also contributes significantly to local economies. ICH encompasses a broad spectrum that ranges from oral traditions, performing arts, social

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<sup>16</sup> Martorell Carreño, A. (2003). Cultural routes: Tangible and intangible dimensions of cultural heritage.

<sup>17</sup> Allison, E. W., & Allison, M. A. (2008). Preserving tangible cultural assets: a framework for a new dialog in preservation. *Preservation Education & Research*, 1, 29-40.

<sup>18</sup> Amali, L. N., Katili, M. R., & Ismail, W. (2022). Preservation of intangible and tangible cultural heritage using digital technology. *Indonesian Journal of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science*, 28(2), 980-986.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen, T. (2016). Street murals as a unique tangible cultural heritage: a case study of artifact value preservation'. *Int J Cult Creat Ind*, 4(1), 48-61.

practices, to traditional craftsmanship, all of which hold the potential to be translated into products and services imbued with cultural value. The very act of preserving this heritage necessitates the involvement of the culture-bearers—artists, craftsmen, musicians, and storytellers—who are key players in the transmission and realization of these intangible assets. This process inherently stimulates job creation, contributes to diversifying incomes, and ensures the economic sustainability of the creators and communities involved. ICH transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, enhances the skill set within a community, leading to the enhancement of local craftsmanship and art, thereby fostering innovation and design that have market value and can attract investment.<sup>20</sup> Cultural tourism is one significant area through which ICH yields direct economic benefits. The desire for authentic cultural experiences drives tourism, with travelers seeking to immerse themselves in local traditions, arts, and gastronomy. This influx of tourists supports local businesses, provides employment, and also encourages local governance to invest in infrastructure development catering to tourists, such as transportation, accommodation, and the service industry, which in turn further supports the local economy.<sup>21</sup> The enhancement and revitalization of ICH is also an incentive for the development of new economic sectors such as cultural festivals, exhibitions, and workshops, which serve as a platform for cultural expression and are also able to create multiple allied jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. For instance, local markets selling ICH-related products not only support the artisans but also the distributors, retailers, and marketers involved along the supply chain. Furthermore, the promotion of ICH contributes to the flourishing of industries that may otherwise remain underdeveloped, such as local gastronomy, indigenous textiles, and folk music industries.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the linkage of ICH to tourism and the global market has resulted in economic benefits for local communities but has also raised concerns about the commodification and potential distortion of cultural heritage.<sup>23</sup> By “commodification” is meant the growing tendency of transforming cultural traditions into marketable goods for tourists. This

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<sup>20</sup> Jacobs, M. (2016). The spirit of the convention—Interlocking principles and ethics for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 11, 72-87

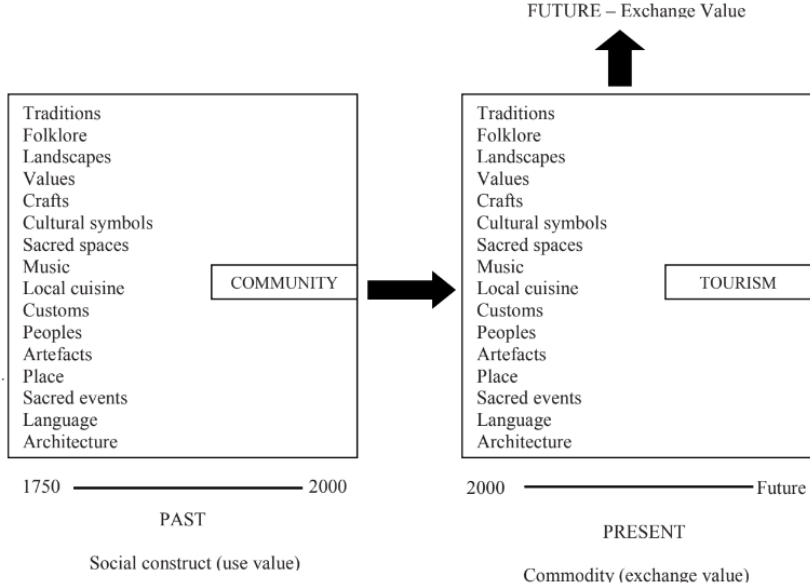
<sup>21</sup> Cominelli, F., & Greffe, X. (2012). Intangible cultural heritage Safeguarding for creativity. *City, Culture and Society*, 3(4), 245-250.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, L., & Akagawa, N. (Eds.). (2009). *Intangible heritage* (p. 1). London Routledge.

<sup>23</sup> Aikawa, N. (2004). An historical overview of the preparation of the UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. *Museum international*, 56(1-2), 137-149.

practice involves converting community's cultural expressions into sellable experiences or items for tourists. In this commercial transition, original cultural meanings might be overshadowed by tourist appeal, altering the heritage in ways that prioritize profit over tradition.<sup>24</sup> Over time, such a shift can dilute cultural authenticity, replacing deeply rooted communal values with consumer-oriented motives. (Figure 2)

Heritage as a cultural artifact that the community cares for and passes on to future generations is contrasted with a more critical view of its commodification for commercial exploitation. Both perspectives are integral and cannot be ignored; therefore, a balanced understanding is needed. Heritage should not be viewed in binary terms, as vestiges of the past or as commodities for the heritage industry. This division fails to capture the intersection of economic value and cultural significance, and commercialization can play a role in heritage preservation and transmission.<sup>25</sup> The balance between protecting the integrity of cultural practices and accommodating some degree of adaptation to modern economic requirements is delicate and demands thoughtful governance and community engagement.



**Figure 2.** Commodification of Cultural Heritage for tourism. *Source:* Rodzi et al., 2013

<sup>24</sup> Wanda George, E. (2010). Intangible cultural heritage, ownership, copyrights, and tourism. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 4(4), 376-388.

<sup>25</sup> Petronela, T. (2016). The importance of the intangible cultural heritage in the economy. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 39, 731-736.

### 1.1.2 Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Intangible Cultural Heritage, as defined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities and groups recognize as part of their cultural heritage. The Convention emphasizes that this heritage is constantly recreated and its maintenance is a guarantee for continuing creativity.<sup>26</sup>

The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage marked a significant breakthrough in the recognition and protection of cultural expressions that are an integral part of a community's identity and social fabric. Prior to this, there was no global international policy that recognized and sought to preserve the intangible aspects of culture, the focus was only on tangible heritage, such as monuments, collections of objects and other physical artifacts. However, this perspective was increasingly seen as limiting, as it neglected the essential and living aspects of culture that do not reside in stone and object but in practice, performance and tradition. Therefore, the development of the Convention was a response to the growing awareness that the intangible aspects of culture were underrepresented within the existing heritage frameworks.<sup>27</sup>

The international response to the Convention was largely positive, with many UNESCO member states ratifying the Convention and committing themselves to its implementation. The ratification of the Convention marked a growing consensus on the urgency of protecting the living heritage, which was made evident by the wide and rapid rate of adoption among UNESCO members. This transnational approach has facilitated intercultural dialogue and exchange, leading to a greater understanding of the role and value of intangible heritage in a global context. The UNESCO Convention has thus provided a framework for safeguarding the intangible heritage and also an incentive for governments and communities to actively engage with their living heritage.<sup>28</sup>

The conceptual transformation of heritage, which gained substantial momentum following the adoption of the UNESCO Convention, marks a significant shift in global policy

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<sup>26</sup> UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>27</sup> Kurin, R. (2007). Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: Key factors in implementing the 2003 Convention. *International journal of intangible heritage*, 2(8), 9-20.

<sup>28</sup> Wanda George, E. (2010). Intangible cultural heritage, ownership, copyrights, and tourism. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 4(4), 376-388.



and perspectives on heritage conservation. Global policy now acknowledges the economic and social value of knowledge contained within ICH for both minority and mainstream social groups. The wealth of skills and practices transmitted through ICH contribute significantly to a country's cultural and economic landscape, influencing sectors such as tourism, where the global wealth of traditions is a primary motivator for travel and cultural exchange. These interactions stimulate discussion and build understanding, fostering tolerance and peace. Furthermore, the UNESCO Convention has led to innovative approaches to documenting cultural heritage and engaging local communities. The rise of social media and other platforms enables new forms of participatory documentation, integrating local and personal narratives into the wider heritage narrative, fostering local engagement, and raising awareness of the roles cultural heritage can play. Global policy on heritage now encompasses a holistic concept that includes the tangible and intangible, ensuring that intangible aspects are recognized as real to the people who live them out daily, making cultural heritage resonate with actual experiences and memories.<sup>29</sup> Such practices and representations are dynamic, allowing for innovation within tradition, thereby contributing to the vitality and resilience of cultures.

Exploring measures for actually safeguarding ICH leads to examining the various domains in which it is manifested. Each facet provides distinct avenues for cultural expression and requires specific approaches for preservation to ensure their viability for future generations.

- *Oral Traditions and Expressions*

These form a vast canvas for ICH, incorporating language as a critical medium. This domain is rich with stories, epics, songs, and oral histories that bind communities to their past while evolving with every new generation. Preserving this domain requires methodologies that can capture the dynamism and fluidity of the spoken word. Efforts include recording and archiving languages, stories, poems, and songs, often through digital repositories. Moreover, encouraging the intergenerational transmission of these expressions in their original languages within communities is vital. Community

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<sup>29</sup> Swensen, G., Jerpåsen, G. B., Sæter, O., & Tveit, M. S. (2013). Capturing the intangible and tangible aspects of heritage: Personal versus official perspectives in cultural heritage management. *Landscape Research, 38*(2), 203-221.

elders can collaborate with linguists and cultural practitioners to create language programs in schools, ensuring the younger generation learns and retains these oral traditions.<sup>30</sup>

- *Performing Arts*

The performing arts are a means for cultural expression through music, dance, and theater, offering an immersive experience of the intangible heritage. Their preservation involves both documentation and active participation. High-quality audiovisual recordings can capture the nuances of performances, which can be used for educational purposes and safeguard the techniques and styles unique to each form. Sustainable preservation also necessitates the patronage of live performances and creating spaces for practitioners to teach and showcase their art. This hands-on transmission ensures that the knowledge embodied in these arts is not lost.<sup>31</sup>

- *Social Practices, Rituals, and Festive Events*

The ICH's social dimension manifests in the form of collective practices, celebrations, and customs. These practices form the social structure of communities, shaping collective identity and fostering a sense of communal belonging. Preservation strategies may include community festivals that invite broader public engagement and educational workshops that focus on the history and societal functions of these practices. Collaborations with cultural anthropologists can also provide insights into the cultural significances of these events, aiding their appropriate inclusion and representation in cultural education.<sup>32</sup>

- *Knowledge and Practices Concerning Nature and the Universe*

This domain is the community's accumulated wisdom about the natural world. Traditional agricultural methods, herbal medicines, and cosmological beliefs both reflect and shape the interaction between humans and their environment. Protective measures may involve establishing living libraries and botanical gardens where

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<sup>30</sup> Lenzerini, F. (2011). Intangible cultural heritage: The living culture of peoples. *European Journal of International Law*, 22(1), 101-120.

<sup>31</sup> Karakul, Ö. (2015). An integrated methodology for the conservation of traditional craftsmanship in historic buildings. *International journal of intangible heritage*, 10, 135-144.

<sup>32</sup> Poullos, I. (2014). Discussing strategy in heritage conservation: Living heritage approach as an example of strategic innovation. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 4(1), 16-34.

traditional ecological knowledge is practiced and taught. Collaborative efforts with local universities and research institutions can also help document and validate this knowledge, potentially leading to a reinvigoration of interest among youth.<sup>33</sup>

- *Traditional Craftsmanship*

This realm of ICH represents skills and knowledge embodied in material culture, from weaving to pottery. Here, safeguarding can be multifaceted: providing platforms for artisans to sell their goods helps in economic preservation; apprenticeship programs can ensure skill transmission; and documenting the intricate processes of craft production can serve educational purposes. Policies promoting the use of traditional materials and techniques in public works can foster an environment where craftsmanship is valued and demanded. Furthermore, integrating craft education in school curricula ensures that the knowledge does not become obsolete.<sup>34</sup>

Collectively, these domains and the ongoing efforts to maintain their relevance demonstrate how heritage serves as an essential bridge between the past, present, and future, integrating transition and transcendence into the structure of society. Considering the mechanisms and motivations behind the preservation of these domains, it is clear that safeguarding ICH involves both maintaining old traditions and fostering the continued growth and evolution of cultural expressions, ensuring their sustainable viability and relevancy in contemporary society. It is a living process that requires active participation and adaptation by both the bearers of this heritage and the broader societal structures that support it.

Intangible cultural heritage is deeply intertwined with the social and cultural identity of communities and relies on living practices for its continuity. As such, safeguarding ICH is not only about preservation but also about nurturing the conditions for its continued and sustainable transmission to future generations. ICH's protection requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account every aspect of its existence. This encompasses the

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<sup>33</sup> Salamanca, A. M., Nugroho, A., Osbeck, M., Bharwani, S., & Dwisasanti, N. (2015). *Managing a living cultural landscape: Bali's subaks and the Unesco World Heritage Site*. Stockholm Environment Institute.

<sup>34</sup> Mutchima, P., Phiwma, N., & Valeepitakdej, V. (2019, October). E-Commerce for the Preservation of Traditional Thai Craftsmanship. In *2019 4th International Conference on Information Technology (InCIT)* (pp. 114-119). IEEE.

identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, and transmission of ICH. These actions are fundamental to ensuring the viability of ICH, providing a stable platform for its continued practice within changing contemporary contexts.<sup>35</sup>

The first critical steps in safeguarding ICH are the identification and thorough documentation of these cultural expressions. This process involves detailed recording and archiving of traditions, practices, and languages, often through close cooperation with community members who are the custodians of such knowledge. This raises awareness of the significance of ICH and serves as an invaluable resource for the education and engagement of both current and future community members. Given the ephemeral and dynamic nature of ICH, continuous research is vital to understand its evolution, current practices, and its potential for adaptation. Preservation efforts extend beyond mere maintenance, promoting practices that ensure the longevity and relevance of ICH. Protection involves safeguarding the rights and intellectual properties of the communities that own these cultural expressions, defending against unwarranted exploitation or harmful misrepresentation. The promotion of ICH ensures that it remains a living part of contemporary culture and social life. Enhancing its visibility and appreciation fosters broader understanding and respect for cultural diversity. Such promotion could involve the presentation of cultural expressions through festivals and performances and through the implementation of educational programs in schools and communities also aimed at the transmission of ICH to the younger generations.<sup>36</sup>

Safeguarding measures for ICH must be holistic, encompassing the full cycle of identifying, documenting, researching, protecting, promoting, enhancing, and transmitting cultural expressions. Education and robust community engagement are indispensable to these efforts, as they ensure that ICH remains vibrant and relevant. The community's role in preserving cultural heritage is primary as they are the bearers and practitioners of these traditions. Respecting their authority to endeavor in the transmission of cultural knowledge is the core of any safeguarding effort. The acknowledgment of the rights of communities, groups, and individuals to sustain their cultural practices without external interference is critical. This includes understanding and respecting the various ways in

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<sup>35</sup> Bouchenaki, M. (2003). The interdependency of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

<sup>36</sup> Hoang, K. V. (2021). The benefits of preserving and promoting cultural heritage values for the sustainable development of the country. In *E3S Web of Conferences* (Vol. 234, p. 00076). EDP Sciences.

which different communities attribute value to their heritage, even when these values diverge from prevalent global norms. Safeguarding ICH therefore, requires a deep understanding of the heritage values held by different groups and should avoid homogenizing these practices under single standards or interpretations.<sup>37</sup>

### **1.1.3 Intangible Cultural Heritage and sustainable development**

The concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage has been increasingly recognized as a fundamental element within the discourse on sustainable development—the process of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.<sup>38</sup>

The incorporation of ICH into UNESCO's policy intertwines closely with the organization's broader goals for preserving cultural diversity and promoting human creativity as essential components of sustainability. UNESCO, with its normative instruments, particularly the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, has articulated the role of ICH as a "guarantee for sustainable development." This perspective posits that ICH contributes to development that balances social, economic, and environmental factors. By placing ICH at the heart of its policies, UNESCO advocates for the preservation of cultural forms and also underscores the significant role such heritages play in contemporary sustainable development strategies. The linkage of ICH to sustainable development can be understood in multiple dimensions. Firstly, ICH practices foster social cohesion and mutual understanding, reinforcing ties within and across communities. UNESCO suggests that these social and cultural fabrics are critical to sustainable social development. When people are cohesive and share a common identity through practices and traditions, social inclusion is promoted, enhancing the overall wellbeing of the society. Secondly, the economic significance of ICH cannot be overstated. It serves as a vehicle for financial growth, contributing to regional infrastructures and economies. ICH-related products and services offer a spectrum of economic opportunities, ranging from tourism to local craft markets. These traditional crafts and performances can be valorized to generate income, employment, and stimulate economic activity without

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<sup>37</sup> Chng, K. S., & Narayanan, S. (2017). Culture and social identity in preserving cultural heritage: an experimental study. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 44(8), 1078-1091.

<sup>38</sup> *Sustainable development*. International Institute for Sustainable Development.

exhausting natural resources, showcasing ICH as a cornerstone for sustainable economic development.<sup>39</sup>

The role of ICH in UNESCO's policy has gone beyond the recognition phase to recommendation: it is suggested that ICH should be incorporated into both national and regional development policies. This integration is poised to unlock the potential of ICH as a cornerstone for long-term development plans that seek to respect cultural diversity and ensure social and economic sustainability. Such integration also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to reducing inequalities, promoting decent work and economic growth, and fostering inclusive societies. By prioritizing the safeguarding of ICH, UNESCO's policies emphasize its vital role in framing the sustainable development agenda. The goal is to see ICH as a living, evolving practice that is relevant to contemporary and future societal needs. This vision preserves the essence of cultural practices while guiding them as a force for sustainable development, ensuring that the economic and social structure of societies continues to benefit from the wealth of knowledge, skills, and identities that ICH holds.<sup>40</sup>

ICH contributes to sustainable development by ensuring that traditional skills and knowledge are recognized, respected, and integrated into modern practices. This integration spans several dimensions, including the inclusion of ICH in educational programs, fostering respect for cultural diversity amongst youth generations, and integrating traditional environmental management practices into modern conservation strategies. Sustainability in ICH also touches on social and economic development. By translating ICH into products, tourism experiences, or educational resources, communities can generate income, promote social cohesion, and stimulate creativity and innovation. However, this economic angle must be balanced carefully to prevent the commercialization and potential exploitation of ICH. The frameworks and initiatives for safeguarding ICH must reconcile economic benefits with a duty to cultural sensitivity and the prevention of cultural homogenization. Maintaining the vitality of ICH involves support from various stakeholders. Governments provide funding and official

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<sup>39</sup> Hennessy, K., & Fraser, S. (2012). From intangible expression to digital cultural heritage. *Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage*, 33-45.

<sup>40</sup> UNESCO. (2003). *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Paris: UNESCO.

legitimization while connecting ICH activities to broader sectors like education, economic development, and media.<sup>41</sup>

ICH role in a sustainable future is multifaceted, intertwining cultural management with the valorization of tradition and the community's active participation in heritage management. Traditional and indigenous practices which form a part of ICH, serve as living examples of sustainable living. They embody generations of observations and adaptations to the natural environment, which can offer contemporary societies information on sustainable resource use. This inherent knowledge, encapsulated within ICH, particularly in the domains of traditional knowledge and practices concerning nature, may carry vital insights for environmental sustainability and biodiversity conservation.<sup>42</sup> Sustaining ICH is both about conservation and adaptation, ensuring that it remains a living practice. Methodologically, the approach to sustainability involves documentation, protection and support of the ICH bearers, which stands in contrast to tangible heritage that focuses mainly on conservation and restoration. Moreover, methodologies that instigate the active participation of community groups and individuals are essential. UNESCO emphasizes the role of communities in the safeguarding processes, endorsing a bottom-up, participatory approach to ICH management.<sup>43</sup> This inclusive stance ensures that the cultural heritage management does not overlook or marginalize the very individuals and communities that create and maintain these traditions.

ICH is an active interplay of the environment, society, and history, shaped by collective and individual experiences. The interplay of ICH with environmental and historical factors is vividly visible in how communities use their traditional knowledge to manage natural resources, predict weather patterns, and sustainably utilize their lands. By respecting the rhythms of nature and the universe, traditional practices incorporated into ICH often lead to the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable management of ecosystems, and resilience to environmental changes.<sup>44</sup> ICH's value to sustainable development also lies in

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<sup>41</sup> Cominelli, F., & Greffe, X. (2012). Intangible cultural heritage Safeguarding for creativity. *City, Culture and Society*, 3(4), 245-250.

<sup>42</sup> Rodzi, N. I. M., Zaki, S. A., & Subli, S. M. H. S. (2013). Between tourism and intangible cultural heritage. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 85, 411-420.

<sup>43</sup> Kurin, R. (2007). Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: Key factors in implementing the 2003 Convention. *International journal of intangible heritage*, 2(8), 9-20

<sup>44</sup> Lenzerini, F. (2011). Intangible cultural heritage\_ The living culture of peoples. *European Journal of International Law*, 22(1), 101-120.

promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. By valuing the diverse expressions of different communities, sustainable development initiatives can adopt more inclusive approaches that validate and integrate indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions. Respecting and safeguarding ICH encourages continuous creativity, as knowledge and skills evolve within their cultural context, ensuring that traditions stay relevant and applicable to current social and environmental realities. ICH's entwined relationship with the environmental and historical context of its bearers is fundamental to its role in shaping cultural identities and contributing to sustainable development. The active recreation and transmission of ICH in response to shifting environmental and social dynamics are central to preserving cultural diversity and fostering human creativity. By providing communities with a sense of identity and continuity, ICH proves that it is a decisive factor in the framework of sustainable development.<sup>45</sup>

## **1.2 Food as intangible cultural heritage**

Food represents a fundamental aspect of cultural expression, transcending its basic function of sustenance. It is deeply rooted in cultural identity, offering a connection to heritage and a means of expressing community values and individual belonging. The way food functions as a social language is intricate, revealing much about societal structures, status, and ethnicity through the subtleties of culinary choices. The gastronomic realm, interconnected with socio-cultural elements, stands as a marker of identity, shaping and reflecting the heritage of ethnic and national groups while contributing to the intergenerational tapestry of human experience. In the context of "food heritage," it is important to consider the encompassing rituals, techniques, and practices surrounding the dishes and ingredients. This comprehensive perspective aligns closely with broader conceptions of intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing the significance of maintaining and transmitting traditions. As food history and studies continue to delve into the complex symbolism food carries for different groups, they uncover the intricate layers through which food functions in societal rituals and interactions, and how distinct culinary experiences emerge within cultures. Universally, the impact of ethnically tied foods and their acceptance in a global gastronomic landscape also offers insights into the

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<sup>45</sup> UNESCO (2003). "Intangible Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development," United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



complex landscape of cultural interchange and the adaptation of cuisines beyond their origins. In safeguarding these culinary traditions, the international community recognizes their importance, examining how they contribute to and coexist with globalized cultural practices. This recognition is embodied by the UNESCO designation of practices like the Mediterranean diet as a sustainable lifestyle reflecting rich cultural values, social practices, and historical significance. The Mediterranean diet exemplifies how a food system, rooted in a particular region's way of life and history, can influence global dietary patterns and transform perceptions of what comprises a holistic culinary system. As the richness of food heritage is embraced, the delicate task of its heritagization – the process of preserving, legitimizing, and valuing these traditions – is encountered. This task presents complex challenges that include preventing the loss of authenticity and avoiding marginalization or cultural appropriation. It shines a light on the need for more research to understand the sustainability of promoting food heritage and its role in meeting global challenges such as food security and cultural preservation.

### **1.2.1 Cultural meanings in food**

“Culinary heritage” or “food heritage” is a multi-dimensional concept, extending well beyond the edible constituents that make up traditional recipes. It encapsulates a complex web of elements that include symbolic dimensions, rituals, cooking techniques, culinary knowledge, and communal eating practices. Food heritage, as it stands, generates identity and continuity and serves as a living exhibition of a community's historical trajectory and social evolution.<sup>46</sup> This expansive understanding aligns closely with UNESCO’s conception of intangible cultural heritage, which recognizes the wider cultural significance and traditional knowledge embodied in culinary practices.<sup>47</sup>

Food does not merely sustain life; it evokes stories, embodies traditions, and serves as an ongoing narrative of a culture's history, migrations, and interactions with other societies. At what initially seems to be the most basic human activity – eating – is where cultural

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<sup>46</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage: challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 9510.

<sup>47</sup> Romagnoli, M. (2019). Gastronomic heritage elements at UNESCO: Problems, reflections on and interpretations of a new heritage category. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 14, 158-171.

identity often finds its most fervent expression. Ethnic foods, which include a range of regional cuisines deeply rooted in the history are a testament to the myriad ways humans relate to their environment and each other. Eating ethnic foods is a crucial way for individuals to connect and reconnect with their own cultural heritage and identity. This is evident in how diasporic communities often use traditional cooking to 'transport' themselves back to their origins, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity with the past.<sup>48</sup> For the cultural outsider, ethnic foods represent gateways to exploration and discovery. Sampling the cuisine of another culture is often one of the first steps one takes when stepping into the world of another.<sup>49</sup> This engagement with ethnic foods underscores how culinary experiences can bridge divides, enhance multicultural understanding, and spark a global appreciation for diversity. The symbolic power of food cannot be understated either. It conveys messages about identity, belonging, and tradition. The foods chosen for particular occasions, the manner of their presentation, and the rituals surrounding their consumption are part of the cultural identity of places. The deep connections of food symbolism are evident in various ceremonies, festivals, and daily rituals, underscoring shared values and collective memory. Cultural events are often marked by specific foods that embody the occasion's essence. Consider the mooncake of the Mid-Autumn Festival in Chinese culture, or the Thanksgiving turkey in American tradition, each of these is not simply a part of the menu but an integral element of the celebration, that embodies the spirit of the event and the identity of the community.<sup>50</sup>

Gastronomy plays a crucial role also in cultural tourism, offering visitors an authentic taste of local traditions and history. Through the gastronomic experience, travelers engage with the local culture, learning about regional production techniques, historical narratives, and the community's social values.<sup>51</sup> This synergy between food and tourism amplifies the significance of gastronomic heritage as an engine of the local economy and a demonstration of cultural pride. It is through these many layers of symbolism and association that food is enshrined in the cultural heritage of a community or nation. The

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<sup>48</sup> Almerico, G. M. (2014). Food and identity: Food studies, cultural, and personal identity. *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies*, 8, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Tan, H. S. G., Fischer, A. R., Tinch, P., Stieger, M., Steenbekkers, L. P. A., & van Trijp, H. C. (2015). Insects as food: Exploring cultural exposure and individual experience as determinants of acceptance. *Food quality and preference*, 42, 78-89.

<sup>50</sup> Martorell Carreño, A. (2003). Cultural routes Tangible and intangible dimensions of cultural heritage.

<sup>51</sup> Rodzi, N. I. M., Zaki, S. A., & Subli, S. M. H. S. (2013). Between tourism and intangible cultural heritage. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 85, 411-420.

shared meals and communal dishes reinforce social bonds, transmit values, and preserve a sense of identity and continuity among people. The essence of food symbolism is therefore not to be understated. It supports the intangible cultural heritage that UNESCO strives to protect and sustain, ensuring that food can continue to act as a narrative of cultural wisdom, a medium for communal expression, and a pathway for connecting past, present, and future. Moreover, food operates as a living language. It reveals the socio-economic stratifications of a society, the historical contact with other cultures, and the demarcation of identity within the complex social matrix.<sup>52</sup> The socio-cultural elements tied to the culinary sphere form an integral part of what can be called the gastronomic heritage. They are markers of ethnic or national identity, and also of the relationship of a culture with its food. This includes the locally sourced ingredients that speak to a region's agricultural narrative to the handed-down techniques that display a continuum of know-how and creation.<sup>53</sup> As global cuisines become more accessible, food's role in maintaining and communicating cultural identity becomes ever more intricate and essential. It prompts an understanding that while we all must eat, it is what, how, and with whom we eat that helps define who we are, where we have been, and perhaps where we are going.

When analyzing the dietary preferences of both individuals and societies, one delves into a universal language of cultural expression and identity interpretation. Food functions as a powerful vector for the expression of cultural identities. For instance, the way a society regards literature and art as symbolic expressions of cultural identities can also be directed towards their food traditions and choices, tying them to aspects of culture like ethnicity and geographical roots.<sup>54</sup> The anthropology of food and eating delves even further into this concept, demonstrating how food and eating rituals, and the intersection with identities are cardinal in understanding a group's cultural values and social dynamics.<sup>55</sup> The culinary etiquette of each culture, which dictates table manners and culturally appropriate food choices for different occasions, is in harmony with its heritage and societal norms, influenced by the cultural context rather than being an intrinsic

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<sup>52</sup> Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.

<sup>53</sup> Highmore, B. (2008). Alimentary agents: Food, cultural theory and multiculturalism. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 29(4), 381-398.

<sup>54</sup> Hereniko, V., & Wilson, R. (Eds.). (1999). *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the new Pacific* (No. 119). Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>55</sup> LeBesco, K., & Naccarato, P. (Eds.). (2008). *Edible ideologies: Representing food and meaning*. Suny Press.

quality of the food itself. In fact, human food preferences are deeply interwoven with cultural identity. Cultural background molds food preferences, resulting in a rich diversity of culinary practices that mark individual and collective identities. The social rules around eating extend to understanding and respecting the choices of food appropriate for different occasions. What is considered celebratory, respectful, or even mourning food can be fundamentally different in various cultural settings.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the choices pertaining to what we eat and how we eat during social gatherings are often influenced by environmental and cultural pressures, reflecting a complex interaction between personal choices and the cultural scene. Cultural approaches to food preferences indicate that our palate is tailored by the social and cultural contexts we grow up in and continue to live within.<sup>57</sup> This means that while we may have personal preferences, they are nonetheless framed within a larger cultural context that combines the experience of dining and sharing a meal. Culinary cultures and the social organization of eating are significant to diet and health as well. How we decide what to eat, the diversity of our diet, and our overall relationship with food can be linked to our cultural identity and the environment we live in.<sup>58</sup> These culinary choices are further influenced by aesthetic concerns and constraints within the culture of production, shaping the sensory qualities of what ends up on our plates and how they are presented and consumed. Culture, thus, impacts our food-related behavior profoundly, substantiating the old adage "you are what you eat".<sup>59</sup>

### **1.2.2 Culinary traditions as cultural intangible heritage**

UNESCO's conception of intangible cultural heritage recognizes and protects culinary practices as bearers of identity, value systems, and social frameworks. The cultural dimension of food is inherent; it shapes and is shaped by the socio-cultural attachments that communities nurture within their culinary sphere, defining their ethnic or national dimensions and operating as dynamic identity markers. The recognition of food as

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<sup>56</sup> Enriquez, J. P., & Archila-Godinez, J. C. (2022). Social and cultural influences on food choices: A review. *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 62(13), 3698-3704.

<sup>57</sup> Baumann, S., Szabo, M., & Johnston, J. (2019). Understanding the food preferences of people of low socioeconomic status. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 19(3), 316-339.

<sup>58</sup> Gatley, A. (2016). The significance of culinary cultures to diet. *British Food Journal*, 118(1), 40-59.

<sup>59</sup> Axelson, M. L. (1986). The impact of culture on food-related behavior. *Annual review of nutrition*, 6(1), 345-363.

intangible cultural heritage is notably about the cultural and social processes associated with foodways—the rituals, traditions, communal gatherings, and the social expressions that resonate with a community's vibrancy and vitality. This dynamic of continuous culinary evolution and identity is distinct in every community's use of food. For those belonging to the ethnic group from which a culinary practice originates, the food offers familiarity and authenticity. Simultaneously, for outsiders or newcomers, these culinary practices serve as an invitation to participate in an unfamiliar cultural narrative, thereby expanding their culinary horizons and fostering a deeper cultural appreciation.<sup>60</sup> The process of heritagisation of gastronomy confirm the deep connection that stretches far beyond the tangible dimensions of food, reflecting the necessity to preserve the intangible knowledge interlinked with the cultivation, harvesting, and conservation of culinary practices. Communities identify with their gastronomy in heritage terms, often independently from an understanding of ICH or the patrimonialisation process. This identification with culinary heritage acts as a potent cultural activator, cultivating pride and belonging at a local level. Thus, gastronomic heritage serves both as a means of cultural expression and as a keystone for communal and international identity.<sup>61</sup> As food is increasingly recognized as an indispensable aspect of cultural expression, and UNESCO stands at the vanguard of this recognition, it becomes apparent that the social landscape of a community and its foodways are indelibly linked. Food, as an immaterial inheritance, is ritualized in the cultural expressions of food practices, which bear the weight of tradition and the promise of continuity for future generations.

Food-related ICH items encompass a wide spectrum that captures the essence of a community's way of life, reflecting its connection to the land, history, and identity. Distinctive preparation techniques are integral to food-related ICH. For instance, traditional methods of fermentation, unique ways of roasting or steaming in various cultures, and the art of sushi-making in Japan exemplify culinary skills, but also represent an accumulation of knowledge passed down through generations.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the preparation and consumption of festive foods during specific cultural celebrations are

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<sup>60</sup> Almerico, G. M. (2014). Food and identity Food studies, cultural, and personal identity. *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies*, 8, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Romagnoli, M. (2019). Gastronomic heritage elements at UNESCO. Problems, reflections on and interpretations of a new heritage category. *Int. J. Intang. Herit*, 14, 157-171.

<sup>62</sup> Bessièrè, J. (1998). Local development and heritage: traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas. *Sociologia ruralis*, 38(1), 21-34.

emblematic of how culinary practice intertwines with the rituals and joy of communal gatherings. The production of cooking utensils also constitutes an important dimension of food-related ICH, as they can carry symbolic meaning and contribute to the distinctive taste and presentation of food. Preserving this culinary knowledge of a culture is essential for maintaining the integrity and authenticity of its gastronomic identity. It is through the ritual of cooking and presentation that a culture communicates its history, values, and aesthetic appreciation to both its members and others. The essence of cultural heritage within the realm of gastronomy is deeply intertwined with the transmission of culinary knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. This process ensures the survival of traditional dishes and preserves the unique cultural identities that are expressed through culinary practices. It is through the precise knowledge of ingredients, equipment, preparation methods, and cooking skills that authentic heritage dishes can be recreated and passed down, bearing the authentic flavors and essence of a culture's gastronomic traditions.<sup>63</sup>

The recognition and safeguarding of gastronomic heritage by organizations such as UNESCO have profound implications on the culinary sphere and the socio-cultural dynamics of communities worldwide. Gastronomic elements, once identified and celebrated as ICH have far-reaching impacts on community identity, socio-economic development, and the perpetuation of traditional practices. The acknowledgment of gastronomic heritage reinforces the identity and sense of belonging within societies, cementing the role of culinary practices as vital to cultural expression and continuity. The traditional foods associated with these recognized cultural practices become symbols of identity and heritage, characterized by unique qualities, traditional ingredients, and distinct preparation methods passed through generations. UNESCO's recognition also tends to raise awareness of the historical and cultural significance of these practices. It emphasizes the social and cultural functions of these elements in contemporary life, ensuring that they are not relegated to historical footnotes but are appreciated as living traditions that shape everyday experiences. These gastronomic elements often carry the essence of a community's interaction with its environment and history, enclosing traditional wisdom about agriculture, ecology, and sustainable living. They represent a

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<sup>63</sup> Almansouri, M., Verkerk, R., Fogliano, V., & Luning, P. A. (2021). Exploration of heritage food concept. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 111, 790-797.

community's adaptation to its natural surroundings, embodied in practices like local fishing, traditional farming techniques, and foraging of local flora and fauna.<sup>64</sup>

The global impact of gastronomic heritage is evident in the growing movements advocating for food sovereignty and the preservation of traditional food systems. This entails the control over the means of production and the protection of local food systems from the encroachment of globalized food chains, thus preserving traditional values and relationships within the community. Community identity and traditional practices, especially those related to food, are often intertwined with the expression of social norms and rituals. Traditional ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, rites of passage, and seasonal festivities, frequently center around specific food practices, with dishes that carry special significance for the occasion. Recognizing these practices as part of the gastronomic heritage celebrates their cultural importance and contributes to their perseverance. It ensures that the knowledge and skills, like the ability to prepare certain ceremonial dishes or understanding intricate table manners, are passed on to succeeding generations, maintaining the authenticity and continuity of culinary traditions. There are, however, challenges and tensions that arise from the process of heritagization of food practices. Modifications to adapt to global tastes and regulations can sometimes dilute the traditional elements or lead to the emergence of new representations that overshadow the original traditions.<sup>65</sup> In light of this, the role of communities in actively participating in the preservation process is crucial to maintain the integrity of their gastronomic heritage. Additionally, the inventorying and inscribing of food-related ICH items demonstrate a commitment to their preservation and continuance. This practice provides a framework within which communities can engage in the conscious act of continuing and innovating upon their culinary traditions, ensuring their vitality for the enjoyment and nourishment of future generations. Moreover, these inscribed food-related practices often become instrumental in the socio-economic development of their communities by

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<sup>64</sup> Qiu, Q., Zuo, Y., & Zhang, M. (2022). Intangible cultural heritage in tourism Research review and investigation of future agenda. *Land*, 11(1), 139.

<sup>65</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 95

promoting tourism and creating markets for traditional foods and culinary experiences. Thus, they contribute to both preserving heritage and fostering a living culture.<sup>66</sup>

### **1.2.3 Mediterranean diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage**

The Mediterranean diet, an exemplar of culinary legacy and cultural discourse, has been honored with the designation of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. This laudation by UNESCO is more than just acknowledging a dietary habit; it is an affirmation of a living culture that has shaped and been shaped by the peoples of the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean Diet Foundation, since 1996, has committed itself to promoting the research and dissemination of the Mediterranean Diet's myriad health advantages. This Foundation played a pivotal role in the technical coordination necessary for the nomination process, ensuring that the Mediterranean diet's heritage was convincingly portrayed and articulated. The inscription of the Mediterranean diet into UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was made possible through the international coordination and commitment of multiple Mediterranean countries spearheaded by the Mediterranean Diet Foundation (FDM). The Permanent Delegates to UNESCO of Greece, Italy, Morocco, and Spain collectively presented this nomination, showcasing an exemplary model of intergovernmental collaboration and mutual cultural appreciation. The UNESCO nomination process served as a catalyzing point for a broader recognition of the diet's role in cultural identity, healthy living, and sustainable food systems. With the growing global interest in intangible cultural heritage, as demonstrated by the adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003, the Mediterranean Diet's inscription reflects a collective will to protect and celebrate this way of life. The coordinated effort by the Mediterranean countries, structured around the Mediterranean Diet Foundation, serves as a baseline for current and future endeavors aiming to preserve and promote the Mediterranean diet. The intention extends to welcoming other nations to join in safeguarding this shared heritage, emphasizing that the practices of the Mediterranean diet are not static but continually recreated in response to changes in the

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<sup>66</sup> Murcott, A. (1982). The cultural significance of food and eating. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 41(2), 203-210.



environment and history.<sup>67</sup> In the decade following its UNESCO recognition, the Mediterranean Diet, as intangible heritage, has become an international benchmark for integrating nutritional health into cultural identity and sustainable practices.<sup>68</sup>

Drawing from the profound etymological roots of the term "diet," stemming from the Greek word "díata" which signifies a way of life, the Mediterranean diet has been deeply intertwined with the region's culture and identity. This dietary tradition is lauded for its simplicity. Using minimal resources to combine products and flavors, it gives birth to a large variety of dishes that are universal expressions of sociability and intercultural dialogue. This simplicity and resourcefulness represent the real wealth of the Mediterranean diet, resonating an ethos of environmental sustainability and social sustainability, challenging the modern food consumption ideologies and the impacts of globalization. Furthermore, the Mediterranean diet has also been linked to the concept of "food sovereignty," which posits that the food available to a population should be in keeping with the cultural backgrounds of those who consume it. In this way, the diet is seen as a significant element of cultural heritage, imbued with the knowledge and skills passed down through generations, which in itself supports the cultural tradition of communal food sharing.<sup>69</sup>

Food is an expression form that conveys profound social and cultural dimensions. The choices of nutrients we consume daily are acts of communication, projecting identity and societal placements.<sup>70</sup> This is strongly resonant in how UNESCO's recognition renders the Mediterranean diet a repository of diverse human experiences and rich communal traditions. The Mediterranean diet is rich in healthy ingredients like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and olive oil, paired with the cultural practices of growing, harvesting, and preparing food. These practices are infused with histories and traditions reflecting the ecological and social environments from which they emanate. Thus, the diet's UNESCO status reinforces its role as an identity marker, denoting a deep sociocultural significance

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<sup>67</sup> Reguant-Aleix, J., Arbore, M. R., Bach-Faig, A., & Serra-Majem, L. (2009). Mediterranean Heritage\_ an intangible cultural heritage. *Public health nutrition*, 12(9A), 1591-1594.

<sup>68</sup> Trichopoulou, A. (2021). Mediterranean diet as intangible heritage of humanity 10 years on. *Nutrition, Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases*, 31(7), 1943-1948.

<sup>69</sup> Almansouri, M., Verkerk, R., Fogliano, V., & Luning, P. A. (2021). Exploration of heritage food concept. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 111, 790-797.

<sup>70</sup> Fonseca, M. (2008). Understanding consumer culture the role of food as an important cultural category. *Latin American advances in consumer research*, 2, 28-33.

within a defined geographical origin and a series of culinary elements tied to regional and national identities. The act of recognition also underscores the continuity and evolution of the Mediterranean diet's practices and the essential role of its intergenerational transmission. Sharing recipes and culinary skills within families and communities is crucial to the preservation of such intangible heritage. Traditional food knowledge is a precious facet of cultural identity and needs to be passed down to maintain the authenticity of the region's culinary practices. By inscribing the Mediterranean diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO honors the dietary patterns themselves and also the broader cultural system they represent. These patterns and practices are intrinsically linked to the multicultural dynamics of the modern world, where food sovereignty and access to culturally appropriate foods have become increasingly important.<sup>71</sup>

UNESCO's acknowledgment of the Mediterranean diet as a quintessential part of humanity's living heritage celebrates the shared values and commitment to sustainability, biodiversity, and healthy lifestyles. It is a call to acknowledge the powerful role food plays in our lives, beyond sustenance, as a symbol of shared humanity and a source of communal pride that spans the globe.

The Mediterranean diet is celebrated not only for its cultural significance but also for its profound association with a healthy lifestyle and the prevention and management of chronic diseases. Embracing this diet is to adopt a pattern of eating that is deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of Mediterranean countries, where the incidence of lifestyle-related diseases is notably lower than in more industrialized nations. The link between the Mediterranean diet and a reduced risk of heart disease is largely attributable to its emphasis on heart-healthy fats and antioxidants. Furthermore, the diet's rich fiber content, derived from its focus on plant-based foods, contributes to better glycemic control and aids in the prevention and management of diabetes. The diet also has potential benefits for neurodegenerative diseases and some cancers. The core elements of the Mediterranean diet include high consumption of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and nuts. Olive oil is the principal source of fat, instead of butter or lard. There is moderate intake of fish and poultry, and the diet is low in red meat and high-sugar foods. Alongside, it encourages the consumption of red wine in moderation, assuming no

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<sup>71</sup> Almansouri, M., Verkerk, R., Fogliano, V., & Luning, P. A. (2021). Exploration of heritage food concept. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 111, 790-797.

contraindications.<sup>72</sup> Each of these components plays a crucial role in disease prevention and promotes overall well-being. Therefore, the recognition of the Mediterranean diet as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO highlights the intrinsic value of this dietary pattern to foster a society that is not only culturally rich but also inherently healthy.

Apart from the direct health benefits, the Mediterranean diet has long been celebrated for its contributions to biodiversity and sustainability. The dietary pattern, which is prevalent among the communities residing along the Mediterranean basin, is inherently linked to the natural and agricultural landscapes of the region, which are rich in biodiversity. The Mediterranean diet contributes to biodiversity through its reliance on a wide variety of plant-based foods. The traditional agricultural practices that support this diet help to maintain and enhance these diverse ecosystems. The diet's emphasis on local and seasonal foods, as well as minimal processing, supports local economies and reduces the environmental impact associated with long-distance transportation and storage of foodstuffs.<sup>73</sup> Traditional farming techniques employed in the cultivation of these foods also tend to be less resource-intensive and more sustainable compared to modern intensive agricultural practices. Moreover, the Mediterranean diet encourages the consumption of a diverse array of plant-based foods, which exerts a lower environmental pressure in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land, and water use compared to diets with high animal-based food consumption. This lower demand for resources contributes to the conservation of natural habitats and the species that inhabit them, thus indirectly supporting biodiversity.<sup>74</sup>

The recognition of the Mediterranean diet as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO underlines the importance of its role in sustainable development policies. It is not simply a diet but represents a comprehensive lifestyle that harmonizes the consumption of healthy foods with a commitment to preserve the environment and sustain local communities. This encompasses an approach that values sustainability, from the preservation of traditional knowledge and local customs to the promotion of agricultural

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<sup>72</sup> Trichopoulou, A. (2021). Mediterranean diet as intangible heritage of humanity 10 years on. *Nutrition, Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases*, 31(7), 1943-1948.

<sup>73</sup> Serra-Majem, L., & Medina, F. X. (2015). The Mediterranean diet as an intangible and sustainable food culture. In *The Mediterranean Diet* (pp. 37-46). Academic Press.

<sup>74</sup> Freitas, A. D., Bernardes, J. P., Mateus, M. P., & Braz, N. (2015). Dimensions of Mediterranean Diet world cultural heritage.

diversity and protection of the landscape. However, while the Mediterranean diet contributes positively to biodiversity and sustainability, it is also essential to be mindful of the risks associated with the commodification and loss of cultural identity. An increase in global demand for the diet's components may lead to the industrialization and standardization of production methods, which could threaten the very biodiversity and sustainability it aims to protect. The challenge lies in maintaining the delicate balance between popularizing the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet and preserving the traditional practices that form its foundation. In addressing these concerns, the design and implementation of policies to bolster the Mediterranean diet must ensure food security, the enrichment of cultural identity, the conservation of biodiversity, and enhancement of local economies, without triggering unintended consequences such as the marginalization of certain groups, cultural expropriation, and loss of traditional knowledge.<sup>75</sup>

Despite its global popularity, the traditional Mediterranean diet faces threats. The spread of industrialization, globalization of food markets, and shifts in lifestyle have contributed to its endangerment in its very homelands. This dichotomy points to the need for recognition and protective measures. Such efforts may include promotion through local and international food movements, and the work of cultural brokers like chefs and food activists who help redefine and popularize these dietary patterns in ways that respect their origins and contributions to sustainability and health. The safeguarding and promotion of the Mediterranean diet and its associated food culture is increasingly seen as a tool for achieving socio-cultural sustainability. With increasing attention on socio-cultural sustainability, integrating food heritage into sustainable development policies through education can establish a strong foundation for food security and sovereignty on a global scale. In this endeavor, acknowledging the role of intangible cultural heritage is vital, considering not only the legacy and traditions of food but also the socio-economic and environmental pillars that underpin sustainability. Heritage recognition is essential to this process, affording the Mediterranean diet a status that helps protect and sustain the local knowledge, traditional skills, and ecological practices that define it. Heritage foods represent the connections between legacy, people, and place, carrying meanings and

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<sup>75</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 95

practices from past generations to the present and from one region to another. The challenge lies in balancing the valorization of the Mediterranean diet as global intangible cultural heritage with the nurturing of its authentic, local expressions and diversity. It becomes imperative to also engage in efforts to preserve its cultural foundations. This involves a comprehensive approach that takes into account the intangible elements of the diet, such as cooking methods and meals as social rituals, as well as the tangible ones, like crops and landscapes.<sup>76</sup>

#### **1.2.4 Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage**

Food heritage holds a multitude of meanings, steeped in the cultural, social, and historical fabric of societies. It is a complex interplay of ingredients, culinary techniques, dietary customs, and eating habits that are passed down through generations. It incorporates the traditional knowledge systems that guide the cultivation, harvesting, preparation, and consumption of food. However, the concept extends far beyond these tangible dimensions. Etymologically tied to the past and preserved by collective memory, food heritage encapsulates shared history, identity, aesthetics, and values within culinary practices. In diverse cultures, food heritage serves as a symbol of communal identity and ecological wisdom. It can be as specific as the preparation of a traditional dish for a festival, or as broad as the dietary patterns that define an entire region, such as the Mediterranean diet celebrated by UNESCO. Food heritage continually evolves, responding to environmental changes, cultural exchanges, and global influences. Navigating between the preservation of authenticity and the inevitability of change is a critical challenge in defining food heritage. Consequently, the term 'food heritage' entails a certain paradox; it must remain faithful to its roots to retain its distinctive character yet adapt to survive. This paradox gives rise to a multiplicity of meanings depending on who is defining the heritage—for some, it may be a matter of preserving the purity of tradition, while for others, it is about the living, breathing adaptation of those traditions in modern society.<sup>77</sup> Understanding food heritage is highly contextual and reflects diverse geographies, climates, social structures, and worldviews. For instance, food practices among Indigenous communities,

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<sup>76</sup> Fontefrancesco, M. F., Zocchi, D. M., & Pieroni, A. (2023). The intersections between food and cultural landscape insights from three mountain case studies. *Land*, 12(3), 676.

<sup>77</sup> Bessi re, J. (1998). Local development and heritage: traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas. *Sociologia ruralis*, 38(1), 21-34.

which may include foraging and traditional farming, form a unique part of their cultural heritage and identity. In contrast, cosmopolitan urban environments might adopt a broader interpretation of food heritage, where fusion cuisines and international influences play a significant role. The stakeholders involved—farmers, chefs, food entrepreneurs, cultural scholars, and consumers—each interact with food heritage in different ways. Their respective interests range from the sustainability of traditional farming methods to culinary innovation and the marketing of a region's foods as tourist attractions. What is important to note is that for all stakeholders, food heritage is about meaning-making and the continued significance of food in expressing and sustaining culture.<sup>78</sup>

The heritagisation of food is a multi-faceted process that involves the interplay between recognition, legitimisation, and valorisation. Each of these processes plays a crucial role in transforming everyday culinary practices into a celebrated and preserved component of cultural heritage. Recognition is the foundational step in the heritagisation process. It is the initial acknowledgment that a certain food or culinary practice holds significant value beyond its basic function to nourish. To recognize food as part of heritage is to appreciate its role in conveying the history, traditions, and identity of a community. This dimension is often emphasized when diverse groups of people unite over shared eating practices which reflect common cultural or ethnic identities, as well as regional distinctions. The transition from recognition to legitimisation brings food heritage into the official domain. Legitimation is the process through which food practices are formally accepted and may receive legal backing to ensure their preservation and continuation. This often involves a transition from informal transmission of knowledge to codified forms of education and standards. The act of legitimising food heritage gives it a status that safeguards and enshrines its practice within a community or nation, sometimes culminating in formal recognitions such as designation by UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. This acknowledgement can take many forms, from including a dish in national archive records to granting geographical indication status to certain regional foods. Valorisation represents the ongoing efforts to increase the social, cultural, and economic value of food heritage. This step often ties into tourism and local

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<sup>78</sup> Anderson, E. N. (2014). *Everyone eats: Understanding food and culture*. NYU Press.

development strategies, where food is celebrated and promoted as a signature of cultural identity. Through valorisation, traditional food practices can be reintroduced into the contemporary marketplace, branded and marketed to elevate their profile both locally and globally. However, it is crucial to balance market demands with the integrity of the heritage, so as not to erode the traditional values and relationships attached to the heritage food. The three dimensions of heritagization, recognition, legitimisation, and valorisation are interconnected steps that build upon one another to solidify food's place within cultural heritage. This journey from an everyday meal to a treasured heritage requires a delicate balance, ongoing dedication, and a shared commitment among all stakeholders involved to maintain the culinary practices that are the lifeblood of cultural identities across the globe. However, in the intricate process of food heritagisation, various risks and challenges can threaten the integrity and viability of initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting food as an element of cultural heritage.<sup>79</sup> (Figure 3)

Food Heritagisation Processes	Unintended Effects	Main Causes
HERITAGE RECOGNITION	Frictions and conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Misinterpretation of the drivers behind heritage realisation</li> <li>• Irreconcilability of the meaning and role attributed to food heritagisation</li> </ul>
	Homogenised representations of food and gastronomic diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frictions between the dynamism of food culture and the static notion of heritage</li> <li>• Adoption of global heritage models that cannot grasp the specificities of the local place</li> </ul>
	Marginalisation and distortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-down approaches and unbalanced power relations between promoters and heritage bearers</li> <li>• Limited control of local communities over the identification of collective heritage objects</li> <li>• Distorted, idealised, and stereotyped representations of food and gastronomic diversity</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.** Summary of the main criticalities in the processes of heritage recognition, legitimisation, and valorisation. *Source:* Zocchi et al., 2021

<sup>79</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage: challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 9510.

HERITAGE LEGITIMISATION	Standardisation and homogenisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exogenous models, poor adaptability to the local foodscape, and scarce protection of heritage bearers</li> <li>• Standardisation and loss of both diversity and variability of food and cultural systems</li> </ul>
	Exclusion and co-optation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive influence of external players in the codification of food heritage</li> <li>• Poor adaptability of production and legal standards to the local production realities</li> </ul>
HERITAGE VALORISATION	Loss of traditional values and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commodification and alterations of the socio-cultural values of food heritage</li> <li>• Market feedback and its impact on the traditional production and social system</li> </ul>
	Loss of control over and access to heritage resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the competition of powerful economic actors and risk of co-optation</li> <li>• Decrease in product availability within traditional exchange and consumption networks</li> </ul>

Figure 3. Cont

A primary risk in the heritagisation of food involves the dilution or loss of authenticity. As food practices are adapted for wider recognition and appeal, there is a danger that these adaptations may estrange them from their traditional roots. This could emerge from the modification of production methods to scale for tourist demand or the alteration of recipes to suit broader palates, potentially affecting the very essence of the food heritage that initiatives seek to protect.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the process of declaring and sustaining food as a heritage often involves complex relationships among various actors. The marginalization of local communities, who are the authentic bearers of these traditions, is a crucial concern. Centralized decision-making by political bodies or international entities might prioritize branding opportunities or global recognition over the inclusion and empowerment of those whose heritage is at stake. Such an approach may inhibit the active contribution and knowledge of local custodians and enthusiasts whose involvement is vital for genuine heritagization.<sup>81</sup> Cultural expropriation, or the adoption of specific food-related customs without proper acknowledgment of its origins, can occur when elements

<sup>80</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage: challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 9510.

<sup>81</sup> Grimaldi, P., Fassino, G., & Porporato, D. (2019). Culture, heritage, identity and food. A methodological approach.



of food heritage are commercialized. The branding of food for a global audience might neglect or misrepresent the intricate details that make the heritage unique to its originators, potentially leading to a diluted interpretation that benefits external stakeholders more than the local community.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the heritagisation of food sometimes results in commodification, which refers to the transformation of cultural practices or goods into commercial products, transitioning value systems from cultural significance to broader economic profitability. This shift can result in a loss of authenticity in the cultural expression of traditional food practices, as they become tailored to the demands of widespread commercial appeal. Such commodification not only challenges the preservation of true cultural meanings but may also oversimplify or distort these traditions to enhance profitability, thereby detaching them from their roots and embracing a generic appeal that may not accurately reflect their origins. This trend is notably problematic as it can dilute the rich, cultural authenticity that these food practices originally embodied, reducing them to mere items of trade rather than preserving their integral roles within the cultural heritage.<sup>83</sup> Another challenge in preserving food as intangible cultural heritage arises from its connection to tourism, which can result in the overexploitation of resources. The influx of tourists looking for authentic experiences can put a strain on local ecosystems, leading to overfishing, depletion of fertile land, or the unsustainable use of water and other inputs necessary for traditional food production. Moreover, this can accentuate the challenge of maintaining ecologically sustainable farming practices and ensuring food security. Additionally, the focus on food waste management within tourism studies has highlighted the potential strain on local resources due to inadequate management and exploitation practices, which may resonate across various dimensions of sustainability, including biodiversity and ecological balance. The tourism industry plays a critical role in this scenario. It brings attention and revenue to heritage food initiatives, yet it can also become a driver for many of the unintended effects mentioned above. Sustainable tourism development in rural areas should be carefully planned to avoid exploitation and ensure that the valorisation of culinary heritage does not sacrifice the cultural and ecological sustainability of the region.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Del Soldato, E., & Massari, S. (2024). Creativity and digital strategies to support food cultural heritage in Mediterranean rural areas. *EuroMed Journal of Business*.

<sup>83</sup> Outka, E. (2009). *Consuming traditions: modernity, modernism, and the commodified authentic* (Vol. 1). OUP USA.

<sup>84</sup> Thomé-Ortiz, H. (2018). Heritage cuisine and identity: free time and its relation to the social reproduction of local food. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 13(2), 104-114.

The cultivation of food cultural heritage should be part of a holistic framework that includes broad participation of community members, a conscious recognition of the origin of cultural practices, the protection of biodiversity and sustainable economic models. Recognising the complex relationship between food heritage and community dynamics is vital to mitigating these potential unintended effects. Effective management of food heritage resources must include a variety of indicators for cultural resource use monitoring and sustainability that encompass social, ecological, and economic considerations. As such, community-based management models may serve to empower local populations and safeguard against the inadvertent negative consequences of heritagisation. To keep heritage cuisine viable and sustainable, local knowledge systems must be respected and integrated into heritage initiatives. This includes recognizing the diversity of cuisines within a region and understanding the socio-cultural and ecological systems that underpin them. Community chefs and bearers of traditional knowledge have a role in both preserving culinary practices and in guiding their responsible evolution, ensuring that food remains an authentic expression of culture and heritage.<sup>85</sup>

Food culture is dynamic, evolving with generational shifts, technological advancements, and cross-cultural exchanges. However, heritagization efforts often focus on preserving culinary practices in their most traditional forms, potentially neglecting their natural progression and adaptation over time. This static representation can lead to a freezing of culinary traditions in time, which becomes a point of conflict with the lived reality of food culture's natural progression and adaptation. The challenge for food heritage initiatives lies in recognizing and embracing this dynamic quality, fostering a managed evolution that respects the authenticity of traditional practices while integrating thoughtful innovation.<sup>86</sup> This balance requires a keen understanding of the intrinsic values and historical significance of these food practices, ensuring that any adaptations or innovations do not dilute their authenticity. The literature on the heritagization of food underscores a delicate equilibrium between preserving heritage and embracing innovation. This balance involves a strategic approach where the reinvention or functional

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<sup>85</sup> Keitumetse, S. O. (2013). Cultural resources as sustainability enablers: Towards a community-based cultural heritage resources management (COBACHREM) model. *Sustainability*, 6(1), 70-85.

<sup>86</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 95

innovation of food practices serves to both consolidate their traditional roles and diversify their functions, thus ensuring their relevance in contemporary society. This dual approach not only honors the past but also secures a vibrant future for these culinary traditions, making them accessible and meaningful to new generations.<sup>87</sup> This approach underscores the importance of a holistic view in food heritage projects, where the goal is to cultivate culinary practices that are sustainable, relevant, and respectful of their rich histories.

The connection between food heritage and socio-economic sustainability is becoming increasingly apparent. Food heritage offers potential economic benefits through agri-tourism and direct market access, potentially leading to the revitalization of local economies. Moreover, it provides an avenue for communities to develop a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency by harnessing traditional environmental knowledge for the contemporary market. Promoting food heritage could be a powerful tool for achieving socio-cultural sustainability. It serves as a mechanism for communities to hold onto and display their values through practices that are essentially sustainable, making use of local, seasonally available resources, and time-tested methods of food production and preparation. In addition to offering an alternative to the industrialized food system, it establishes platforms for transmission of cultural values and skills to future generations, thereby ensuring continuity. The aforementioned capacity to strengthen cultural identity through traditional gastronomic heritage is twofold: it provides communities with a sense of pride and place while also offering an economic incentive for the preservation of such practices. Enhancing socio-economic conditions via promotion of food heritage encourages innovation while preserving tradition, leading to new employment opportunities, increased household incomes, and therefore, improved quality of life.<sup>88</sup> Food heritage holds immense potential as a vehicle for socio-cultural sustainability. While the journey of transforming this potential into tangible socio-economic benefits has commenced, there is room for further scholarly investigation to optimize these endeavors' impact.

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<sup>87</sup> Guerrero, L., Guàrdia, M. D., Xicola, J., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., Zakowska-Biemans, S., ... & Hersleth, M. (2009). Consumer-driven definition of traditional food products and innovation in traditional foods. A qualitative cross-cultural study. *Appetite*, 52(2), 345-354.

<sup>88</sup> Zocchi, D. M., Fontefrancesco, M. F., Corvo, P., & Pieroni, A. (2021). Recognising, safeguarding, and promoting food heritage challenges and prospects for the future of sustainable food systems. *Sustainability*, 13(17), 95

The heritagisation of food involves intricate negotiations among a multitude of stakeholders, ranging from local producers, heritage project promoters, food entrepreneurs, to the consuming community, each with their own perspectives, expectations, and objectives. For producers, it is often a matter of preserving tradition and ensuring the viability of their livelihoods, while for heritage-based project promoters and food entrepreneurs, it might represent an opportunity for economic development and marketing. These parties frequently enter into dialogue and negotiation to strike a balance between authenticity and marketability. Food entrepreneurs and chefs act as cultural brokers who raise awareness and create visibility for heritage foods within broader society. They can imbue traditional elements of the foodscape with new values and interpretations, reinforcing their relevance to modern-day consumers and tourists. This influence is needed to help capture the interest of global markets and local communities alike. At the grassroots level, the engagement of local communities is essential in the protection of their food heritage. It is their acceptance and active participation that often drive the collective identification and eventual safeguarding of heritage food items. The ethics and morals of local actors, particularly their dedication to preserving the communal nature of their culinary practices, are essential forces in food heritage protection. This commitment often emerges from an understanding of the intrinsic value of their traditions apart from any economic benefits. As they negotiate with other stakeholders, their aim is to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the foodscape, often negotiating against pressures of commercialization and standardization. However, power discrepancies can arise between larger-scale stakeholders and individual community members, and negotiations need to be delicately managed to prevent overshadowing local perspectives. Additionally, various factors, such as globalization's erosion of cultural diversity and changes in the roles of food resources due to industrialization, motivate communities and stakeholders to engage proactively in food heritage preservation. These drivers reiterate the importance of community engagement being value-driven and ethically oriented.<sup>89</sup> The negotiation process in the heritagisation of food is complex, requiring a delicate balance of ethical considerations, economic incentives, and the myriad values held by the different stakeholders involved. The hope is to develop a collaborative approach where all stakeholders, led by the ethical imperatives of community well-being

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<sup>89</sup> Romagnoli, M. (2019). Gastronomic heritage elements at UNESCO\_ Problems, reflections on and interpretations of a new heritage category. *Int. J. Intang. Herit*, 14, 157-171.

and the celebration of cultural identity, can find common ground, leading to the effective and responsible promotion of food heritage.

### **1.3 Balancing food traditions and innovation**

Within the European gastronomic panorama, Traditional Food Products (TFP) play a significant role, serving as a nexus between past and present. The conceptualization of traditional foods has matured over time, influenced by a myriad of factors such as ancestral links, cultural practices, and the agricultural origins that bind communities to their environment. European academe has strived to delineate these foods more distinctly, acknowledging their complexities and their lasting significance within society, despite the challenges in establishing a uniform definition across varied cultures and regions. The heart of traditional foods lies in their essence, the distinctive sensory properties, minimal touch of modern processing, and the transmission of these edible treasures from one generation to the next. This essence finds validation in the consumers' eyes, who see these products as both bearers of nourishment and as emblems of celebrations, seasonality, and culinary inheritance. What is clear is a mutual respect and longing for the genuine essence carried by TFPs, confirming their importance within the identity of the locales they symbolize. However, tradition is not static; it evolves. The food sector is struggling with the dual need to preserve the authenticity of TFPs while adapting to market demands for convenience and nutrition, all in the backdrop of innovation. The advent of new technologies and strategies in packaging, in product development and production processes represents the fine line between maintaining traditional characteristics and improving marketability to meet modern consumer preferences. The perception of these adaptations is critical. While a balance between integrity and novelty is desirable, the market's acceptance of TFPs influenced by innovation largely hinges on how well these changes are integrated without diluting the product's core identity. It is a delicate balance of preserving the traditional charm while artfully incorporating the new, recognizing that the extent and approach of innovation can greatly influence consumer reception. In navigating the challenges of integrating new trends with the respect for legacy, the food industry is drawing a course where traditional products are not merely preserved as artifacts but are allowed to breathe and flourish within the contemporary

marketplace. The goal remains steadfast: to ensure TFPs continue to define European culture, provide sensory delight, and satiate the evolving desires of consumers.

### **1.3.1 Traditional Food Products: concept and classification in the European context**

Over the years, the conceptual understanding of "traditional food" in Europe has been a mosaic of diverse interpretations, each with their ratio of historical depth, cultural significance, and sensory tradition. Initially a broad and varied term, "traditional food" included a spectrum of categories, from 'ancient' to 'celebratory', 'typical', and those deeply rooted in specific ancestry, regions, cultures, and even the type of agriculture — the methods used in 'farm and field'.<sup>90</sup> As the discourse in European literature has matured, so has the conceptual definition of traditional food. A concerted effort has been made in delineating traditional foods more distinctly. One of the evolved definitions suggests that traditional food products, or TFPs, have specific characteristics. They are often entwined with festive times or certain seasons and are transmitted through generations. These foods are crafted according to time-honored methods, settled in the gastronomic heritage. Their sensory properties are distinct, forming an indelible link with their area of origin, whether local, regional, or national.<sup>91</sup> Such links are not only ecological or geographical but also encompass the local socio-economic conditions, which influence both the type and manner of TFP production and presentation. The identities of TFPs are also inextricably linked to the territory they hail from, often characterized by using the nomenclature like 'local', 'regional', 'original', or 'typical'. These terms speak to a connection with the physical place and the intrinsic techniques and heritage of food production that might distinguish them, though these designations sometimes overlap and are utilizable as synonyms. This evolution in terminology underscores the effort to sync the concept of traditional food with modern sensibilities without stripping away its intrinsic value.<sup>92</sup> Prioritizing the examination of such foods is vital in the effort to systematize the concept, ensuring their preservation and advancement. The essence of traditional foods lies in their capacity to evoke reminiscences and honor heritage, tying them to distinct locales, forming the foundation of cultural and territorial identities.

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<sup>90</sup> Kulkarni, K. D. (2004). Food, culture, and diabetes in the United States. *Clinical Diabetes*, 22(4), 190-193.

<sup>91</sup> Pilcher, J. M. (Ed.). (2012). *The Oxford handbook of food history*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>92</sup> Kuznesof, S., Tregear, A., & Moxey, A. (1997). Regional foods a consumer perspective. *British Food Journal*, 99(6), 199-206.

Interestingly, different countries may have varying perspectives on what attributes qualify a food product as 'traditional'. These attitudes can influence how TFPs are classified and valued, which has implications for how they are marketed, preserved, and potentially, how they are innovated upon to meet modern needs without severing the cultural threads that tie them to the past. It is the recognition of these very attributes – the cultural and territorial identity, the transferability of knowledge and skill, and the distinct sensory experiences TFPs provide – that fortify their status as vital cultural artefacts. In the European schema, TFPs function as landmarks of dietary patterns, and conserving them ensures the continuation of an intangible cultural heritage, one that carries deep social and economic significance for both local clusters and the majority social groups across the continent.<sup>93</sup>

Consumer perceptions of traditional foods is a collage of various associations, ranging from celebrations, seasonality, to the cherished transmission of culinary practices across generations. Celebration and seasonality are among the primary associations consumers have with traditional foods. These food products frequently appear on tables during specific festivities and within particular seasons, indicating a ritualistic consumption pattern tied to cultural calendars. The festivity-linked foods act as time-honored staples that mark occasions of communal joy and remembrance, while seasonal foods manifest the agrarian rhythm and connection to the natural cycle of growth and harvest. Another central pillar in consumer perceptions is the transmission of traditional food knowledge and methods from one generation to another. This intergenerational relay is about preserving recipes and ensuring that the knowledge of the past is interwoven into the present and future culinary practices. This preservation of gastronomic heritage through family teaching and community sharing is central in maintaining the identity of traditional foods within the cultural consciousness. In addition, consumers perceive traditional foods as being subjected to little or no industrial manipulation, asserting a preference for methods that favor natural processes and avoid excessive refinement or artificial additives. This association underscores a desire to maintain a close, uncomplicated relationship with the food we eat, where transparency in production and integrity in ingredients are held in high esteem. The sensory experience delivered by traditional foods

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<sup>93</sup> Guiné, R. P., Florença, S. G., Barroca, M. J., & Anjos, O. (2021). The duality of innovation and food development versus purely traditional foods. *Trends in food science & technology*, 109, 16-24.

is unparalleled and has become a defining feature in consumer perception. These foods are distinguished by their taste, aroma, texture, and overall sensory properties. Through these sensory markers, traditional foods serve as historical records, connecting people to places and traditions through the simple act of eating and savoring.<sup>94</sup>

The Locality Index is a crucial concept when discussing consumer preferences, particularly involving traditional food products. A locality index reflects the degree to which food products are associated with a particular place or regional area, emphasizing the geographic specificity and local character of these items. This concept plays a significant role in consumer perceptions and preferences, underscoring the importance of local and regional attributes in the classification of traditional foods. Consumer preferences for local products is not merely about geographical proximity but is connected with deeper threads of ethnocentrism, sustainability, and quality. Consumers often perceive local foods as being of higher quality, which can be attributable to the transparency in the production process, the reduced logistics required for market delivery, and perhaps the inherent freshness associated with minimal transport times. The connection that traditional foods have to specific local areas, regions, or countries forms a significant part of consumer perception. The linkage to a place of origin conveys a sense of authenticity and provenance that further enriches the value of traditional foods. This regional connection plays a role in shaping the identity of a traditional food, influencing the ingredients used, the methods of preparation, and ultimately, the cultural story these foods narrate.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, the term 'natural' has consistently been associated with both traditional and homemade, lending a unique authentic character to local foods. In fact, local foods, particularly those seen as traditional, often adhere to less industrialized production methods and maintain a strong connection with the practices of the past, which is reflected in their taste, preparation and presentation. As such, consumers show a strong propensity to buy traditional local food, which they consider special products. These products embody the authenticity, heritage, and tradition that are highly sought after in

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<sup>94</sup> Guerrero, L., Claret, A., Verbeke, W., Enderli, G., Zakowska-Biemans, S., Vanhonacker, F., ... & Hersleth, M. (2010). Perception of traditional food products in six European regions using free word association. *Food quality and preference*, 21(2), 225-233.

<sup>95</sup> Pieniak, Z., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., Guerrero, L., & Hersleth, M. (2009). Association between traditional food consumption and motives for food choice in six European countries. *Appetite*, 53(1), 101-108



the current market.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, the Locality Index and its connection to consumer preferences elucidate the profound role that the sense of place plays in the valuation of TFPs. The consumers' yearning for local foods is a profound expression of their desire for authenticity, quality, and a connection with their cultural roots. The strength of these preferences suggests that the future of the food market places considerable importance on locality, both for economic and environmental reasons and for the continuity of cultural heritage among consumers.

In Europe, the concept of TFPs is taken seriously with regulations and certifications such as the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) underscoring the importance of this cultural aspect. These labels are not mere marketing tools but a testament to the rich narrative that each traditional food item carries within it. Products like traditional bread, cheese, and wine, which are often subject to PDO or PGI classifications, exemplify the harmony of sensory excellence and cultural richness. This system ensures that European consumers access foods that are safe, flavorful, and nutritionally beneficial, which aligns with modern health-conscious lifestyles.<sup>97</sup> The regulatory embrace of PDO and PGI labels reflects a broader commitment to maintaining the integrity and continuity of Europe's food heritage. These labels safeguard the methods and locales of traditional food production, thus preserving unique regional flavors that might otherwise be lost in a globalized marketplace. As such, they play a critical role in maintaining the cultural diversity and culinary richness that characterize the European food landscape, ensuring that these traditions endure amidst changing dietary trends and preferences.<sup>98</sup> This approach not only satisfies consumer demand for high-quality and authentic culinary experiences but also supports sustainable agricultural practices by favoring local production methods. Ultimately, these efforts foster a deeper appreciation of Europe's gastronomic heritage and encourage a sustainable connection to food that respects both tradition and modern dietary needs.

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<sup>96</sup> Almli, V. L., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., Næs, T., & Hersleth, M. (2011). General image and attribute perceptions of traditional food in six European countries. *Food quality and preference*, 22(1), 129-138.

<sup>97</sup> Strong, J. (Ed.). (2011). *Educated tastes: Food, drink, and connoisseur culture*. U of Nebraska Press.

<sup>98</sup> Murdoch, J., & Miele, M. (1999). 'Back to nature': changing 'worlds of production' in the food sector. *Sociologia ruralis*, 39(4), 465-483.

### 1.3.2 Innovative trends and consumer perceptions in Traditional Food Products

In the dynamic landscape of traditional food products, innovation emerges as a key force in market expansion. It offers a strategic response to modern consumer demands, which oscillate between the appeal of manufactured convenience foods and the revered authenticity of traditional cuisines. This duality presents a unique challenge: how to innovate within the traditional food sector in a way that strengthens and widens its market without diminishing the product's time-honored character.<sup>99</sup>

Innovations within the traditional food sector can be categorized into product and process innovations. Product innovations include changes in composition or packaging that lean into consumer health consciousness without altering the product's fundamental identity. Changes in packaging can serve multiple purposes: from extending shelf life and improving convenience to enhancing appeal through design. For example, implementing vacuum packaging not only preserves food but can also carry cultural narratives through packaging design that resonates with the authenticity sought by consumers.<sup>100</sup> Alterations in food composition respond directly to the health-conscious consumer, reducing content perceived as harmful or enhancing nutritional profiles. These adjustments are frequently made to preserve the 'authentic' taste profiles and nutritional principles that characterize the traditional essence of the cuisine. However, while such product innovations can make traditional foods more accessible and attractive, especially in tourism contexts, they must be carefully balanced to avoid diluting the perceived authenticity that anchors the food's cultural significance.<sup>101</sup>

Process innovations, though less visible to the consumer, are fundamental in ensuring the quality and traceability of traditional foods. Improvements can include the introduction of new techniques or technologies that optimize production without altering the core methodology, thus preserving the foods' historic and cultural identity. For instance, integrating modern tracking systems can improve the traceability of ingredients back to their source, fostering a transparent connection between modern consumption and

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<sup>99</sup> Guerrero, L., Guàrdia, M. D., Xicola, J., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., Zakowska-Biemans, S., ... & Hersleth, M. (2009). Consumer-driven definition of traditional food products and innovation in traditional foods. A qualitative cross-cultural study. *Appetite*, 52(2), 345-354.

<sup>100</sup> Zhang, T., Chen, J., & Hu, B. (2019). Authenticity, quality, and loyalty: Local food and sustainable tourism experience. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3437.

<sup>101</sup> Grubor, B., Kalenjuk Pivarski, B., Đerčan, B., Tešanović, D., Banjac, M., Lukić, T., ... & Ćirić, I. (2022). Traditional and authentic food of ethnic groups of Vojvodina (northern Serbia)—preservation and potential for tourism development. *Sustainability*, 14(3), 1805.

traditional practices. Yet, there exists a tacit understanding that process innovations must be more conservative to maintain the authentic identity of traditional foods.<sup>102</sup>

Besides product and process innovation, the domains of innovation also include market and organizational innovation. In the context of market and organizational innovations, strategic marketing approaches and organizational changes can provide an arsenal with which to appeal to modern consumers' preferences for healthful and convenient options. Consumers' appreciation for the authenticity of traditional foods is juxtaposed with their desire for modifications that align with a healthier lifestyle and modern-day conveniences. Innovative marketing strategies and organizational changes thus become crucial to address this demand. Marketing plays an instrumental role in aligning consumer perception with innovation in traditional food products. Messaging that highlights the enhanced nutritional value or convenience of traditional foods, while reassuring the preservation of their authentic taste and heritage, is essential. For example, promoting a traditional product that has reduced sodium or fat content while maintaining its conventional preparation methods can appeal to health-conscious consumers without alienating traditionalists who value authenticity. Communication strategies should emphasize the natural ingredients, the health benefits of reduced unhealthy components, and the artisanal quality that stands behind traditional food products. This reinforcement of authenticity, coupled with nutritional improvements, can drive consumer acceptance and increase market competitiveness. On the organizational side, innovation often requires implementing new technologies and embracing practices that enhance the quality and safety of traditional food products without diluting their heritage. This involves upgrading manufacturing processes for better productivity while preserving the craftsmanship that defines the food's traditional character. Such organizational innovations may also extend to supply chain management to ensure the traceability and provenance of ingredients, which are critical factors contributing to the authenticity and narrative of traditional foods. By adopting technologies that provide better visibility and control over the sourcing and production processes, companies can meet modern demands without sacrificing the historic essence of their products. Traditional food producers have unexploited opportunities to maintain and even increase their market

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<sup>102</sup> Amalia, R. M., & Marta, D. (2018). Preserving traditional food from West Java: An effort to maintain national and regional food security. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 6(9).

share by introducing innovations that respond to modern day demands. Diversification of product varieties to include more nutrient-rich and convenient options can cater to today's lifestyles. Generating a range of products that serve various dietary preferences while embodying the spirit of traditional cuisines can capture a broad consumer base. Furthermore, adaptation does not only restrict itself to the product but also to how it is presented to and accessed by consumers. Adopting contemporary distribution channels, like online marketplaces or direct-to-consumer platforms, can enhance accessibility while embracing the narrative of tradition through digital storytelling.<sup>103</sup> A summary of innovations in the traditional food sector, divided by innovation domain is presented in Figure 4.

Stakeholder	Product innovation	Process innovation	Market innovation	Organisational innovation
Traditional food manufacturer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in product composition</li> <li>• New ways of using the traditional product</li> <li>• New product size and/or form</li> <li>• New use of product in food preparations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New technical solutions to improve quality assurance and traceability along the SC</li> <li>• Change in process would be deviation from master's rule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of alternative distribution channels (e.g. specialised small shops)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of membership-based research organisations</li> <li>• Joint product development activities</li> <li>• Formation of innovation networks supported by the government</li> </ul>
Supplier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in product composition</li> <li>• New feeding stuff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New technical solutions to improve quality assurance and traceability along the SC</li> </ul>	-	-
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Package innovation without changing the design too much</li> <li>• Package innovation</li> <li>• New product combinations packed together</li> <li>• New product composition</li> </ul>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of alternative distribution channels (e.g. specialised small shops)</li> <li>• Search for not widely known traditional food products and supporting their marketability</li> </ul>	-

**Figure 4.** Summary of innovations in the traditional food sector. *Source:* Gellynck and Kühne (2008)

It is crucial to note that consumer acceptance of innovation in traditional food is closely linked to their perception of the product's authenticity. Consumers must feel that the innovations contribute to the product's value without distorting its fundamental identity. Innovations are more likely to be embraced when they are perceived as enhancing the

<sup>103</sup> Gellynck, X., & Kühne, B. (2008). Innovation and collaboration in traditional food chain networks. *Journal on Chain and Network Science*, 8(2), 121-129.

traditional nature of the food, such as size variations or composition changes that address health concerns without completely reviewing the product. Conversely, radical changes, such as substantial alterations to core ingredients or traditional production methods, are more likely to be met with consumer resistance.<sup>104</sup> The challenge of balancing innovation with tradition is a delicate one, demanding that food industries navigate between modern trends and the historic identities of traditional products. The challenge lies in the delicate balance between introducing innovations and maintaining the authenticity that consumers expect from traditional foods. The innovation types adopted must, therefore, be sensitive to the culinary legacy that these products represent and not result in any radical change that shifts the product from its cultural and traditional roots.<sup>105</sup> In this regard, consumer-driven innovation, guided by substantial market research and feedback mechanisms, can ensure that product development aligns with consumer expectations and preserves the traditional character that consumers associate with the food.<sup>106</sup>

In the context of traditional foods, the perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards innovations present a complex landscape. Traditional foods occupy a special niche, strongly associated with cultural heritage, local identity, and often, a sense of nostalgia. Consumers typically perceive traditional foods as embodying historical continuity, authenticity, and a strong connection to a particular locality or culinary tradition. These perceptions evolve with societal changes and exposure to global culinary trends. Consumers' definitions of traditional foods commonly depend on essential attributes such as sensory properties, habitual consumption, elaboration methods, and geographic origins. Yet, consumers' expectations are also shaped by contemporary concerns regarding health, convenience, and nutritional value, driving a demand for innovation within this traditional food sphere. There is a perceived contradiction between what is 'traditional' and what is innovated, as changes to the former are often seen as a distortion of the food's authentic character. Consumers may particularly scrutinize innovations such as reducing fat or salt content, which can affect both the healthiness of the food and its

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<sup>104</sup> Pieniak, Z., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., Guerrero, L., & Hersleth, M. (2009). Association between traditional food consumption and motives for food choice in six European countries. *Appetite*, 53(1), 101-108

<sup>105</sup> Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.

<sup>106</sup> Guiné, R. P., Florença, S. G., Barroca, M. J., & Anjos, O. (2021). The duality of innovation and food development versus purely traditional foods. *Trends in food science & technology*, 109, 16-24.

sensory profile. Despite this, there exists an opportunity for innovation in products that are valued for their traditional character, provided these innovations are carefully communicated and implemented. Innovation can find fertile ground in the traditional food space when it aligns with consumer-driven demands. When consumers perceive that innovations serve to enhance the traditional food – whether through improving health benefits, ensuring sustainability, or adding convenience – without sacrificing its essential character, they are more likely to embrace these changes. Indeed, increased awareness of the implications of food consumption choices on health and the environment has made consumers more receptive to innovations that reflect these concerns. Moreover, just as the definition of traditional food relies heavily on consumer perception, so does the acceptance of innovation within it. If innovation is perceived as an enhancement to the product's traditional values, such as the inclusion of a quality label indicating the use of locally-sourced ingredients, it can be more readily accepted. Conversely, innovations that are viewed as moving the product away from its roots face greater skepticism. This skepticism often arises from consumers' concept of tradition, which can carry connotations of familiarity, nostalgia, and a link to cultural identity.<sup>107</sup>

In crafting the future of traditional foods, food producers, marketers, and policymakers must recognize the nuanced perception of consumers. Transparency in innovation, regarding ingredient sourcing, manufacturing processes, and health implications, is essential. By valuing both the traditional character and the health-oriented innovations to consumers, producers can educate and assure consumers that the essence they seek in traditional foods remains untouched, even enhanced, by innovation. Additionally, by leveraging the communal nature and shared identity of traditional foods, marketing campaigns can blend tradition and innovation effectively, creating a narrative that appeals to both the familiar and the new.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, understanding consumer perspectives on innovation in traditional foods is crucial. Examining the motivations of consumers behind their purchases can inform the innovation process, ensuring that new products or product modifications do not stray too far from their expectations of a 'traditional' product. For

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<sup>107</sup> Guerrero, L., Guàrdia, M. D., Xicola, J., Verbeke, W., Vanhonacker, F., Zakowska-Biemans, S., ... & Hersleth, M. (2009). Consumer-driven definition of traditional food products and innovation in traditional foods. A qualitative cross-cultural study. *Appetite*, 52(2), 345-354.

<sup>108</sup> Richards, G. (2003). Gastronomy: an essential ingredient in tourism production and consumption?. In *Tourism and gastronomy* (pp. 17-34). Routledge.

instance, integrating consumer insights into the new product development process can lead to innovatively enriched traditional foods that are met with enthusiasm rather than hesitance.<sup>109</sup> The food industry stands at an intersection where the mores of tradition often collide with the pressures of modernization and innovation. Particularly for traditional food products, which are an elemental part of European cultural heritage, there's a dual imperative to preserve their historical integrity while also evolving to meet contemporary consumer preferences. Producers of traditional food products contribute significantly to local economies and the sustenance of rural areas. Yet, they are faced with a consumer base that demands not just safe and palatable food but also variety, convenience, and nutritional benefits in tune with the present dynamics of modern societies. The future trajectory for traditional food products entails embracing innovation that does not discard tradition but builds upon it. The task is complex, and requires an astute understanding of market trends and the profound cultural foundations of traditional foods.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Grunert, K. G., Verbeke, W., Kügler, J. O., Saeed, F., & Scholderer, J. (2011). Use of consumer insight in the new product development process in the meat sector. *Meat Science*, *89*(3), 251-258.

<sup>110</sup> Kristbergsson, K., & Oliveira, J. (2016). Traditional foods. *General and*, 85-86.





## CHAPTER II

### Food and tourism

This chapter presents a thorough analysis of culinary tourism and its significant role in enhancing the allure of travel destinations. It seeks to unravel the depth of gastronomy's influence on the decision-making process of travelers, recognizing that local cuisine is an integral part of the fabric of a city's identity. This narrative explores how certain destinations have become synonymous with their iconic dishes, tapping into the visceral connection between food and place. The chapter frames food not just as a basic human need, but as a cultural cornerstone that narrates the unique stories and preserves the heritage of a city. As urban identities are increasingly shaped by their gastronomic offerings, culinary experiences such as specialized tours and festivals become pivotal, capturing the essence of the locale and enriching tourist encounters. As the exploration deepens, the focus shifts to the strategic use of culinary appeal in destination branding. It analyzes the ways in which a city's food culture crafts and curates its image in the minds of potential visitors. Moreover, the chapter connects the dots between traditional local cuisine and the principles of sustainability. It examines how indigenous gastronomic practices not only authenticate a destination but also echo the values of sustainable living. By aligning with the philosophies of the Slow Food movement, which intersects with the slow tourism concept, this narrative underscores a response to the challenge of over-tourism faced by cities that are inundated daily with visitors. In synthesizing these perspectives, the chapter aims to analyze the relationship between food and tourism, introducing the concept of authenticity as a guiding thread. The essence of authenticity in gastronomy can be defined by three main characteristics<sup>111</sup>:

1. *Authentic local products*: authentic culinary experiences prioritize the use of locally sourced and seasonal ingredients
2. *Authentic recipes*: authentic gastronomy tourism emphasizes the use of age-old recipes and cooking methods that have been passed down through generations
3. *Authentic ways of cooking*: authentic ways of cooking refer to traditional techniques preserving a dish's original flavors and cultural heritage

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<sup>111</sup> World Food Travel Association (2024, March 11) *The importance of authenticity in food and beverage tourism*.

The idea is that tourists seek authentic culinary experiences to immerse themselves in the local gastronomic culture of a place. It postulates that the authenticity in culinary experiences, whether inherently genuine or apparent, draws travelers into a deeper, more enriching engagement with a city's gastronomic narrative.

## **2.1 Culinary tourism**

Culinary tourism is defined as a cultural interaction where tourists engage with a destination's food and beverage experiences, encompassing gastronomy, wine tasting, and unique culinary activities targeted at travelers.<sup>112</sup> This type of tourism is quickly becoming an essential draw for destinations looking to entice visitors with the promise of unique and authentic experiences. Food reinforces the image of a destination, and recognizing the profile of a culinary tourist is key to tailoring experiences that meet their expectations for gastronomic adventure. Food experiences involve elements that leave lasting impressions, from the ambiance and the perceived authenticity to the way these experiences connect with local traditions. Such encounters celebrate the origin and history of regional dishes and play a key role in marketing strategies, driving the economic engine behind the preservation of culinary heritage, and providing a rich narrative for destinations. Cities often use their culinary offerings to showcase their unique identities and enhance living quality for both inhabitants and visitors, as dining becomes a vehicle for both celebrating local heritage and influencing the social atmosphere. Authentic expressions of the culinary culture become symbolic in how they reflect the heritage of a place, from everyday street food to the grandeur of food festivals, which can themselves be central to the marketing and promotion of a destination. This delicious journey through a destination's cuisine also has profound effects on travelers, influencing their attachment to a place and their intentions to revisit. Pleasurable culinary experiences contribute significantly to the holiday experience and can transform the way tourists perceive a destination, often leading to recommendations to others and intentions to return. Moreover, these enriching experiences foster a sense of connection and belonging, creating a powerful emotional bond with the places visited. As travelers engage with a

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<sup>112</sup> Long, L. M. (1998). Culinary tourism: A folkloristic perspective on eating and otherness. *Southern Folklore*, 55(3), 181.

region's food culture, their perceptions of the place evolve, leaving an indelible mark on their travel memories and identities.

### **2.1.1 Culinary tourism as a destination attraction**

The culinary traditions of a destination form an integral part of its cultural heritage, serving as a testament to its history and lifestyle and also significantly reinforcing its image and appeal to tourists. The strategic use of gastronomy in marketing is fundamental to enhancing a destination's attractiveness, utilizing the power of taste and culinary experiences to create a distinctive and memorable image. Gastronomy as a marketing tool taps into the emotive connections formed through food related experiences that tie together the senses with the cultural and social fabric of the destination. Food engages visitors in a narrative that encapsulates history, tradition, and the local way of life. It is not just what is eaten, but how, why, and where it is eaten that contributes to the allure of a location.<sup>113</sup> Food, thus, becomes an integral part of the tourist's quest, interweaving with the very identity of the destination.

In culinary tourism marketing, the concept of “destination foodscape” plays a significant role. It refers to a comprehensive framework that encapsulates the diverse culinary places and experiences within a specific locale, collectively presenting a detailed portrayal of the area's gastronomic profile. It integrates various components of the local food environment, showcasing how they contribute to forming a multifaceted representation of the destination's culinary identity. This concept is pivotal in the marketing strategies employed within the sphere of culinary tourism, leveraging the diverse and rich culinary characteristics of a place to attract visitors eager to experience its authentic and distinctive culinary heritage.<sup>114</sup>

Marketing strategies aimed at culinary tourists need to encompass the rich and diverse local foodscape, weaving engaging narratives that invite visitors to delve deeply into the region's culinary offerings. Successful marketing to this niche hinges on tapping into themes like authenticity, which in the context of culinary tourism, refers to the genuine and original culinary experiences, tastes, and cultures that are unique to a particular place

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<sup>113</sup> Henderson, J. C. (2009). Food tourism reviewed. *British food journal*, 111(4), 317-326.

<sup>114</sup> Björk, P., & Kauppinen-Räsänen, H. (2019). Destination foodscape\_ A stage for travelers' food experience. *Tourism Management*, 71, 466-475

or community.<sup>115</sup> Additionally, effective promotion of culinary tourism requires crafting stories that connect cuisine to its cultural and geographic origins, highlighting the intrinsic qualities of the area and its inhabitants, beyond mere location. This marketing approach not only shapes a distinct image and identity for a community but also unites local stakeholders and communities, creating a unified purpose and enhancing the collective cultural experience.<sup>116</sup>

Culinary experiences have taken center stage in the world of tourism, turning into significant cultural elements that enhance destination attractiveness. These experiences encompass a broad spectrum of activities and encounters that provide a taste of the destination's heart and soul, with food serving as the narrative of its culinary culture and heritage.<sup>117</sup> Creating memorable food tourism experiences requires attending to several factors. Firstly, the ability to invoke a strong sense of place is essential; local foods served in settings that reflect the destination's character can captivate tourists' senses and etch the experience into memory. This emphasizes the importance of authenticity in food tourism. Memorable experiences are often tightly intertwined with emotions, which means the emotional and symbolic aspects of meals can be intensified during travel. This can result in culinary experiences having a lasting impact on the traveler's memory, influencing their perceptions of the destination long after their visit.<sup>118</sup>

In order to craft tourism experiences that satisfy the evolving tastes and preferences of visitors eager to explore gastronomy as a vital component of their travel itineraries, it is fundamental to understand the profile of the culinary tourist. Culinary tourists are not a monolithic group; their interests and motivations are as diverse as the culinary landscapes they seek to explore. Modern culinary tourists are driven by a desire for authentic experiences, they are in search of deeper cultural immersion and understanding. Food is a medium through which they can connect to the history, traditions, and essence of a place. These travelers often value the story behind the food as much as the taste itself, seeking

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<sup>115</sup> Walter, P. (2017). Culinary tourism as living history: Staging, tourist performance and perceptions of authenticity in a Thai cooking school. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 12(4), 365-379.

<sup>116</sup> Silkes, C. A., Cai, L. A., & Lehto, X. Y. (2013). Marketing to the culinary tourist. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(4), 335-349.

<sup>117</sup> Ellis, A., Park, E., Kim, S., & Yeoman, I. (2018). What is food tourism?. *Tourism management*, 68, 250-263.

<sup>118</sup> Stone, M. J., Soulard, J., Migacz, S., & Wolf, E. (2018). Elements of memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(8), 1121-1132

out indigenous and traditional cuisines that represent the true flavor of a destination.<sup>119</sup> Their experiences are made more profound by engaging in activities such as cooking classes, food festivals, and visits to local markets and producers. To meet the demands of these gastronomic explorers, tourism providers must consider several dimensions that characterize the culinary tourist. Motivations for food tourism include the pursuit of new tastes and unique gastronomic experiences, the enjoyment of food-related activities, and the search for food that symbolizes the quintessence of a locality. The culinary tourist's profile is further defined by their participation in and preference for certain types of food-related activities, ranging from casual dining at renowned local joints to more structured experiences like gastronomic tours or chef-led workshops.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, the satisfaction derived from culinary experiences is a product of the alignment between the tourist's expectations and the destination's offerings. Culinary visitors approach food as both an experience and as a bridge to the cultural identity of the destination. This connection underlines the importance of a destination's ability to offer a cohesive narrative that links gastronomy to its cultural and historical context. As food tourists are more likely to have positive images of locales that provide pleasant and memorable gastronomic experiences, there is a close correlation between the satisfaction of these experiences and the overall perception of the destination. This further influences their future behavioral intentions, potentially translating to repeat visits or positive word-of-mouth recommendations.<sup>121</sup> Food tourism research has extensively focused on understanding the typologies of food tourists, which help in delineating specific market segments and catering to each effectively. For instance, there are those who seek luxury and exclusivity in their dining experiences, while others might be more interested in sustainable and locally sourced cuisine. Some may be motivated by the desire to learn and engage in the creation of dishes, whereas others are content with the simple pleasure of tasting and savoring.<sup>122</sup> The complexity of the culinary tourist's profile necessitates a multi-faceted approach to product development and marketing. To effectively appeal to and engage these tourists, destinations and service providers must offer high-quality, authentic food experiences

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<sup>119</sup> Hsu, F. C., & Scott, N. (2020). Food experience, place attachment, destination image and the role of food-related personality traits. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 79-87.

<sup>120</sup> Stone, M. J., Migacz, S., & Wolf, E. (2019). Beyond the journey: The lasting impact of culinary tourism activities. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(2), 147-152

<sup>121</sup> Pan, X., Rasouli, S., & Timmermans, H. (2021). Investigating tourist destination choice\_ Effect of destination image from social network members. *Tourism Management*, 83, 104217.

<sup>122</sup> Mak, A. H., Lumbers, M., Eves, A., & Chang, R. C. (2012). Factors influencing tourist food consumption. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(3), 928-936.

and present them in a manner that resonates with the tourists' desire for engagement and cultural learning.

### **2.1.2 Culinary influence on the cultural identity of touristic cities**

Integrating culinary delights with local identity and heritage branding has become a pivotal aspect in distinguishing touristic cities. In this approach, ethnic food plays a fundamental role as a cornerstone of heritage branding. Representing the authentic history and heritage of a place, it encapsulates the traditional flavors and culinary practices that have been passed down through generations. The authentic preparation and serving of an ethnic dish within its original cultural context provide a portal to the deeper cultural essence of a destination. Furthermore, heritage branding through food extends to intangible cultural elements such as culinary rituals, festivals, and community practices, all of which contribute to the dynamic cultural identity of touristic cities. Additionally, food serves a symbolic role in a city's branding strategy, enhancing tourists' experiences by adding a dimension of depth. Engaging in the local cuisine allows tourists to participate in cultural exchange, fostering a personal connection with the destination's heritage. Local food, then, becomes a means of branding that reflects a place's unique characteristics, potentially also acting as a tool to market and differentiate one city from another. Thus, by strategically leveraging ethnic food in heritage branding, a destination can offer its visitors a profound, authentic, and memorable cultural experience that resonates both emotionally and culturally.<sup>123</sup>

The intricate relationship between food, culture, and identity is evident in the traditions of cooking, consumption, and the meticulous selection and cultivation of ingredients fundamental to regional culinary practices. Gastronomy reflects the environmental, historic, and societal influences shaping community food traditions. These practices signify a region's commitment to preserving its culinary heritage, as seen in treasured family recipes, local festivals, and a broader gastronomic legacy that communities strive to uphold. The embedded symbolism and sustainability of these practices connect

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<sup>123</sup> Recuero-Virto, N., & Arróspide, C. V. (2024). Culinary destination enchantment: The strategic interplay of local gastronomy in regional tourism development. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 36, 100931.

culinary experiences to a broader cultural heritage, deepening travelers' ties to the local history, values, and populations. The act of consuming local food enables tourists to intimately engage with a region's identity. As they traverse diverse culinary landscapes, visitors authentically experience the area's life through a comprehensive understanding of local food systems, including production, processing, and marketing, all elements that define a locality's unique gastronomic character. Moreover, engaging with rural communities and local producers enriches a shared cultural heritage, with markets and farms serving as platforms for intercultural dialogue and exchange.<sup>124</sup> More than just consuming food, adopting local dining customs or participating in food-related celebrations transforms eating into an immersive cultural activity, enabling tourists to experience and partake in the region's cultural norms. It is through these shared rituals and traditions that tourists transiently weave themselves into the fabric of the community.

The culinary identity of a city now plays a significant role in defining its perception, experience, and appeal, serving both as a tourism magnet and a key component in crafting urban identity. Globally, cities are leveraging their gastronomic offerings to create distinctive images, stimulate local economies, and strengthen community bonds. This dynamic process influences various facets of urban life, including city branding, character, and spatial development. The growing focus on gastronomy as a central element of city branding and environmental enhancement is encapsulated by the concept of 'foodification'. This refers to the transformation of urban spaces and socioeconomic structures driven by food-centered initiatives and developments.<sup>125</sup>

Food branding strategies significantly influence both tourism and the quality of life for urban residents. Gastronomy plays a crucial role in cultivating an inviting city atmosphere that enriches the experiences of tourists and instills pride among locals regarding their city's culinary reputation.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, the effect of food on urban atmospheres is evident in how cities evolve and showcase their unique foodscapes.<sup>127</sup> The rise of fusion cooking and the transformation of historical venues into retro-chic diners represent

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<sup>124</sup> Bessiere, J., & Tibere, L. (2013). Traditional food and tourism: French tourist experience and food heritage in rural spaces. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 93(14), 3420-3425

<sup>125</sup> Bourlessas, P., Cenere, S., & Vanolo, A. (2022). The work of foodification: an analysis of food gentrification in Turin, Italy. *Urban Geography*, 43(9), 1328-1349.

<sup>126</sup> Henderson, J. C. (2009). Food tourism reviewed. *British food journal*, 111(4), 317-326.

<sup>127</sup> Mikkelsen, B. E. (2011). Images of foodscapes: Introduction to foodscape studies and their application in the study of healthy eating out-of-home environments. *Perspectives in public health*, 131(5), 209-216.

dynamic shifts in urban identities, mirroring current cultural trends and societal transformations within cities. These developments illustrate how urban areas adapt and reimagine their gastronomic landscapes to stay aligned with contemporary tastes and societal shifts.<sup>128</sup> The culinary landscape of a city significantly reflects its consumption identity, shaping the evolution of consumption spaces and potentially altering the economic and cultural fabric of urban environments. Just as a city may opt for an open-air amphitheater over a concert hall, it may also prioritize the development of food markets and festival spaces, which then emerge as vibrant centers of social interaction and cultural expression.<sup>129</sup>

City branding through gastronomy involves promotional activities aiming to engage a wide array of stakeholders, including local communities, in the creation of a shared urban narrative. Food, in the context of city branding, is employed in diverse ways. It is an active ingredient in shaping city atmospheres, reflecting a city's cultural heritage, and supporting the maintenance and amplification of civic identity. Moreover, food branding may strategically be chosen to improve a city's competitive strength in drawing tourists and investment capital, all the while enhancing the atmosphere for its inhabitants to improve quality of life. The integration of food-oriented initiatives has demonstrable impacts on city atmospheres, potentially reviving dormant areas within cities, engaging local resources, and recreating genuine and attractive living spaces.<sup>130</sup>

Food-related branding strategies vary, encompassing event-based approaches (like festivals and food expos), competence strategies (such as cities recognized as gastronomic centers), and spatial strategies (including iconic food halls or refurbished waterfronts). Such strategies reflect the integration of food in the larger panorama of attraction assets a city can offer. Cities using food to brand themselves do so by materializing their claims through actions and investments that resonate with both their heritage and aspirational image they seek to project to the world. This reflects a larger strategy aimed at actively showcasing the city's identity through tangible experiences and spaces that embody its culinary values. Therefore, food's role in city branding is multifaceted, acting as both an

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<sup>128</sup> Bell, D. (2002). Fragments for a new urban culinary geography. *Journal for the Study of Food and Society*, 6(1), 10-21.

<sup>129</sup> Neal, Z. P. (2006). Culinary deserts, gastronomic oases: A classification of US cities. *Urban Studies*, 43(1), 1-21.

<sup>130</sup> Tellström, R. (2011). City branding through food culture: insights from the regional branding level. In *City Branding: Theory and Cases* (pp. 62-69). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.



attractor for external interest and a medium for internal community cohesion. Through strategic branding efforts that emphasize the gastronomic characteristics, cities harness the power of food as a cultural asset that amplifies their local character and enriches the urban experience for all who participate in it.<sup>131</sup>

It is through the tangible and intangible aspects of culinary traditions—ranging from ingredients and cookwares to recipes and dining rituals—that the cultural values and characteristics of places are articulated and celebrated.<sup>132</sup> A dish becomes a container of cultural knowledge, carrying the weight of historical context and tradition with it wherever it travels or is replicated.<sup>133</sup> Food tourism is a continuous interplay between the tourists and the locals, with local cuisines evolving through mutual negotiation, infusing the destination with dynamic cultural authenticity. What the tourist consumes transcends the immediate sensory pleasures of taste and smell. This consumption is replete with symbolic meanings that foster a tourist's connection to the place they visit. Food traditions are perceived by tourists as cultural codes, a form of language that offers insights into the identity and heritage of a region or locality. Thus, gastronomy becomes a code for social and cultural integration, providing tourist participation in local rites and an avenue for heritage appreciation.<sup>134</sup>

### **2.1.3 Culinary tourism experiences**

The key elements that make culinary experiences memorable are many, each of which contributes to an intricate set of sensory, emotional and cultural impressions that resonate with travelers, incorporating gastronomic adventure in their memory.

At the heart of memorable culinary experiences is the atmosphere, which acts as the stage for gastronomic performances. The ambiance can transform a simple meal into an extraordinary event by encapsulating the local culture and setting a mood that complements the culinary delights. Yet, the ambiance is a multifaceted notion, challenging

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<sup>131</sup> Berg, P. O., & Sevón, G. (2014). Food-branding places—A sensory perspective. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 10, 289-304.

<sup>132</sup> Timothy, D. J., & Ron, A. S. (2013). Understanding heritage cuisines and tourism\_ Identity, image, authenticity, and change. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 8(2-3), 99-104.

<sup>133</sup> Ellis, A., Park, E., Kim, S., & Yeoman, I. (2018). What is food tourism?. *Tourism management*, 68, 250-263.

<sup>134</sup> Bessière, J. (1998). Local development and heritage: traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas. *Sociologia ruralis*, 38(1), 21-34

to quantify and define, as it is a complex and articulated set of both tangible and intangible elements. Additionally, authenticity plays a vital role in culinary experiences, rooting them deeply in the culture of the destination. Authentic experiences derive from the traditional preparation methods, the use of local and indigenous ingredients, and the faithful representation of regional recipes. The authenticity connects tourists with the true essence of the locale through its flavors and culinary techniques. Such transparency in culinary practices educates and allows travelers to participate in the cultural story of a place.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, it is important to recognize the underlying symbolic meanings and values attributed to food. These include their sensorial qualities and their connection to authenticity, originality, and memory. The symbolic appraisal of culinary experiences can increase the perceived value of the meal, sculpting a distinctive and memorable narrative for the diner. This intrinsic symbolism of food, tied to its place of origin and the authentic practices behind its creation, endows each culinary experience with a unique story that tourists are keen to unveil.<sup>136</sup> The experience of a culinary event is further enhanced by the rituals surrounding food consumption. The way a dish is served, the order of the courses, the etiquette of dining, and even the conversation at the table.<sup>137</sup> Figure 5 provides a comprehensive framework of the key elements that make memorable a food experience, divided into five main categories (food/drink, location/setting, companions, occasion and touristic elements). Each of these elements intertwine to create an indelible imprint on the traveler's memory, invoking a longing to relive those moments long after the journey has ended.

In delving into the gastronomic journey, culinary tourists are not passive consumers but active participants, seeking to immerse themselves in the authentic culture of their chosen destinations. The motivations driving culinary tourists are multifaceted; they seek education, entertainment, and a profound sense of place. Motivational factors such as the pursuit of unique dining experiences, the desire to connect with local lifestyles, and the curiosity for new flavors are critical in shaping the culinary tourist's journey and destination choice. Engagement in culinary tourism is characterized by a search for

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<sup>135</sup> Stone, M. J., Soulard, J., Migacz, S., & Wolf, E. (2018). Elements of memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(8), 1121-1132

<sup>136</sup> Lin, L., & Mao, P. C. (2015). Food for memories and culture—A content analysis study of food specialties and souvenirs. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 22, 19-29

<sup>137</sup> Timothy, D. J., & Ron, A. S. (2013). Understanding heritage cuisines and tourism\_ Identity, image, authenticity, and change. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 8(2-3), 99-104.

authenticity, where tourists are motivated by the anticipation of genuine and traditional experiences. They are drawn to places that promise an encounter with the true essence of the locale, manifested through its food and beverage traditions.<sup>138</sup> The gastronomic motivation is linked with learning and participating in the culinary practices of a destination. For some, this involves active participation in cooking classes, which the empirical examination shows to create a significant relationship between this form of engagement and the satisfaction derived from the activity. Visitors are also motivated by the desire to experience the farm life, learning directly from the sources that sustain the culinary heritage of the area.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, sustainability has emerged as a forceful motivator in the realm of culinary tourism, particularly among those tourists who hold a keen interest in the ethical aspects of food production and consumption.<sup>140</sup> Sustainability in culinary tourism focuses on preserving local food cultures and resources for the long term. It aims to develop a culinary tourism sector that is environmentally friendly, economically beneficial, and socially inclusive.<sup>141</sup>

Food/Drink	Location/Setting	Companions	Occasion	Touristic Elements
<i>WHAT food or drink was experienced</i>	<i>WHERE did the food or drink experience occur</i>	<i>WHO participated in the experience</i>	<i>WHEN did the experience occur</i>	<i>WHY was this experience memorable</i>
Local foods	Famous or iconic restaurant	Spouse/partner	Special occasion	Novelty
Authentic foods		Other family members or friends	Food/Culinary travel experience (festival, cooking class, etc.)	Authenticity
Novel foods	Trendy restaurant			Nostalgia
Unusual or bizarre foods	Theme restaurant	Locals		Variety
Variety of foods	Local or authentic restaurant	Meeting new people		Surprise
Wine and beer	Setting or view			Desire to return
Service quality	Outdoor dining			Emotions/sensuality
	Other locations (bars, wineries, breweries, etc.)			Satisfaction
	Street food			Hedonism
	Homes			

**Figure 5:** Elements of Memorable Food or Drink Tourism Experiences. *Source:* Stone et al., 2018

Comprehending the underlying motivations of culinary tourists is essential to craft gastronomic experiences that resonate with their aspirations. In fact, satisfaction and repeat visitation in culinary tourism are determined by how well the experience aligns with the traveler's motivations. A satisfying dining experience that resonates with the

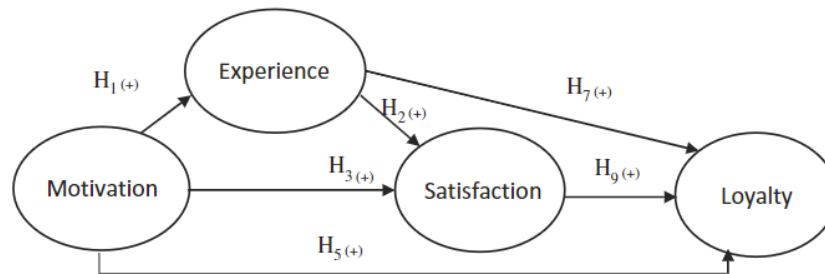
<sup>138</sup> Nicoletti, S., Medina-Viruel, M. J., Di-Clemente, E., & Fruet-Cardozo, J. V. (2019). Motivations of the culinary tourist in the city of Trapani, Italy. *Sustainability*, 11(9), 2686.

<sup>139</sup> Testa, R., Galati, A., Schifani, G., Di Trapani, A. M., & Migliore, G. (2019). Culinary tourism experiences in agri-tourism destinations and sustainable consumption—understanding Italian tourists' Motivations. *Sustainability*, 11(17), 4588.

<sup>140</sup> Ellis, A., Park, E., Kim, S., & Yeoman, I. (2018). What is food tourism?. *Tourism management*, 68, 250-263.

<sup>141</sup> Hall, C. M., & Gössling, S. (2013). Sustainable culinary systems. *Local foods, innovation*.

motivations for choosing a destination can lead to subsequent loyalty to that place.<sup>142</sup> (Figure 6). The satisfaction derived from attending culinary events also influences behavioral intentions, including the subsequent promotion of the destination through word-of-mouth recommendations and the likelihood of a return visit.<sup>143</sup>



**Figure 6.** Relationship among motivation, satisfaction and loyalty. *Source:* Agyeiwaah et. al., 2019

Culinary tourism has become a rich part of travelers' holiday experiences. This search for gastronomic delights represents a diverse mix of experiences that travelers seek, mixing culture, emotion and the search for the local essence. It is about seeking experiences deeply tied to the culture of the destination, characterized by authentic flavors and culinary skill. Frequently, tourists seek a brief yet palpable departure from their daily routines while on vacation, and in culinary tourism, this manifests as a departure from typical eating habits in favor of indulgent and hedonistic culinary experiences. Additionally, travelers' motivations for engaging in culinary tourism are enriched by an inherent curiosity for the local food culture. The intention to discover and enjoy localized 'terroir'—a term denoting the environmental conditions, especially soil and climate, in which grapes are grown that give a wine its unique flavor—but in a broader sense encompassing all local agriculture, drives tourists to explore and immerse themselves in local food experiences. This heightened interest in place-specific foods positions restaurants and other dining establishments as stages for cultural discovery and exploration.<sup>144</sup> The consumption of local cuisines is a form of social and educational

<sup>142</sup> Agyeiwaah, E., Otoo, F. E., Suntikul, W., & Huang, W. J. (2019). Understanding culinary tourist motivation, experience, satisfaction, and loyalty using a structural approach. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 36*(3), 295-313.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, S., Costello, C., & Muenchen, R. A. (2010). Influence of push and pull motivations on satisfaction and behavioral intentions within a culinary tourism event. *Journal of quality assurance in hospitality & tourism, 11*(1), 17-35.

<sup>144</sup> Bessiere, J., & Tibere, L. (2013). Traditional food and tourism: French tourist experience and food heritage in rural spaces. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture, 93*(14), 3420-3425

engagement. Tourists engage with local food heritages as a reflection of their motivation for travel, appreciating both the culinary skills and traditions, and the environmental and architectural aspects that form the backdrop to these gastronomic adventures. Local cuisine thus sometimes emerges as a secondary attraction but remains a significant factor influencing tourists' representations and practices.<sup>145</sup>

Participating in food tourism has a significant and lasting impact on travelers' attitudes and behaviors, shaping both their current vacation satisfaction levels and their future travel intentions and recommendations. The appreciation of a destination's cuisine can lead to the development of a bond between the traveler and the place, which is key in determining the likelihood of return or recommendation of the destination to others. Evidence suggests that culinary brand equity—how well the destination's food is branded and marketed—and the traveler's familiarity with the destination are crucial factors influencing travel intentions.<sup>146</sup> Further, culinary tourist satisfaction is a mediating factor: if the traveler has enjoyed a positive culinary experience, particularly within the framework of gastronomic events, they are more likely to revisit or advocate for the destination.<sup>147</sup> The empirical examination of the satisfaction levels and loyalty of food tourists indicates that the experience of a place's unique culinary offerings can lead to an effective satisfaction level that influences future loyalty to that destination.<sup>148</sup> This connection underscores the potential of culinary experiences to cater not only to the immediate enjoyment but also to foster a sustained relationship between the tourist and the destination. Memorable culinary experiences are often mentioned by travelers as highlights of their trips, indicating the power of food to create lasting positive associations with the place of visit. The importance of these experiences extends into future behaviors.

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<sup>145</sup> Tsai, C. T. (2016). Memorable tourist experiences and place attachment when consuming local food. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18(6), 536-548.

<sup>146</sup> Horng, J. S., Liu, C. H., Chou, H. Y., & Tsai, C. Y. (2012). Understanding the impact of culinary brand equity and destination familiarity on travel intentions. *Tourism management*, 33(4), 815-824.

<sup>147</sup> Folgado-Fernández, J. A., Hernández-Mogollón, J. M., & Duarte, P. (2017). Destination image and loyalty development: the impact of tourists' food experiences at gastronomic events. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 17(1), 92-110.

<sup>148</sup> Agyeiwaah, E., Otoo, F. E., Suntikul, W., & Huang, W. J. (2019). Understanding culinary tourist motivation, experience, satisfaction, and loyalty using a structural approach. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 36(3), 295-313.

For example, when travelers find culinary experiences satisfying, they are more likely to seek to repeat those experiences and recommend the destination.<sup>149</sup>

Gastronomy is a mainstay in the marketing of tourist destinations due to its powerful role in providing pleasure, creating memories, and enriching the holiday experience. The role of food in tourism is deeply rooted in the concept of pleasure. The enjoyment of a meal is linked to the sense of personal satisfaction and wholeness that comes from sharing food in a relaxed holiday setting. It is the social occasion, the ambiance, and the shared experiences that become the centerpiece of the holiday memory, and in that context, food and drink assume critical significance. Holiday food consumption acts as a sensory attraction, involving taste, touch, sound, and smell, transforming the gastronomic experience from simple sustenance into a celebration of the destination's culture and tradition.<sup>150</sup> Notably, even for travelers who do not consider themselves food tourists, local culinary offerings can elevate the quality of the holiday experience significantly. Dining out and trying local food is often an unavoidable and essential part of any trip; while it may not be the primary factor for travel, it unquestionably enriches the travel experience, sometimes even becoming the peak of the tourist experience.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, the pleasure derived from culinary experiences in tourism enhances destination marketing and promises an emotive journey that can be as fulfilling and memorable as any landmark visited. Through the shared joy of dining, the discovery of new flavors, and the quest for authenticity, gastronomy becomes the heart of the pleasure of the holiday experience.

Food festivals have become an essential ingredient in the increasingly popular realm of food tourism experiences, playing an important role in the marketing, promotion, and conservation of culinary culture. These events encapsulate the essence of a place, showcasing regional flavors and, in doing so, solidify the image of a city or region as a vibrant food destination. Food festivals provide a platform for the marketing and promotion of local produce and culinary traditions. By facilitating a direct connection between agriculturists, chefs, and consumers, these festivals foster a closer relationship with the source of food while driving awareness and sales for local products. The collective

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<sup>149</sup> Björk, P., & Kauppinen-Räsänen, H. (2016). Exploring the multi-dimensionality of travellers' culinary-gastronomic experiences. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(12), 1260-1280.

<sup>150</sup> Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity\_ local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.

<sup>151</sup> Hsu, F. C., & Scott, N. (2020). Food experience, place attachment, destination image and the role of food-related personality traits. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 79-87.

engagement in these celebrations translates into a deeper appreciation and a richer narrative surrounding local cuisines and practices, reinforcing the identity of a place through its food culture. Furthermore, food festivals are useful for the conservation of cultural and culinary heritage. They function as live museums where traditional recipes and cooking methods are displayed and experienced. This experiential aspect is key to their allure, offering opportunities for immersion that are both educational and enjoyable. In doing so, these festivals help sustain culinary practices that might otherwise be overshadowed by the globalized food market, and thus play a critical role in maintaining cultural diversity.<sup>152</sup> Food festivals are also instrumental in influencing the image of a city or region, presenting them as cosmopolitan locations ripe for culinary exploration. They are, in themselves, destinations attracting food enthusiasts from all corners of the world while concurrently enhancing the overall tourism experience of the place. Cities use these festivals to strategically market themselves, showcasing their ability to offer various culinary delights and enhancing their image as thriving 'food cities'. The perceived positive effects of food festivals on a city cannot be overstated. Economically, they can be significant drivers of tourism revenue, bringing in visitors who contribute to the event and to the lodging, retail, and service sectors of the city.<sup>153</sup> Food festivals have a positive impact also on sustainable tourism practice. They encourage the consumption of local produce, reducing the food miles associated with transporting goods over long distances and highlighting sustainable agricultural practices. This localization of the supply chain benefits the environment and supports the local economy, creating jobs and keeping the financial benefits within the community.<sup>154</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Impact on place attachment and destination image**

Place attachment in the context of tourism is a psychological construct that captures the bond between tourists and their chosen destinations. It involves the feelings and connections that people develop, often subconsciously, with places that hold meaning for

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<sup>152</sup> Getz, D., & Page, S. J. (2016). Progress and prospects for event tourism research. *Tourism management*, 52, 593-631.

<sup>153</sup> Nicoletti, S., Medina-Viruel, M. J., Di-Clemente, E., & Fruet-Cardozo, J. V. (2019). Motivations of the culinary tourist in the city of Trapani, Italy. *Sustainability*, 11(9), 2686.

<sup>154</sup> Gálvez, J. C. P., Granda, M. J., López-Guzmán, T., & Coronel, J. R. (2017). Local gastronomy, culture and tourism sustainable cities: The behavior of the American tourist. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 32, 604-612.

them.<sup>155</sup> Place attachment has been theorized and empirically demonstrated to consist of multiple dimensions that are emotional, functional, affective, and social in nature, each playing a distinct role in shaping a tourist's experience and connection to the destination.<sup>156</sup>

- *Emotional dimension – place identity*

The emotional dimension, often captured under the umbrella term "place identity," resonates with the personal experiences and memories that tourists associate with a destination. These may derive from interactions with the local culture, participations in authentic activities, or indulgence in culinary delights that are unique to a place. Such experiences can lead to a strong sense of identification and personal attachment to the locale.<sup>157</sup>

- *Functional dimension – place dependence*

"Place dependence" addresses the functional dimension of place attachment. This aspect refers to a destination's capability to satisfy tourists' practical needs better than alternative locations. Place dependence is crafted through evaluative comparisons, where tourists assess a destination's ability to facilitate desired activities and experiences effectively. This functional connection reinforces the likelihood of a tourist's return by fostering a sense of reliance on the destination for certain recreational fulfillments.<sup>158</sup>

- *Affective dimension*

From an affective standpoint, a tourist's culinary experiences within a destination can impact their cognitive and emotional evaluations of that place. Factors such as the atmosphere of a restaurant, the authenticity of a culinary experience, or even

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<sup>155</sup> Hashemnezhad, H., Heidari, A. A., & Mohammad Hoseini, P. (2013). Sense of place" and "place attachment. *International Journal of Architecture and Urban Development*, 3(1), 5-12.

<sup>156</sup> Ramkissoon, H., Smith, L. D. G., & Weiler, B. (2013). Testing the dimensionality of place attachment and its relationships with place satisfaction and pro-environmental behaviours: A structural equation modelling approach. *Tourism management*, 36, 552-566.

<sup>157</sup> Hsu, F. C., & Scott, N. (2020). Food experience, place attachment, destination image and the role of food-related personality traits. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 79-87.

<sup>158</sup> Alrobaee, T. R., & Al-Kinani, A. S. (2019, December). Place dependence as the physical environment role function in the place attachment. In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering* (Vol. 698, No. 3, p. 033014). IOP Publishing.



the story behind a traditional dish can engender affective responses that contribute to a nuanced perception of the location.<sup>159</sup>

- *Social dimension*

The social element of place attachment refers to the interpersonal relationships and communal experiences that tourists gain during their journey. Participating in a shared gastronomic experience, like a communal feast or a cooking class, fosters interpersonal connections and enhances the place attachment through the social fulfillment that such interactions provide.<sup>160</sup>

Each dimension of place attachment enriches the tourists' connection to the place, reinforcing the likelihood of revisiting and recommending the destination, and effectively informing the overall image of the place in the eyes of the traveler and the wider world. The dimensions of place attachment are shown in Figure 7.

The relationship between place attachment and tourism highlights how the emotional and functional connections that tourists forge with destinations can act as significant predictors of intentions of revisiting and loyalty behaviors. The emotions evoked by food consumption create memories in the mind of consumers, which further affect attachment and behavioral intentions (Figure 8). These intentions can be seen as tourists' internalized plans to continue engaging with the destination in the future, whether through revisits, recommendations, or positive word-of-mouth communication. Positive behavioral intentions, such as the desire to revisit a destination, serve as both indicators of a tourist's satisfaction and as testimonies to the formative influence of place attachment.<sup>161</sup>

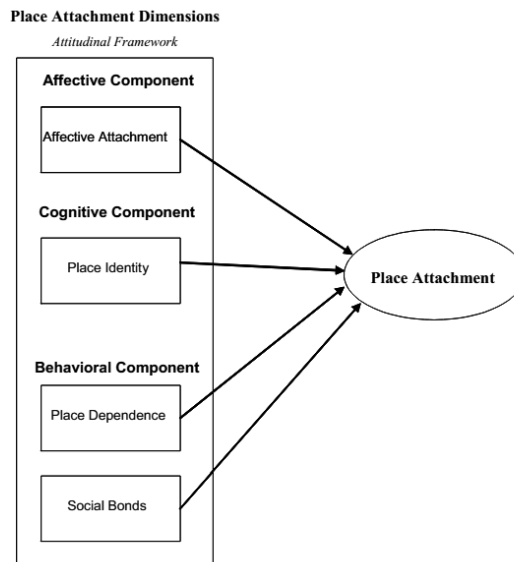
The domain of culinary tourism provides a perspective through which the relationship between food experiences, place attachment, and destination image can be understood. The concept of destination image is an intriguing and dynamic construct integral to understanding tourism behavior. It is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that individuals possess regarding a specific place.

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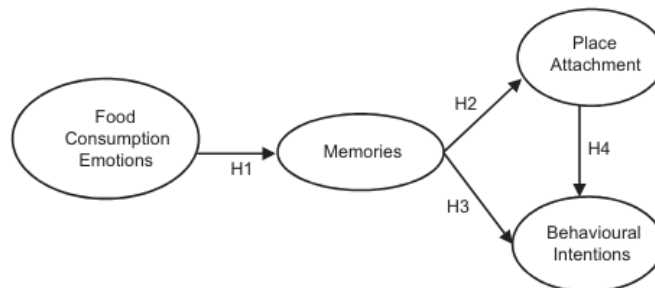
<sup>159</sup> Şahin, A., & Kılıçlar, A. (2023). The effect of tourists' gastronomic experience on emotional and cognitive evaluation: an application of SOR paradigm. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 6(2), 595-612.

<sup>160</sup> Suntikul, W., Agyeiwaah, E., Huang, W. J., & Pratt, S. (2020). Investigating the tourism experience of Thai cooking classes: An application of Larsen's three-stage model. *Tourism Analysis*, 25(1), 107-122.

<sup>161</sup> Sthapit, E., Björk, P., & Coudounaris, D. N. (2017). Emotions elicited by local food consumption, memories, place attachment and behavioural intentions. *Anatolia*, 28(3), 363-380.



**Figure 7.** Place attachment dimension. *Source:* Brocato, 2006

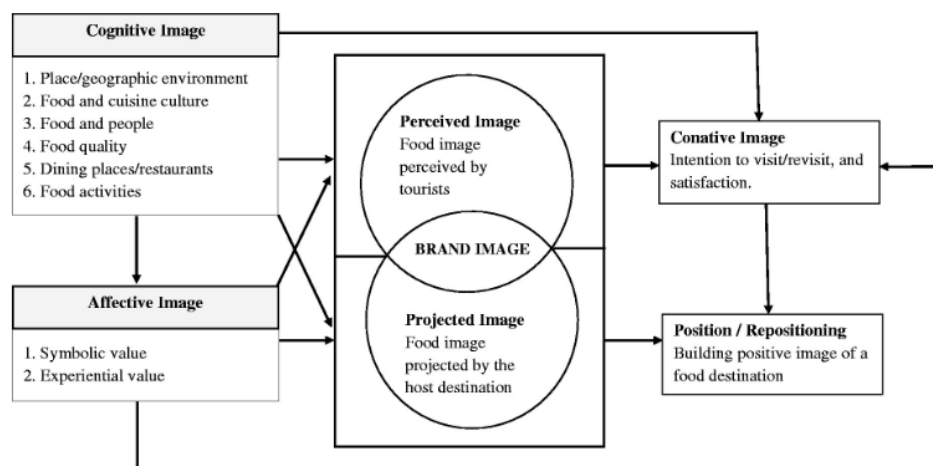


**Figure 8.** Relationship between emotions, memories, place attachment and behavioral intentions in local food consumption. *Source:* Sthapit et. al., 2017

The destination image is not a static picture in the mind of a tourist; rather, it is always changing as people form new impressions and ideas.<sup>162</sup> Gastronomy, in particular, stands out as one of the most compelling elements influencing the destination image. The foods consumed, the dining environments, and the narrative of the eating experience map onto the destination image, either reinforcing or occasionally challenging preconceived notions. The destination image is shaped by what could be termed the destination foodscape, which includes both peak culinary experiences and everyday dining incidents. The foodscape is co-created by experiential encounters in various contexts, from

<sup>162</sup> Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. B. (1991). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *Journal of tourism studies*, 2(2), 2-12.

organized service encounters to random street food discoveries. In staged settings, interactions with staff and other customers add a social dimension to the gastronomy experience, highlighting the role of co-creation between tourist, locale, and locals.<sup>163</sup> Food-related behaviors, such as discussing or sampling novel cuisines, emerge out of food involvement, contributing moreover to the destination image. A destination can, therefore, build an emotional connection with visitors by enhancing food experiences that underscore local specialties in authentic and hospitable settings. Emphasis is laid on creating and promoting appealing food narratives that can entice and familiarize before the actual visit, setting the stage for an anticipated food adventure and forming the groundwork of the destination image.<sup>164</sup> Destination image is often a blend of affective and cognitive evaluations, encompassing both the factual information about the place and the emotions and feelings associated with it, as illustrated in Figure 9. The affective component of the destination image refers to symbolic and experiential values, while the cognitive component includes knowledge and beliefs about the destination's attributes – its landmarks, cuisine culture, food quality, dining places and available activities, including the gastronomic offerings. Both the cognitive and the affective component contribute to form the brand image of a destination, which is made up of the image perceived by tourists and the image projected by the host destination.<sup>165</sup>



**Figure 9.** Framework for measuring food destination image. *Source:* Lai et. al., 2019

<sup>163</sup> Björk, P., & Kauppinen-Räsänen, H. (2019). Destination foodscape\_ A stage for travelers' food experience. *Tourism Management*, 71, 466-475

<sup>164</sup> Hsu, F. C., & Scott, N. (2020). Food experience, place attachment, destination image and the role of food-related personality traits. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 44, 79-87.

<sup>165</sup> Lai, M. Y., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Wang, Y. (2019). Food and cuisine image in destination branding: Toward a conceptual model. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 19(2), 238-251.

## **2.2 Food in branding places**

In the travel landscape, the charm of culinary experiences has become an integral part of destination attraction. Engaging potential travelers through the promise of unique and local food experiences, destinations are now tapping into marketing strategies that center around their gastronomic strengths. By understanding the image that targeted customers hold of their culinary offerings, destinations can craft marketing messages that highlight their distinct cuisines to draw in those seeking culinary adventures. The destination image, a mosaic of perceptions and feelings held by travelers, is central to the design of effective marketing strategies with food experiences often leaving a lasting emotional imprint. These experiences are skillfully integrated into the emotional branding of a destination, utilizing the enticing appeal of local food to capture the interest of potential visitors. A destination's cuisine, in its rich variety, emerges as a fundamental aspect of its competitive advantage, ensuring a coveted place as a main attraction for tourists. Within the realm of place branding, local food stands as a cultural ambassador, embodying the tradition and innovation of culinary practices. The continued growth in consumer interest in local food markets presents a series of opportunities for destinations, from the organic reach of farmers' markets to the curated experiences of local cuisines that tell the story of a place. Such branding efforts through local gastronomy can redefine a destination's cultural image, aligning with the contemporary trends that prioritize authenticity and provenance. Additionally, the promotion of culinary tourism has found a fertile ground in the world of social media. Engaging travelers with content such as social sharing initiatives, contests, and user-generated storytelling, destinations can forge authentic connections that extend beyond the journey itself. Through the power of shared experiences and the impact of storytelling, social media serves as a dynamic tool in shaping the image of a location and in fostering a place attachment that resonates with travelers long after their return. The culinary promotion, thus, evolves into a strategic engagement that entices, educates, and entertains, making every culinary experience a cornerstone of the traveler's exploration narrative.

### **2.2.1 Elevating destinations through culinary promotion**

In the context of tourism and cultural promotion, culinary offerings occupy an exceptional position as key elements of destination branding and marketing strategies, this underscores the importance of strategically understanding and exploiting the current image perceived by potential travelers regarding a destination's culinary offerings. Therefore, marketers tasked with promoting a destination must first delve into the existing perceptions and attitudes held by their target audience. This involves comprehensive research to uncover what potential visitors know, believe, and expect from the culinary scene of the destination.<sup>166</sup> Once marketers grasp the existing culinary image of their destination, the focus shifts to spotlighting food as a primary attraction. The marketing strategies should capture the essence of local gastronomy, with a particular emphasis on distinctiveness and emotional appeal. It is also vital for marketing, portraying the global culture that surrounds food. Presenting flavors rooted in tradition, offers a deeper and more authentic experience to potential tourists. This can be effective because it connects to the wishes of tourists to engage in authentic cultural exchanges. A potent strategy is to highlight unique local ingredients and to showcase how they are used in various dishes, underscoring the notion that these culinary experiences cannot be replicated elsewhere.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, the emotional and affective components of food experiences are paramount. As tourists indulge in the local cuisine, they form emotional bonds with the destination, creating lasting memories that become entwined with the place's image. Gastronomic experiences at local festivals and events further strengthen these emotional connections and contribute to the destination's image formation. Drawing on the emotional bond, marketing materials should include stories about the places, the people, and the traditions that characterize the destination's culinary identity. Visual and verbal cues are strategically crafted, using vivid descriptions to invoke imagination, desire, and emotional anticipation in the marketing collateral.<sup>168</sup> Given these considerations, the marketing strategies focused on the culinary offer should stimulate

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<sup>166</sup> Björk, P., & Kauppinen-Räsänen, H. (2016). Local food\_ a source for destination attraction. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(1), 177-194.

<sup>167</sup> Kivela, J., & Crofts, J. C. (2006). Tourism and gastronomy: Gastronomy's influence on how tourists experience a destination. *Journal of hospitality & tourism research*, 30(3), 354-377

<sup>168</sup> Silkes, C. A., Cai, L. A., & Lehto, X. Y. (2013). Marketing to the culinary tourist. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(4), 335-349

sensory pleasures by leveraging the cultural depth and emotional resonance of the destination's food.

Destination image plays an indispensable role in the landscape of destination marketing. Recognized as a significant factor influencing travel behavior, the destination image directly impacts destination selection, the intention to revisit, and overall satisfaction with a destination experience. At the core of destination marketing is the need to comprehend and strategically shape the image that potential travelers will form in their minds. When potential travelers perceive a destination as having a vibrant and rich culinary scene, it can markedly influence their decision to visit that place. This is particularly true for destinations that strive for a favorable culinary image to entice gastronomy enthusiasts. The satisfaction derived from a travel experience often depends on the initial image held by the tourist before the visit. Even if the actual experiences differ from this preconceived image, individuals tend to seek out moments that affirm their prior beliefs, a phenomenon attributed to the confirmation bias theory.<sup>169</sup> This underscores the importance of managing destination marketing strategies to create an authentic and positive pre-visit image that aligns with what the tourist will experience.

The emotional aspects of food experiences play a crucial role in attracting people to a destination and are central to its branding strategy. Food is inherently linked to emotions, traditions, and culture, making it a key element in shaping the emotional appeal of a destination's brand. Food experiences have the power to invoke a multitude of emotions which play a crucial role in shaping a traveler's perception of a destination. The affective elements—the feeling of warmth as one tastes a local delicacy, the joy of sharing a meal with newfound friends, the nostalgia evoked by flavors reminiscent of childhood—contribute significantly to the satisfaction and memories associated with a visit. These aspects of food experiences reinforce the emotional bonds tourists develop with a place, often motivating them to share these experiences via social networking or recommending the destination to others. Gastronomic cues are tangible attributes that support the cognitive recognition of a destination's food offerings but also act as emotional triggers. These cues, which include descriptions of taste, the ambience of dining venues, and the

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<sup>169</sup> Mohamed, M. E., Lehto, X., Hewedi, M., & Behnke, C. A. (2021). Naïve destination food images: Exploring the food images of non-visitors. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 47, 93-103

cultural significance of local cuisine, are vital components of marketing materials. Marketers utilize vivid imagery to portray the destination's culinary landscape, knowing that these sensory and emotional appeals can draw in the gastronomically curious traveler. Strategic use of gastronomic cues in marketing endeavors can lead to the development of a strong and favorable destination image. For instance, evocative words and images can elicit sensory responses, make the intangible tangible, and transport potential tourists to the destination in their imagination before they even begin their journey.<sup>170</sup> To effectively attract culinary tourists, destinations display their food scene as a reflection of their cultural identity, underscoring the notion that to savor the cuisine is to engage with the place and its people. Hence, food tourism marketing strategies are tailored to emphasize the enjoyment and distinctive experiences that food can deliver, experiences that have the potential to be the most memorable aspects of a trip.

Cuisine, as a central element of cultural expression and as a profound indication of the charm of a destination, has a significant influence on the competitiveness of the destination. This remains ever so pertinent in the overlapping fields of tourism and gastronomy, where the appeal of local culinary delights is about the identity, history, and authenticity they embody. The influence of a destination's cuisine on its attractiveness has many facets. It can act as a primary motivator for visitation, a component of the broader tourism product, a unique cultural experience, and a reflection of the destination's food festivals and gastronomic renown.<sup>171</sup> The local cuisine is a symbol of differentiation and regional character, fundamental to the image of a destination and competitive advantage. The competitive positioning of a destination in the tourism market can be significantly strengthened by showing its gastronomy, not only through the food itself, but also through a convincing narrative that accentuates the cultural heritage and traditions of the region. Gastronomic expressions provide a potent vehicle through which destinations can convey their uniqueness and appeal to tourists' emotions, persuading them of an authentic experience that goes beyond the standard offers. Indeed, the promotion of a location through its gastronomy must function by presenting a clear differentiation of its culinary resources. Having recognizable and appealing local cuisine alongside a variety and

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<sup>170</sup> Silkes, C. A., Cai, L. A., & Lehto, X. Y. (2013). Marketing to the culinary tourist. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(4), 335-349

<sup>171</sup> Jiménez-Beltrán, F. J., López-Guzmán, T., & González Santa Cruz, F. (2016). Analysis of the relationship between tourism and food culture. *Sustainability*, 8(5), 418.

quantity of dining establishments enriches the traveler's experience, allowing for a hands-on interaction with the cultural fabric of the destination through its food. This ensures that gastronomy offers a deeply ingrained cultural and emotional experience that is unique to the destination. To optimize the use of cuisine as a form of destination competitiveness, the approach must be comprehensive. It should involve local ingredients, showcase culinary skills, involve participatory experiences at food festivals and market local dishes as an indispensable part of the cultural patrimony.<sup>172</sup> By incorporating these elements, destinations can leverage their unique gastronomic assets to stand out in the global tourism marketplace.

### **2.2.2 Leveraging local food in place branding**

In the evolving landscape of travel and gastronomy, local food has become a symbol of cultural pride and prosperity. As travelers increasingly seek genuine experiences that reflect a destination's traditional lifestyle, local food becomes central to delivering this authenticity. Highlighting local cuisine in place branding is crucial, as it allows destinations to distinguish themselves in a crowded global marketplace while fostering a sustainable alliance between tourism and local culture.<sup>173</sup> Some places, marked almost entirely by their characteristic dishes, show how gastronomy can guide alone the image and economic vitality of a place. For instance, cities such as Naples renowned for its iconic pizza, exemplify this phenomenon. Such is the potential of local food that can drive branding campaigns, positioning these destinations as epitomes of culinary excellence on the global scene. Meanwhile, in other localities where attractions are multifold, food complements the existing allure. Cities such as Paris are known for their culture, fashion, and art, but the culinary scene with its cafes and patisseries forms an integral, albeit complementary, part of the experience. In both cases, whether as the star or the supporting actor, local food enhances the narrative by adding layers of depth to the place branding strategy.<sup>174</sup> Moreover, local food offers myriad business opportunities for a spectrum of market players – from farmhouse kitchens and street food vendors to upscale

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<sup>172</sup> Silkes, C. A., Cai, L. A., & Lehto, X. Y. (2013). Marketing to the culinary tourist. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(4), 335-349

<sup>173</sup> Askegaard, S., & Kjeldgaard, D. (2007). Here, there, and everywhere: place branding and gastronomical globalization in a macromarketing perspective. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 27(2), 138-147.

<sup>174</sup> Berg, P. O., & Sevón, G. (2014). Food-branding places—A sensory perspective. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 10, 289-304.



dining and food festivals. Each entity contributes to the local economy and becomes a stakeholder in preserving the culinary heritage and, by extension, the destination's brand.<sup>175</sup>

In the vortex of globalization, there is a burgeoning trend wherein consumers are increasingly gravitating towards local food, creating a robust ecosystem that weaves together farms, local markets, stores, and even the modern-day supermarkets. This shift towards local food is reflective of contemporary consumer interests that are rooted in the search for quality, authenticity, and sustainability. Local markets have always been important places where farmers connect directly with buyers, offering a hands-on experience of the region's agriculture.<sup>176</sup> Here, the food tells the story of the community's farming methods, seasonal changes, and cultural heritage. The authenticity of these interactions is unparalleled, forming the cornerstone of community development strategies and enabling the tangible connection between the consumer and the source of their food. This experience is also artistically rendered in the design of some supermarkets which have begun to adopt features reminiscent of traditional food markets. They introduce a form of culinary infrastructure that creates value and meaning around food by fostering an environment where shopping is transactional, as well as, experiential. In doing so, supermarkets are redefining their role in the community, becoming spaces of culinary exploration and social interaction, and acting as new food authorities.<sup>177</sup> The increasing number of consumers turning towards locality in their dietary choices is not only observed in the retail sector but is also manifest in the transformation of culinary landscapes. Restaurants, are integrating local produce into their menus, thereby enhancing the flavor profile, as well as, echoing the community's heritage and biodiversity.<sup>178</sup> This contemporary consumer interest in local food has implications beyond personal health and indulgence. It underscores a collective yearning for sustainability, traceability, and community empowerment. The drive for local food

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<sup>175</sup> Lee, A. H. (2012). The Creative Food Economy and Culinary Tourism through Place Branding: Terroir into a Creative and Environmentally Friendly Taste of a Place.

<sup>176</sup> Green, G. P., & Dougherty, M. L. (2008). Localizing linkages for food and tourism: Culinary tourism as a community development strategy. *Community Development*, 39(3), 148-158.

<sup>177</sup> Dixon, J. (2007). Supermarkets as new food authorities. In *Supermarkets and agri-food supply chains: Transformations in the production and consumption of foods*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

<sup>178</sup> Ayala, G. X., Mueller, K., Lopez-Madurga, E., Campbell, N. R., & Elder, J. P. (2005). Restaurant and food shopping selections among Latino women in Southern California. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 105(1), 38-45.

resonates well with contemporary consumer interests, which have noticeably shifted towards the sustainable, the organic, and the indigenous. Farm-to-table programs, local food markets, and culinary tours have become crucial components of the tourism and hospitality sectors. By incorporating local foodways into their branding, restaurants, hotels, and entire regions can leverage this growing appetite for authentic local experiences.<sup>179</sup>

### **2.2.3 Promotion of culinary tourism through social media**

The narrative of a destination's culinary offerings can be vividly and effectively illustrated through the strategic use of social media. One of the innovative approaches to destination promotion, in this context, is through the organization of social sharing and contests. Engaging previous travelers to share visual depictions of their food experiences is a dynamic marketing strategy that humanizes a destination and creates community around its culinary heritage. When travelers share their food experiences online, destinations can use that content to attract more tourists. User-generated photos and stories serve as authentic endorsements, giving potential visitors a real taste of what to expect. Thematic contests can be particularly relevant in this engagement process. Participants could be prompted to use destination-specific hashtags, which further enhances the visibility and searchability of this content on social media. Moreover, contests where people vote on their favorite photos involve future tourists in experiencing the destination. It is an indirect yet powerful form of engagement that fosters a sense of belonging and anticipation. By voting on their favorite images or stories, these potential visitors are active participants in the storytelling of the destination's culinary richness.<sup>180</sup> Community building and online engagement are critical, and this goes beyond the temporary excitement of a contest. It implies the cultivation of an ongoing dialog between the destination and its admirers; a dialog that can be harnessed to ensure that each post and shared image becomes a building block of the destination's living digital mosaic.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Lai, M. Y., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Wang, Y. (2019). Food and cuisine image in destination branding: Toward a conceptual model. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 19(2), 238-251.

<sup>180</sup> McCandlish, A., & McPherson, G. (2021). Promoting tangible and intangible hidden cultural heritage: local communities influencing civic decision-making and international cultural policy. *International journal of cultural policy*, 27(5), 683-698.

<sup>181</sup> Ginzarly, M., & Teller, J. (2021). Online communities and their contribution to local heritage knowledge. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 11(4), 361-380.

Upon their return home, travelers often revisit their journey through the stories they share online, particularly their gastronomic adventures. Destinations, conscious of the value this phenomenon carries, have a golden opportunity to sustain a connection with their visitors by encouraging this post-travel engagement. By fostering an environment that incentivizes the sharing of food-related content, destinations can effectively perpetuate the travel experience and create a community of brand ambassadors. The enjoyment of local cuisines does not end when the trip does; it is relived and propagated in digital spheres as travelers recount their savory stories, post mouth-watering images, and share dining experiences that have the power to inspire future journeys. To capitalize on this, destinations need to integrate systems that facilitate easy sharing and storytelling. These could take the form of user-friendly digital platforms, engagement campaigns, or social media challenges that motivate tourists to post their culinary experiences post-trip. Encouraging this behavior contributes to the destination's image and significantly affect tourists' intentions to revisit and engage in positive word-of-mouth behavior, such as blogging or posting reviews.<sup>182</sup> This contemporary form of storytelling effectively becomes a promotional means for restaurant, hotel, and destination branding. It increases the organic reach and reinforces the decision-making process of prospective tourists, who often rely on peer recommendations when planning their travels.<sup>183</sup> Post-travel engagement systems and campaigns can anchor a sense of belonging to a community of those who have shared similar gastronomic pleasures. By engaging in these digital conversations, travelers affirm their place within a narrative that extends beyond their individual experience, contributing to a collective memory associated with the destination. Therefore, destinations would do well to recognize and harness the power of post-travel food sharing. It is a form of engagement that offers a myriad of benefits, including the promotion of repeat visitation and the creation of genuine brand advocates. This post-travel dialogue, if properly encouraged and integrated into marketing efforts, can reinforce the emotional bonds between the traveler and the destination, ultimately contributing to a sustained interest and a progressive accumulation of cultural prestige.

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<sup>182</sup> Tussyadiah, I. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2009). Mediating tourist experiences: Access to places via shared videos. *Annals of tourism research*, 36(1), 24-40.

<sup>183</sup> Ab Karim, S., & Chi, C. G. Q. (2010). Culinary tourism as a destination attraction: An empirical examination of destinations' food image. *Journal of hospitality marketing & management*, 19(6), 531-555

The practice of sharing food experiences online offers a unique opportunity for authentic storytelling and cultural education. It forms a symbiotic relationship between travelers and destination marketers, effectively serving as a conduit for the exchange of cultural narratives and the enrichment of the collective understanding of local heritage and customs. Food consumption, in this light, is an expressive form of communication, a means of sharing cultural experience, status, cultural identity, and communicating. The food experiences shared by travelers are reflections of the destination's authentic narrative, offering an organic yet powerful marketing vector. These shared moments can enhance the destination image, often becoming the most memorable aspect of one's travel. The representations shared by travelers, filled with emotional connections and sensory memories, can be profound. They encapsulate the visit's emotional essence—not just "what" was eaten but "how" the dining experience made them feel. The sharing process positions the cuisine as crucial in shaping the destination's identity, differentiating its cultural heritage, and promoting its unique lifestyle.<sup>184</sup> Destination marketers, conscious of the power behind these gastronomic narratives, should harness travelers' sharing behaviors by recognizing the psychological and emotional motives that inspire them to post their gastronomic discoveries online. Leveraging the power of social platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest, tourist destinations have the potential to create an image that resonates with the personal desires and preferences of travelers, thus encouraging not only immediate interest but also long-term loyalty to their places. By strategically promoting this digital narrative, destination marketers can create a vibrant online community, build an authentic connection with a global audience, and tap into the rapidly growing market of culinary tourism.<sup>185</sup>

One of the most potent elements of social media is its ability to foster community through shared culinary experiences. Online communities often exchange extraordinary restaurant experiences, from fine dining to unique local hideaways, thereby creating a halo of prestige or authenticity around these eateries and, by extension, the destination itself.<sup>186</sup> Moreover, food sharing initiatives have shown that cooking and eating together,

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<sup>184</sup> Mohamed, M. E., Lehto, X., Hewedi, M., & Behnke, C. A. (2021). Naïve destination food images: Exploring the food images of non-visitors. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 47, 93-103

<sup>185</sup> Hosany, S., & Gilbert, D. (2010). Measuring tourists' emotional experiences toward hedonic holiday destinations. *Journal of travel research*, 49(4), 513-526.

<sup>186</sup> Watson, P., Morgan, M., & Hemmington, N. (2008). Online communities and the sharing of extraordinary restaurant experiences. *Journal of Foodservice*, 19(6), 289-302.

even in a digital space, can serve as collective forms of encounter, transcending physical borders and nurturing communal ties.<sup>187</sup> Such is the potential for transformation that social media can also be a driving force for community development. Gastronomic experiences shared online can propel the development of community-based culinary tourism destinations, highlighting the connection between culinary tourism and community upliftment.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, social media's role in destination attraction extends to shaping culinary journeys and expanding the frontiers of traditional cuisines. It effectively creates 'foodscapes' where territorial borders dissolve, allowing for the cross-cultural exchange of cuisines and cooking methods. Destinations, recognizing the importance of these shared narratives, can leverage social media to create and distribute content that resonates with these unexpected brand ambassadors—travelers. Engaging with audiences, encouraging the sharing of authentic stories, and showcasing the unique elements of a place become strategic pillars in a social media marketing strategy.

### **2.3 Sustainable tourism and food**

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that is managed in such a way that it remains viable over an indefinite period, does not degrade or alter the environment in any unacceptable way, and maintains a harmonious relationship with local cultures and social structures. Therefore, it is the delivery of a comprehensive tourism experience that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.<sup>189</sup> The realm of sustainable tourism is increasingly recognizing the crucial role of local food in enhancing visitor experiences and ensuring environmental stewardship. Central to this trend is the pursuit of authentic culinary experiences that truly represent the local culture, providing visitors with profound and immersive encounters that are closely connected to the traditions and community life of the place they are visiting. Tourists' perception of authenticity, forged by genuine ingredients, traditional recipes, and the atmospheres in which they are shared, is fundamental to their satisfaction and to fostering a meaningful

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<sup>187</sup> Marovelli, B. (2019). Cooking and eating together in London: Food sharing initiatives as collective spaces of encounter. *Geoforum*, 99, 190-201.

<sup>188</sup> Abarca, M. E. (2021). Commensality: Networks of personal, family, and community social transformation. *The Sociological Review*, 69(3), 664-680.

<sup>189</sup> Butler, R. W. (1999). Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review. *Tourism geographies*, 1(1), 7-25.

connection with the locale. Local food also embodies a form of cultural exchange that extends beyond the plate, offering insights into the daily lives, traditions, and values of a region. It is this kind of interaction that enriches a traveler's experience, promoting a holistic view of the destination's authenticity and nurturing loyalty among visitors. But authentic experiences vary, with tourists finding value in everything from complete cultural immersion to comfortably staged settings that still offer a taste of the local gastronomy. This diversity in desire highlights the importance of understanding different visitor profiles to tailor sustainable tourism offerings accordingly.

The Slow Food movement is closely connected to sustainable tourism, promoting environmental, economic, and cultural sustainability by supporting local food consumption and preserving agricultural traditions. Stakeholders and destinations are taking note of how aligning with Slow Food principles can bolster destination attractiveness while also serving economic and educational roles. This global appreciation for local, slow, and authentic food experiences reflects broader consumer trends towards environmental consciousness and ethical consumption. It becomes clear that the promotion of local food is not a fleeting trend but a robust pillar in the foundation of sustainable tourism. The cultural exchange, educational opportunities, and the emotional and economic impacts are profound, marking local gastronomy as a vital component in the crafting of unique, memorable, and sustainable travel experiences.

### **2.3.1 Local food and perceived authenticity**

Authenticity in local food is a multifaceted concept that is often defined by attributes such as genuineness, traditional practices, origin, and the unique characteristics that connect food to a particular place or community. It signifies a return to the roots of culinary traditions, embodying the distinctive flavors, preparation methods, and the cultural narratives tied to a specific locale. This authenticity is not just a matter of ingredients being sourced locally; it extends to the way food is produced, processed, and presented, aligning with traditional methods and conveying a sense of the region's history and identity. Consumers often seek out authentic local food as a means to connect with the local culture, to experience its history and traditions in a tangible form.<sup>190</sup> Tourists

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<sup>190</sup> Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.

naturally seek authenticity, leading them to explore a place through its local food. In the era of postmodern tourism, the authenticity of an object or experience, such as food, cannot be viewed as a fixed attribute but rather as something that is subjectively construed by each individual. However, the inherent value of local food does not diminish; instead, it shifts to become a symbol of the tourist's quest for personal authenticity, shaping their gastronomic journey. Subsequently, the search for authentic experiences often leads tourists to local foods and drinks, which serve to enable host communities to capitalize on visitors' desire for an authentic connection to the place and culture of their destination. Engaging in local food consumption becomes a comprehensive cultural exchange that provides insight into regional traditions, everyday life, and genuine experiences. It is this multifaceted integration that beckons tourists to return, fostering a reciprocal relationship that supports the sustainable growth of the tourism industry by leveraging the sensory and cultural exploration provided by local cuisine. The concept of authenticity is closely tied to consumer perceptions of quality and loyalty towards local food. When consumers perceive local food as authentic, they are more likely to appreciate its quality and form a loyal, sustainable relationship with the local produce.<sup>191</sup>

Emphasizing quality and authenticity in local food can heighten the satisfaction derived from a tourism experience, leading to greater tourist loyalty. When tourists find the food quality to meet or exceed their expectations, incorporating freshness, local ingredients, and traditional cooking methods, satisfaction is likely amplified.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, in traditional restaurants, an establishment's ability to offer a genuine representation of its cultural context through cuisine can bind a visitor's loyalty to the destination.<sup>193</sup> For local businesses and tourism operators, therefore, the equation is clear: an investment in the authenticity and quality of their culinary offerings is also an investment in building a loyal customer base that values the unique flavors indicative of their locale.

When tourists pursue experiential authenticity, they are often engaged in a cultural phenomenon that integrates them into the local spirit. This can involve dining at

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<sup>191</sup> Zhang, T., Chen, J., & Hu, B. (2019). Authenticity, quality, and loyalty: Local food and sustainable tourism experience. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3437.

<sup>192</sup> Mora, D., Solano-Sanchez, M. A., Lopez-Guzman, T., & Moral-Cuadra, S. (2021). Gastronomic experiences as a key element in the development of a tourist destination. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 25, 100405.

<sup>193</sup> Hernández-Rojas, R. D., & Huete Alcocer, N. (2021). The role of traditional restaurants in tourist destination loyalty. *Plos one*, 16(6), e0253088.

establishments where the authentic manner of cooking, local flavors, ingredients, and traditional practices are in full display, constituting an integral part of the gastronomic adventure. On the other side of the spectrum is staged authenticity, where tourists may find comfort and enjoyment in localized versions of food that are adapted to suit their palate, presented in settings that combine a mix of authentic elements with familiar service and environmental attributes. Authenticity can therefore also be staged and made to be perceived by tourists as truly authentic. Perceived authenticity is often shaped by the narrative presented to consumers, such as the story of the food's origins, preparation methods, and the people behind it. Perceived authenticity may not always require objective authenticity if the consumer's perception is that the product or experience feels genuine or aligns with their expectations about what is considered authentic.<sup>194</sup> Local foods presented within the context of a tourism experience may appear 'authentic' to visitors due to the way they are marketed and integrated into the tourism narrative, even if they might be adapted or modified to suit broader tastes. The perception of authenticity can be heightened by the use of local ingredients or traditional names, engaging stories about the food's origins, or even the physical setting in which the food is consumed. On the one hand, then, there is objective authenticity, which is an inherent quality of the food product or experience. It involves genuine ingredients, traditional preparation methods, and the cultural narratives that are intrinsic to the place of origin.<sup>195</sup> On the other hand, perceived authenticity is a subjective interpretation of consumers, influenced by their individual experiences, expectations, cultural background, personal beliefs, and their responses to various clues that may trigger affective reactions. The perception of authenticity can be as powerful as real authenticity in influencing consumer preference and purchase intentions.<sup>196</sup>

Local foods serve as an authentic signifier of the local culture, cementing their vital role as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism. Within sustainable tourism, the focus is on experiences that are environmentally responsible, economically beneficial for the local community, and culturally respectful and enriching for the visitor. Local food perfectly

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<sup>194</sup> Youn, H., & Kim, J. H. (2017). Effects of ingredients, names and stories about food origins on perceived authenticity and purchase intentions. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 63, 11-21.

<sup>195</sup> Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.

<sup>196</sup> Chousou, C., & Mattas, K. (2021). Assessing consumer attitudes and perceptions towards food authenticity. *British food journal*, 123(5), 1947-1961.



encapsulates these objectives by offering an authentic signifier of place and practice that is often the highlight of a tourist experience.<sup>197</sup> Sustainable culinary tourism, incorporating the practices and ethos of sustainability, further enhances the depth of cultural exchange. It acknowledges the environmental impact of tourism and seeks to mitigate it by promoting local food traditions that are in harmony with the environment.<sup>198</sup> This sustainable approach is not just a trend but a vital aspect of contemporary food tourism that resonates with tourists' growing environmental consciousness. Educational strategies in culinary tourism also play a critical role in deepening tourists' appreciation of local food cultures. Cooking classes and workshops that focus on local cuisines teach culinary skills at the same time educating tourists about the sustainable practices and cultural significance of the food they are preparing. This learning experience is essential as it connects local food knowledge with the tourist experience in a practical way. The social and cultural impacts of mass tourism can be tempered through sustainable food tourism that focuses on promoting the territory through immersive experiences like cooking classes, thereby supporting sustainable tourism development.<sup>199</sup>

### **2.3.2 The role of the "Slow Food" movement**

The Slow Food movement is an organization and philosophy that promotes local food and traditional cooking. It stands as a counter to the globalization of agricultural products and fast-food culture. The movement advocates for the preservation of local ecosystems and food traditions, emphasizing the importance of knowing how food is sourced, how it is grown, and how it is prepared. It embraces a comprehensive approach to food that cherishes cultural heritage, respects seasonal rhythms, and supports biodiversity.<sup>200</sup> At its core, Slow Food espouses a "good, clean, and fair" approach to food. "Good" refers to the quality and flavors of food, "clean" highlights the sustainable nature of the food production cycle, and "fair" indicates an ethical commitment to equitable treatment for all involved in

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<sup>197</sup> Zhang, T., Chen, J., & Hu, B. (2019). Authenticity, quality, and loyalty: Local food and sustainable tourism experience. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3437.

<sup>198</sup> Leer, J. (2020). Designing sustainable food experiences: Rethinking sustainable food tourism. *International Journal of Food Design*, 5(1-2), 65-82.

<sup>199</sup> Bardolet-Puigdollers, M., & Fusté-Forné, F. (2023). A Sustainable Future for Food Tourism: Promoting the Territory through Cooking Classes. *Gastronomy*, 1(1), 32-43.

<sup>200</sup> Chrzan, J. (2004). Slow food: What, why, and to where?. *Food, Culture & Society*, 7(2), 117-132.

the food supply chain, from producers to consumers.<sup>201</sup> This trinity seeks to foster a food system that is conscientious about health, community, and environment. The integration of Slow Food principles with sustainable tourism offers a confluence of values that promises a richer, more meaningful travel experience while simultaneously safeguarding the environmental, cultural, and economic fabrics of tourist destinations. The principles of the Slow Food movement—celebrating local cuisine, encouraging mindful eating, and supporting sustainable farming—harmonizes with the objectives of sustainable tourism, which aims to minimize tourism's negative impacts and maximize its benefits to local communities and environments. At the core of the Slow Food movement is the belief that food should be produced and consumed in a way that maintains a respect for the environment, and honors the cultural traditions that food is rooted in. This resonates deeply with the pillars of sustainable tourism, which emphasize the need for environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic viability for local communities. When tourists engage in Slow Food experiences at their travel destinations, they participate in a cultural exchange that offers them a unique and authentic sense of place, enriching their travel and fostering a genuine connection with the destination and its inhabitants. Moreover, by consuming local specialties, tourists support the local economy. Money spent on local food directly benefits farmers, producers, and restaurateurs, keeping the economic benefits within the community. This financial flow contributes to the viability of local agricultural practices that are environmentally sustainable and culturally significant. It transforms rural areas into appealing destinations, making them more attractive and desirable for travelers looking for unique experiences. The Slow Food movement advocates for biodiversity, promoting the consumption of heirloom varieties and locally sourced, seasonal produce. This biodiversity is essential to sustainable tourism as it helps maintain the balance of ecosystems and provides authenticity in the culinary experiences of a region. The diversity of ingredients and traditional cooking practices symbolize the essence of the destination, acting as a form of edible heritage. Furthermore, by aligning with the principles of Slow Food, tourist destinations commit to protecting their culinary and agricultural traditions, which is an essential aspect of cultural sustainability. These

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<sup>201</sup> Askin Uzel, R. (2020). Slow Food Movement and Sustainability. *Encyclopedia of Sustainable Management*, 1-13.

traditions contribute to a sense of identity and continuity, qualities that are often sought after by tourists seeking an escape from the homogenized global food system. Sustainable tourism can also benefit from the educational aspects of the Slow Food movement. Tourists learn about the provenance of their food, the traditional methods used to prepare it, and the stories behind specific dishes. This form of education links cultural heritage to culinary pleasure, fostering a greater appreciation of local food systems and deeper respect for the communities and ecosystems that support them. The Slow Food movement's emphasis on slow, locally sourced, and high-quality dining experiences encourages tourists to step out of their fast-paced lives, fostering a space for relaxation and reflection. This approach to travel promotes a form of gastronomic mindfulness that lies at the heart of sustainable travel practices. In embracing the Slow Food principles, destinations are presented with the opportunity to redesign their tourism strategies to spotlight the intrinsic value of the local terroir.<sup>202</sup>

As previously mentioned, Slow food emphasizes the importance of preserving local culinary traditions, supporting regional farmers, and enjoying meals as an event that goes beyond mere consumption. Slow tourism aligns with these principles by encouraging travelers to take the time to immerse themselves in the local culture, engage with the community, and experience a place rather than merely visit it.<sup>203</sup> This synergy presents an intriguing remedy to the adversities of overtourism, a phenomenon characterized by an excessive number of visitors that exceeds the physical, ecological, social, and psychological capacity thresholds of the destination, leading to a situation where the quality of life of residents is diminished, the visitor experience degrades, and negative impacts on the destination are observed.<sup>204</sup> Adopting slow food and slow tourism practices in cities overwhelmed by daily tourist crowds, such as Venice, could offer several benefits. Firstly, it could enhance the quality of the tourist experience. Visitors who stay longer may gain a more nuanced understanding of the city life, history, and culture. This immersion can foster a greater respect for the local environment and heritage, potentially transforming tourist behavior towards more sustainable practices. Secondly, slow tourism could

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<sup>202</sup> Zhang, T., Chen, J., & Hu, B. (2019). Authenticity, quality, and loyalty\_ Local food and sustainable tourism experience. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3437.

<sup>203</sup> Moira, P., Mylonopoulos, D., & Kondoudaki, A. (2017). The application of slow movement to tourism: is slow tourism a new paradigm?. *Journal of Tourism and Leisure Studies*, 2(2), 1.

<sup>204</sup> Perkumienė, D., & Pranskūnienė, R. (2019). Overtourism: Between the right to travel and residents' rights. *Sustainability*, 11(7), 2138.

alleviate the ecological and social pressures of overtourism. By dispersing tourists throughout the year and encouraging longer stays, it could help mitigate the issue of high visitor turnover and enable a more even distribution of tourism's economic benefits.<sup>205</sup> For local communities, slow food and slow tourism can act as a shield against the commercialization of their culture and cuisine. By prioritizing local products and experiences, these movements challenge the homogenization of global tourism and offer an economic model that benefits local artisans, farmers, and small business owners.<sup>206</sup> The perception and engagement of stakeholders—ranging from local communities and farmers to tourism operators and government bodies—are critical in realizing the potential of the Slow Food movement within sustainable tourism development. By adopting Slow Food principles, stakeholders recognize they are fostering an environment that underscores the importance of local traditions, biodiversity, and community resilience. This, in turn, facilitates the development of tourism experiences that are deeply rooted in the place and its people, offering a step into the lived reality of a locale.<sup>207</sup> Educational institutions have a key role as stakeholders in this development. By creating new curricula and programs focused on sustainable food systems and the nexus with tourism, they could equip future entrepreneurs and workers with the knowledge and skills needed to innovate this sector, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Slow Food principles among the younger generation.<sup>208</sup> Whereas, collaboration between local authorities, and restaurants, farmers and food producers could involve the development of food trails, cooking classes, or farm visits where the story of the local cuisine is told through its flavors, ingredients, and the hands that craft it.<sup>209</sup> This warrants a multidisciplinary approach, where insights from agricultural science, culinary arts, cultural studies, and sustainability practices are synergized. All stakeholders can benefit significantly from an in-depth understanding of Slow Food principles, including marketers

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<sup>205</sup> Bertocchi, D., & Visentin, F. (2019). "The overwhelmed city": Physical and social over-capacities of global tourism in Venice. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 6937.

<sup>206</sup> Salerno, G. M. (2022). Touristification and displacement. The long-standing production of Venice as a tourist attraction. *City*, 26(2-3), 519-541.

<sup>207</sup> Putra, M. K. (2019). Gastronomy tourism: local food and sustainable tourism experience—case study Cirebon. In *Proceedings of the 1st NHI Tourism Forum—Enhancing Innovation in Gastronomic for Millennials; SCITEPRESS—Science and Technology Publications: Bandung, Indonesia* (pp. 19-29).

<sup>208</sup> Leer, J. (2020). Designing sustainable food experiences: Rethinking sustainable food tourism. *International Journal of Food Design*, 5(1-2), 65-82.

<sup>209</sup> H. Jung, T., M. Ineson, E., & Miller, A. (2014). The Slow Food Movement and sustainable tourism development: a case study of Mold, Wales. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 8(4), 432-445.

within the travel and food sectors. They could benefit by crafting compelling storytelling that resonates with the values and aspirations of modern travelers. This narrative marketing could effectively convey the essence of the Slow Food movement, inspiring tourists to actively seek out destinations that offer Slow Food experiences, emphasizing the value of slowing down and enjoying local food traditions and culture. The appeal of living life at a more relaxed pace, of engaging with local food culture that tells the story of a region, is a magnet for tourists seeking depth in their travel experiences.<sup>210</sup>

The Slow Food Movement's commitment to consumer education and the protection of heritage is a cornerstone of its philosophy, emphasizing the importance of traditional and local foods in the cultural fabric of societies. Important in this educational pursuit is the movement's aim to enlighten consumers about the provenance of their food, the methods of its production, and the story that each dish carries with it. This emphasis on education is a direct response to a growing consumer trend that favors natural farming and agricultural practices, mirroring increasing concerns about environmental stewardship, ethical food production, health, and social well-being. Education is a powerful tool that the Slow Food Movement wields to combat the homogeneous nature of industrialized food systems. By informing consumers, the Movement engenders a knowledgeable base of individuals who understand the intrinsic value of what they consume and appreciate the broader implications of their dietary choices. These individuals, influenced by environmental, ethical, social, and health concerns, are turning towards more sustainable modes of consumption. By opting for local foods, there is a dual satisfaction gained: the moral contentment of making ethical choices and the distinct pleasure derived from eating foods that are full of flavor and narrative. Consumer demands, influenced by concerns around the environment, ethics, social welfare, and health, have gradually swayed towards the processes of natural farming and sustainable agriculture promoted by Slow Food. This is reflected in the popularity of local foods initiatives, stemming from both the desire for better health outcomes and from a commitment to supporting practices that have a minimum impact on the environment and maximize social good. Moreover, by reconnecting consumers with their food sources—such as through farm visits or 'meet-your-farmer' markets—the Slow Food Movement fosters a rekindled

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<sup>210</sup> Chrzan, J. (2004). Slow food: What, why, and to where?. *Food, Culture & Society*, 7(2), 117-132.

respect for the people behind the produce, the landscapes that yield harvest, and the ancestral knowledge that informs farming practices today. Through such connections, consumers gain an understanding that their food choices directly contribute to the conservation of "traditional" rural landscapes and the fortification of the local economy. In tying together the enjoyment of food with moral and ethical considerations, and anchoring them in the importance of heritage, the Slow Food Movement aligns itself with what may be considered a comprehensive approach to sustainability. This strategy encompasses the biodiversity of our planet, the well-being of its inhabitants, and the economic vitality of its communities, advocating for a food system that is congruently good, clean, and fair.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.

## CHAPTER III

### **The portrayal of Venetian cuisine by diverse entities within the framework of optimal distinctiveness**

This chapter delves into Venetian culinary traditions, exploring their history, roots, and evolution over time. It provides an overview of traditional Venetian dishes, explaining how food is deeply intertwined with Venetian culture, including its rituals and festivals. Tradition thrives on innovation, encompassing sustainability and leading to the sophisticated reinterpretation of classic dishes. The chapter underscores the importance of preserving these traditions as a significant cultural heritage.

Additionally, the chapter offers an in-depth empirical investigation into the Venetian culinary landscape as represented by various restaurants and eateries. The methodology involves a visual analysis of images provided by different types of restaurants, aiming to discern the concepts of tradition and authenticity these establishments embody, how they portray Venetian culture, and how they integrate modern elements alongside traditional ones. This visual analysis is presented within the framework of optimal distinctiveness.

The research seeks to understand how different types of restaurants position themselves within the Venetian context, identifying commonalities and outliers in their representation of Venetian cuisine.

#### **3.1 Overview of Venice's culinary heritage**

Venice boasts a culinary identity which reflects its storied past as a thriving mercantile republic. The city's cuisine is characterized by ingredients and culinary traditions traded along its expansive routes from the East and the Mediterranean, resulting in a food culture rife with an exotic array of spices and varied culinary techniques. At the heart of Venetian cuisine are the local ingredients that infuse the city's gastronomy with lively flavors. Seafood dominates the scene, with dishes such as "Sarade in Saor" and "Risotto al Nero di Seppia" showcasing the city's culinary prowess and maritime heritage. The daily life of Venice unveils a culinary culture intricately intertwined with its social structure. "Cicchetti," akin to Spanish tapas, is integral to the Venetian way of life, facilitating social communion in the city's "bacari," traditional taverns that are hotspots for casual dining and lively conversation. The city's dining rituals extend to the cherished aperitif hour and

a deeply ingrained coffee culture, encapsulating the essence of Venetian leisure and conviviality. Commemorative rituals and spirited festivities further tinge Venetian cuisine with color and context. Seasonal celebrations such as the Festa del Redentore and Carnival bear their unique culinary customs, imprinting the calendar year with distinct flavors associated with each event. Yet, amidst the romance of tradition lies a dynamic progression. Venetian culinary practices have evolved over time, blending traditional recipes with modern interpretations and innovative techniques. Today, one witnesses a gastronomic renaissance where chefs and culinary artisans blend traditional foundations with modern sensibilities, taking Venetian cuisine into a new age while still honoring its historical context. The intersection of tourism and gastronomy has significantly influenced Venice's culinary landscape. As the city grapples with the ebb and flow of global visitors, efforts to maintain the authenticity of Venetian cuisine are paramount, with local chefs and food festivals playing a pivotal role in upholding traditional culinary practices against the tide of commercialization. Moreover, contemporary concerns of sustainability and conservation have entered the culinary dialogue. The sustainability of the lagoon fishery and the preservation of customary fishing methods are subjects of growing importance, sparking initiatives that promote local and seasonal consumption practices. This not only supports the ecological balance of Venice's waterways but also fortifies the very essence and authenticity of its food culture.

### **3.1.1 Significance of food in Venice's cultural identity**

Venice, renowned as the Serenissima, has long stood as a paragon of cultural fusion, with its reputation as a mercantile republic heavily influencing its culinary landscape. The culinary customs of Venice, which include adaptations of recipes from diverse geographies, reflect this blend of tradition and economic flourish. The historical context becomes crucial to understanding why certain products, such as spices prevalent in Venetian recipes, are considered typical and have become emblematic of the local cuisine's distinctiveness. Historical exchanges, including those propagated by Venice's mercantile activities, have sculpted culinary customs along the storied Mediterranean coast. The introduction and incorporation of new ingredients, notably spices and culinary techniques, have been acknowledged as instrumental in this evolution, reflecting Venice's role within the broader framework of Mediterranean culinary development. Moreover, the



Venetian has also been significantly shaped by the city's geography and its historical relations with the Mediterranean and the Near East. Some recipes absorbed the characteristics of eastern culinary practices, integrating them with the fresh catch from the lagoons and the bounty of the Veneto hinterland. An example is the "Sarade in Saor", sardines immersed in an amalgam of onions cooked in vinegar. Over time, the recipe has been enriched with raisins and pine nuts, given the influences of the Eastern markets, giving the dish a particular and more refined taste. This dish is a testament to Venice's utilization of local seafood, borrowing preservation techniques possibly inspired by the need to store food for long voyages. The fusion of East and West is nowhere more evident than in Venice's staple, 'Risotto al Nero di Seppia' which marries the locally sourced cuttlefish with the exotic allure of its ink for a dish that is deep in both flavor and heritage. The iconic 'Baccalà Mantecato,' meanwhile, tells of the convergence of Norwegian stockfish with Venetian culinary prowess. Here, the dried fish is transformed through a vigorous whipping with olive oil, garlic, and parsley into a creamy spread. This method reflects Venice's trade connections and its culinary ingenuity in adapting foreign ingredients to local tastes. Moreover, Venice's maritime empire significantly shaped its food supply systems, with vast networks stretching from the Levant to the British Isles. This allowed for a consistent influx of unique ingredients, which were then adapted into the local gastronomy, leading to an affluent and varied diet compared to other regions of Europe at the time.<sup>212</sup>

Understanding Venice's historical gastronomic context entails examining how the city's food landscape mixed external influences from expansive trade networks with local traditions. The city's role as a crucible of culinary diversity, therefore, becomes clear. For centuries, its dishes have stood as testaments to this synthesis, with foundations laid by the early need to preserve food for long maritime journeys, eventually crystallizing into the distinctive tastes that today delineate the culinary identity of Venice. To taste Venetian cuisine is to voyage through its illustrious past, filled with the spices of mercantile adventures, the freshness of its lagoons, and the spirit of a republic that once bridged the culinary gap between the East and the Mediterranean.

No exploration of Venetian food culture is complete without mentioning "cicchetti." These small servings, enjoyed in the traditional "bacari" (wine bars) of Venice, capture the

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<sup>212</sup> Dickie, J. (2008). *Delizia!: The epic history of the Italians and their food*. Simon and Schuster.

essence of Venetian social life. Similar to Spanish tapas, "cicchetti" are a social anchor, allowing friends to gather and share a variety of bite-sized specialties, from creamy "baccalà" on crusty bread to fried seafood and olives. This social aspect of food reflects Venice's communal spirit and love for conviviality, providing a window into the everyday life of its inhabitants.<sup>213</sup> The "Bacaro" plays an integral role in this dynamic. Venetian taverns are not just places to dine; they are the bustling epicenters of social life. They serve as the backdrop for a lively performance of daily interactions, where food and wine set the pace for conviviality. These humble establishments, often lined with an assortment of "cicchetti" behind glass counters, beckon the passerby to pause for a moment of leisure and conversation. It is in these enclaves that the rhythm of Venetian life finds its pulse, with locals and visitors alike mingling over glasses of wine and an array of bite-sized local delicacies. The dining rituals in Venice, underscored by the practice of the aperitif, are an evocative dance of cultural and culinary mores. It is customary to partake in an aperitif before the evening meal, a ritual that primes the palate and sets the stage for the gastronomic experiences to follow. This pre-dinner tradition, which often includes a spritz or a glass of Prosecco accompanied by assorted "cicchetti," is less about the food and drink in themselves and more about the ritual's ability to gather people and provoke conversation, offering a space for the intertwining of lives and stories.<sup>214</sup>

Coffee culture in Venice is equally woven into the city's everyday life. With the introduction of coffee through its ports, Venice became one of the first European places to embrace it, embedding it deeply into its social customs.<sup>215</sup> Venetian coffee houses, historical precursors to the modern café, were among the earliest established in Europe, offering a novel setting that went beyond mere consumption of the beverage; they became places of social and intellectual exchange. It was here that Venice's coffee culture blossomed, creating venues that shaped the taste preferences of Europe and opening pathways for new forms of public sociability. Consequently, the significance of coffee culture in Venice represents a broader cultural identity and a symbol of the societal transformation that has taken place within its precincts.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Di Francesco, G. (2022). *Sagre and Quality of Life. The Italian Heritage of Popular Gastronomy*. In *Italian Studies on Food and Quality of Life* (pp. 21-37). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

<sup>214</sup> Thibaut. (2024, April 12). *Bacaro Venezia: Guida culinaria autentica*. Ciao Venezia.

<sup>215</sup> Fregulia, J. M. (2019). *A Rich and Tantalizing Brew: A History of How Coffee Connected the World*. Food and Foodways.

<sup>216</sup> Cowan, B. (2008). *The social life of coffee: The emergence of the British coffeehouse*. Yale University Press.

To partake in the energy of a Venetian "bacaro," to savor the diverse flavors of "cicchetti," or to indulge in the communal ritual of a morning coffee is to engage with the city in conversation, to absorb the essence of Venice not as a silent observer, but as an active participant in its living history. These elements of the daily culinary routine, small as they might seem, compose the Venice's heritage, each piece a story of its own, together narrating the story of La Serenissima's daily life and food culture.

Rituals and festivities in Venice are spectacles of culture, identity, and, notably, food. Seasonal festivals such as the Festa del Redentore and Carnival are steeped in history and showcase a culinary dimension that intertwines with the customs and celebratory practices intrinsic to Venetian life. The Festa del Redentore, a festivity rooted in 16th-century history, commemorates Venice's deliverance from a particularly devastating plague. This event is punctuated with religious solemnity and a subsequent air of jubilation that envelops the city. Although there is no a standard menu for the Redentore in Venice, traditional food plays a central role in this celebration with families and friends gathering for elaborate feasts that integrate local produce and dishes crafted to mark the occasion. Such gatherings are often crowned with the trademark fireworks display over the stunning backdrop of St. Mark's Basin, reflecting the Venetian ethos of blending spectacle with communal dining. Carnival, on the other hand, is a festival that resonates with a different vibrancy. The Carnival of Venice, with its enigmatic masks and opulent costumes, speaks of a time of revelry where food becomes a vehicle for celebration. Particular dishes and ingredients come to the fore, emblematic of this period of feasting. Sweet treats such as fritole – Venetian-style doughnuts – and galani, crisp, layered pastry ribbons, become ubiquitous, gracing many a Venetian table and street corner, embodying the spirit of indulgence that defines the Carnival.<sup>217</sup>

The influence of these festivities on Venetian food and customs can be traced back to historical continuities and the ways in which such events provided an avenue for both aristocratic display and popular celebration. They offer a stage where social distinctions are momentarily paused, allowing the city to unite in a shared cultural expression. Carnival, in particular, plays with food in a manner that contrasts with everyday habits –

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<sup>217</sup> Lysaght, P. (2002). *Food and Celebration: From Fasting to Feasting: Proceedings of the 13th Conference of the International Commission for Ethnological Food Research, Ljubljana, Preddvor, and Piran, Slovenia, June 5–11, 2000*. Založba ZRC.

where normally reserved ingredients and preparation methods are embraced with gusto, challenging the regular customs through this annual cycle of feasting and fasting.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, these events have their underscored significance and symbolic meanings. For instance, the consumption of richer foods during Carnival is a meaningful gesture rooted in traditions that celebrate abundance and merriment preceding the Lenten period of austerity.<sup>219</sup>

Such festivities, deeply woven into the Venetian identity, articulate an essential truth: that food and feasting are performative, symbolic, and communal activities that reflect the cultural and historical pulsations of Venice. "Performative" refers to the act of preparing or consuming food as a form of expression or ritual. For example, through each step of the process, from ingredient selection to presentation, the preparation and serving of "Sarade in Saor" becomes a performative act that reflects Venetian culinary traditions, craftsmanship, and cultural identity.<sup>220</sup> While, "symbolic" indicates that food and culinary traditions in Venice may symbolize cultural values, historical events, or social relationships. For instance, "fritole" are a symbolic treat enjoyed during Venice's Carnival season. These sweet fritters, often filled with cream or raisins, symbolize indulgence and celebration, reflecting the festive spirit of Carnival.<sup>221</sup> Lastly, "communal" means that food and feasting in Venice are communal activities that bring people together, fostering social bonds and shared experiences. Venetian cuisine is often associated with family gatherings, neighborhood festivals, and communal meals. One example of this communal aspect is the tradition of "cicchetti" served in Venetian bacari. Locals and visitors alike gather in these cozy establishments to enjoy a variety of small dishes while socializing with friends and strangers alike, creating a sense of community around food.<sup>222</sup>

In addition, also the organization of culinary events and festivals, other than typical festivities, offers a valuable avenue for safeguarding, showcasing, and elevating Venice's gastronomic legacy. A clear example was the festival "Saor, saperi e sapori veneziani in

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<sup>218</sup> Feil, D. K. (1998). How Venetians think about carnival and history. *The Australian journal of anthropology*, 9(2), 141-162.

<sup>219</sup> Carroll, L. L. (1985). Carnival rites as vehicles of protest in Renaissance Venice. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16(4), 487-502.

<sup>220</sup> Veneziaeventi. (2023). *La storia e la ricetta delle Sarde in Saor - Venezia Eventi*. Venezia Eventi.

<sup>221</sup> *La storia delle fritole, il dolce simbolo del Carnevale di Venezia | 1600Venezia.*

<sup>222</sup> Jasmine. (2024, February 12). *Alla scoperta dei Cicchetti Veneti, simboli della tradizione gastronomica di un territorio lagunare*. Zanatta Caffè.

festa" in 2019. It was the first city festival dedicated to the local gastronomic heritage, a significant initiative carried out within the European project "Slowfood-CE". Led by Slow Food International and financially supported by the INTERREG Central Europe programme, this project was strategically focused on defining methods and strategies to exploit the rich local culinary culture as a catalyst for the sustainable development of the Venetian territory.<sup>223</sup> The organization of these culinary events is also part of the TESTEAT project, a project funded by the Interreg Italy-Croatia program focused on the protection, preservation and enhancement of the local food and wine heritage, in order to promote more sustainable tourism. This initiative taps into the culinary richness of the Adriatic region to forge new, experiential tourism opportunities that respond to contemporary dietary trends and tourist behaviors. In collaboration with seven partners across Italy and Croatia, TESTEAT will map regional gastronomic treasures, offer specialized training for hospitality professionals, and establish enogastronomy hubs to engage key industry players. Ultimately, the project aims to devise strategic action plans to amplify the long-term benefits and commitments to preserving the enogastronomic heritage, thereby reinforcing its educational and touristic value.<sup>224</sup>

### **3.1.2 Evolution of Venetian Culinary Traditions**

The culinary landscape of Venice is dynamic and fluid, continually flowing between the preservation of age-old recipes and the embrace of contemporary innovations. The gastronomic identity of Venice has evolved over centuries, shaped by the lagoon's bounty, historical trade connections, and the vibrant interplay of tradition and modernity. Age-old recipes form the bedrock of Venetian cuisine, with dishes that are deeply rooted in the region's history and lifestyle. Classic recipes such as "Sarade in Saor" are hallowed entries in the Venetian culinary canon, with their origins tracing back to Venice's past as a mercantile hub. These recipes have withstood the test of time, remaining mostly unchanged as they are passed down through generations. However, as palates evolve and new culinary techniques emerge, there has been a curious blend of old and new. Modern interpretations see these timeless dishes being deconstructed and reimaged, as chefs

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<sup>223</sup> "Saór - Saperi e sapori veneziani in festa", *il primo festival cittadino dedicato al patrimonio gastronomico locale*. (2019, September 20). Comune Di Venezia - Live - Le Notizie Di Oggi E I Servizi Della Città.

<sup>224</sup> AgrifoodLab. *TESTEAT - Enhance enogastronomy heritage to establish and expand sustainable tourism*. Agrifood Management & Innovation Lab.

seek to balance reverence for tradition with creative expression. These innovations often incorporate the use of contemporary techniques or the integration of non-traditional ingredients, thereby composing a modern symphony of flavors while maintaining the essence of Venetian taste. The evolution of food customs at festivals and religious festivities marks the calendar not only with events but with the changing gastronomical offerings unique to them. Historical observations, such as the Festa del Redentore, traditionally bring forth an array of dishes that blend religious symbolism with local flavors, while current trends showcase a fusion of these elements with globally influenced gastronomic practices. Seasonal celebrations, tied intimately with Venice's agricultural and fishing cycles, reveal evolving food customs that orbit around the availability and sustainability of local produce. This pattern is a testament to the adaptability of Venetian cuisine, showing how it has woven new threads into its culinary tapestry without forsaking the deeply entrenched traditions of its fabric.<sup>225</sup> The current trends in Venetian cuisine embrace a similar fusion, where chefs and food enthusiasts are delving into the art of combining traditional aspects with modern facets. This culinary metamorphosis sees the rise of gourmet interpretations and the implementation of avant-garde techniques, giving a new, often luxurious character to conventional fare. Such trends are blossoming in Michelin-starred establishments as well as in more humble eateries, where the push for innovation coexists harmoniously with the pull of heritage. These modern interpretations reinvigorate classic fares and serve as a bridge, connecting Venice's storied past with its progressive, cosmopolitan present.

The transformation of Venetian culinary traditions can also be influenced by climate and environmental changes, as it was for the advent of the blue crab in the Venetian waters that inspired a reinterpretation of local recipes. The arrival of the blue crab has inevitably altered the local dynamics. Known as a skilled predator able to quickly adapt to new habitats, the blue crab could threaten the native fauna, including locally produced mollusks.<sup>226</sup> These environmental changes, conducive to the spread of species like the blue crab, may be related to altered climate patterns or changes in marine currents, putting increased pressure on the resilience of native species and the species composition

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<sup>225</sup> Norman, R. (2018). *Venice: Four Seasons of Home Cooking*. Penguin UK.

<sup>226</sup> Manfrin, C., Comisso, G., Dall'Asta, A., Bettoso, N., & Sook Chung, J. (2016). The return of the Blue Crab, *Callinectes sapidus* Rathbun, 1896, after 70 years from its first appearance in the Gulf of Trieste, northern Adriatic Sea, Italy (Decapoda: Portunidae). *Check List*, 12(6).

in the Venice Lagoon.<sup>227</sup> The impact of the blue crab extends beyond ecological balances, spilling over into Venetian culinary culture. The local gastronomy has had to adapt, with some restaurants seeing the invasion as a potential opportunity and beginning to incorporate the blue crab into their menus, replacing traditionally served species. This push for innovation in cuisine might be seen as a positive transformation, yet it collides with unresolved environmental issues.

As the tides of tourism ebb and flow through the canals of Venice, they carry with them a profound influence on the city's rich gastronomic heritage. This phenomenon has cast both preservation and transformation of Venetian food traditions in new light, particularly concerning iconic establishments like "bacari" (wine bars) and "osterie" (taverns). These locales have long been the repositories of Venetian conviviality and culinary customs, offering up distinctive small plates, "cicchetti," and local wines. However, the surge of international visitors has had dual effects: introducing traditional Venetian fare to a global audience while simultaneously exerting pressure on these establishments to cater to a more international palate, which may dilute the authenticity of the traditional experience.<sup>228</sup> While tourism aids in keeping these establishments thriving, there's a growing trend of adapting menus to what's perceived to be the tourists' palate, potentially diluting the authenticity of the Venetian culinary experience. Thus, preserving the authenticity of Venetian cuisine amid the sprawling globalization and commercialization becomes an act of culinary defiance and cultural pride.<sup>229</sup> While Venetian cuisine faces the challenge of maintaining its unique character, concerted efforts by culinary professionals and societies aim to safeguard traditional practices. There is an intricate balance between holding on to age-old recipes and adapting them to the tastes of a diverse tourist population while still upholding the essence that defines them as authentically Venetian. Local chefs have emerged as custodians of culinary authenticity, employing their kitchens as bastions of traditional Venetian cookery. By showcasing classic dishes and ingredients, they reinforce the narrative of Venice's gastronomic identity. Chefs strive to present dishes that encapsulate the spirit of Venice, ensuring that each ingredient speaks to the region's

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<sup>227</sup> Scapin, L., Zucchetta, M., Pranovi, F., & Franzoi, P. (2022). Influence of seascape on coastal lagoon fisheries: The role of habitat mosaic in the Venice lagoon. *Estuaries and Coasts*, 45(3), 793-811.

<sup>228</sup> Soligo, M., & Abarbanel, B. (2020). Theme and authenticity: Experiencing heritage at The Venetian. *International Hospitality Review*, 34(2), 153-172.

<sup>229</sup> Di Giovine, M. A., & Brulotte, R. L. (2016). Introduction food and foodways as cultural heritage. In *Edible identities: Food as cultural heritage* (pp. 1-27). Routledge.

history and terroir. Culinary societies and food festivals further entrench this quest for authenticity by promoting the provenance of local specialties, engaging both visitors and locals in the lore and allure of Venetian cuisine. Such festivities enliven the culinary landscape and serve as forums for exchange and learning, where tourists can grasp the subtleties of genuine Venetian cooking and its place within the broader Italian culinary canon. Through such endeavors, these societies work to frame Venetian food within its historical context, underscoring its uniqueness and relevance in a modern, globalized world.<sup>230</sup> In the face of pervasive tourist influence, the battle for authenticity in Venetian gastronomy is an ongoing one. Establishments may find themselves at a crossroads, navigating the pressures to adapt their offerings to cater to international tastes while striving to hold onto the culinary heartstrings of their heritage. The dialogue between traditional and modern is constant, with innovative chefs delicately infusing contemporary trends into the age-old recipes to create a new iteration that respects the past while embracing the present.

Venice's relationship with food conservation and sustainability is deeply intertwined with its unique ecological and cultural landscape. The city's culinary traditions, tied to the lagoon's bounty, are a palimpsest that aligns closely with the rhythms of its marine ecosystem and the ancient practices of its people. Critical issues around the sustainability of lagoon fisheries and the preservation of traditional fishing methods are at the forefront of efforts to maintain this delicate balance. The Venetian lagoon is the lifeblood of the city's culinary scene, offering a diverse array of seafood that has shaped local diets for centuries. However, concerns about overfishing and the impact of climate change on marine populations have raised alarms regarding the sustainability of these food resources. The historic practice of "voga alla veneta," a rowing style suited for the shallow lagoon waters that is used for fishing, is not just a cultural artifact but also an eco-friendly method that causes minimal disturbance to marine habitats. The preservation of such methods is vital, for the continuation of a cultural heritage.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, initiatives to promote local and seasonal consumption have gained momentum, highlighting the integral connection between Venice's culinary heritage and its future. There's increasing advocacy for

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<sup>230</sup> Gray, M. (2019). The "Misura Aurea" of Italian Cooking: Defining Authentic Foods for Locals and Tourists in Postwar Italy, 1953 to 1974. *Global Food History*, 5(3), 204-223.

<sup>231</sup> Pérez-Lloréns, J. L., Acosta, Y., & Brun, F. G. (2021). Seafood in Mediterranean countries: A culinary journey through history. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 26, 100437.



"Kilometro Zero" or locavorism, where restaurants and citizens are encouraged to support local produce, a trend that resonates with the Slow Food movement's ethos of good, clean, and fair food<sup>232</sup>. This initiative is paramount in safeguarding the authenticity of the region's cuisine, which thrives on the seasonality of its ingredients—be it seafood harvested from the lagoon or vegetables grown on the islands of Sant'Erasmo and Giudecca. Local establishments and food festivals serve as engines for this movement, offering platforms where traditional dishes are prepared with local, seasonal ingredients, providing both Venetians and visitors with authentic culinary experiences. These efforts are also reflected in the realm of tourism, where more and more travelers seek genuine gastrotourism experiences that honor the region's culinary history. In contemporary Venice, the question of conservation is not solely about maintaining environmental standards but about preserving a living cultural heritage that is intrinsically tied to its natural resources. Initiatives like the "Venetian Heritage Fish" project aim to protect indigenous fish species and promote sustainable fishing methods, fostering a linkage between Venice's gastronomic culture and its commitment to environmental stewardship.<sup>233</sup> These initiatives underscore a broader recognition: that the future of Venice's culinary heritage and its authenticity is inextricably linked to its ability to sustain and regenerate its natural resources. Through these combined efforts in sustainability and the enactment of conservation-minded, locally focused consumption practices, Venice is scripting a narrative that could secure its gastronomic legacy for generations to come.

### **3.2 Research Objectives**

The essence of Venetian cuisine is in the authenticity and heritage it represents, a manifestation of the city's rich cultural tapestry that has been woven through the ages. The objective of this research is to delve into the heart of Venice's culinary scene by scrutinizing the images showcased by a diverse range of dining establishments from the opulent luxury restaurants, traditional osterias and trattorias, to the casual bacari. The research will explore the nuances of Venice's culinary imagery, aiming to determine whether there is a uniform portrayal of Venetian cuisine across these different

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<sup>232</sup> Grimaldi, P., Fassino, G., & Porporato, D. (2019). Culture, heritage, identity and food. *A methodological approach*.

<sup>233</sup> Di Giovine, M. A., & Brulotte, R. L. (2016). Introduction food and foodways as cultural heritage. In *Edible identities: Food as cultural heritage* (pp. 1-27). Routledge.

gastronomic spheres or if each projects a unique narrative. This involves identifying common visual themes and distinctions, which are instrumental in shaping consumer perceptions of the Venetian culinary tradition. By meticulously examining the visual content this research will endeavor to understand the layered and complex visual language of Venice's gastronomy. The focus is to discern how different actors craft the image of Venice and its gastronomy: do they uphold the genuine Venetian culinary traditions, or have these been adapted to cater to the evolving palates of their clientele? Culinary experiences in Venice, like in many culturally rich locales, balance between retaining authenticity and evolving to meet contemporary tastes. Luxury establishments may attempt to harmonize authenticity with innovation to attract global diners, trying to maintain the intrinsic Venetian culinary identity while also offering a menu that is distinctive enough to draw attention in a competitive market. Similarly, osterias, trattorias, and Bacari may present a more grounded and arguably authentic experience but must also negotiate their identity within the spectrum of what is authentically Venetian and what may be perceived as such by tourists. This raises questions about the transformation—whether these eateries remain steadfast custodians of Venetian cuisine or adapt their original recipes to suit the taste of a non-local audience, potentially compromising authenticity.

Moreover, by incorporating the concept of optimal distinctiveness into the framework of this investigation, the study examines the positioning of Venetian eateries, as they seek to maintain an identity that resonates with a sense of belonging to Venetian culinary culture and yet asserts their unique features. In examining these restaurants, an attempt is made to discern the concept of tradition and authenticity they embody, how they portray Venetian culture, and how they integrate individual elements alongside traditional ones. Optimal distinctiveness theory, rooted in the social psychology realm, articulates a balance where individuals or entities seek to align with a group to avoid isolation but also strive to maintain enough uniqueness to avoid a loss of self-identity.<sup>234</sup> For Venetian eateries, this means finding a balance between embodying the classic Venetian restaurant archetype and introducing distinguishing elements. And since what constitutes optimal distinctiveness varies based on the audience's evaluations and the specific lenses they use,

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<sup>234</sup> Zhao, E. Y. (2022). *Optimal distinctiveness: A new agenda for the study of competitive positioning of organizations and markets*. Cambridge University Press.

each restaurant must navigate this balance attuned to the feedback and preferences of its particular clientele. On one hand, there is an impetus to assimilate; a Venetian eatery should evoke the essence of Venice's rich culinary history, adhere to local gastronomic customs, and contribute to the collective identity of Venetian restaurants. Such assimilation can be connoted with tradition, using time-honored recipes, and providing that quintessential Venetian dining experience expected by locals and tourists alike. On the other hand, differentiation allows a restaurant to develop a unique dining proposition that stands out from its peers. This could be a signature dish innovative in its use of local ingredients, a modern twist on a Venetian classic, or an ambiance that diverges from the typical Venetian decor.

Optimal distinctiveness suggests that while eateries must align with the identity of their strategic group for legitimacy and recognition, they must also craft a distinctive theme to carve out a competitive niche. An eatery that is too conformist risks being indistinguishable and lost in a sea of sameness, while one that is too divergent may alienate those seeking the familiar comforts of Venetian gastronomy. Applying this framework to the Venetian dining scene positions eateries within a socio-cognitive landscape where they are constantly gauging the market's cues, perceiving their own identity, and adjusting their distinctiveness accordingly. The quest for optimal distinctiveness guides Venetian eateries in strategic decision-making, from menu design to marketing narratives, to cultivate a reputation that aligns with the collective identity of Venice's dining culture while ensuring their individuality resonates with diners seeking an authentic yet distinctive experience.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

The research methodology for analyzing the distinct visual features of images representing three strategic groups within Venetian culinary tradition combines systematic data collection with a rigorous analytical framework grounded in cultural, semiotic, and iconographic studies.

The three strategic groups identified are:

1. Luxury/fine dining restaurants
2. Traditional restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias
3. Bacari

These targets were chosen for their ability to reflect a vast culinary spectrum within Venice's culture, each offering distinctive experiences from high-end to traditional and casual. For the luxury and fine dining category, a refined search on TripAdvisor centered on 'Venice' was conducted, employing the 'fine dining' filter to streamline the focus. This filter inherently incorporated the upper-tier '€€€€' price bracket. Strict geographical and categorical criteria have been imposed, ensuring the inclusion of restaurants strictly within the confines of the Venetian island and excluding any establishments bearing the markers 'osteria' or 'trattoria' to avoid overlap with the 'Traditional restaurants/trattorias and Osterias' category. Further selection criteria included the presence of a website, essential for obtaining a substantial image dataset. Complementing this approach, Google Places served as a pivotal tool for broadening the dataset. A targeted search with the phrase 'luxury restaurants Venice' provided a diverse set of establishments. Subsequently, these results have been redefined by focusing on those within the '€€€' price range, while also prioritizing the availability of a website and meaningful content snippets that could offer additional insights into the aesthetic and experiential offerings of these establishments. Through this rigorous and discerning selection process, a total of 36 luxury and fine dining restaurants have been selected. Each chosen establishment promises a wealth of visual data poised to enhance the understanding of high-end gastronomic representation within Venice's illustrious culinary scene.

To refine the search for establishments fitting into the 'traditional restaurants/trattorias and osterias' category, Google's search capabilities in conjunction with TripAdvisor's database have been utilized. Searching on Google's search bar for 'osterias e trattorias in Venice' revealed a TripAdvisor page titled 'The 10 best restaurants with moderate prices in Venice'. Explicit search parameters were set to include only those restaurants located in Venice proper and falling within a 'medium range' price level. Inclusion criteria were further narrowed to pinpoint establishments with 'trattoria' or 'osteria' in their names or those renowned for traditional Venetian fares, with preferential selection given to those with accessible websites harboring rich information and visual depictions. To supplement and cross-reference findings, Google Places came into play with additional searches tailored to terms like 'osterias and trattorias in Venice' and 'traditional Venetian restaurants'. The filters selected on this platform aimed to capture a price spectrum ranging from 10€ to 40€, aligning with descriptors such as tavern, traditional, rustic, cozy and Venetian cuisine. This dual-platform approach ensured a broader sweep and provided

a means for comparative analysis across both TripAdvisor and Google Places, enhancing the robustness of the selection process. Interestingly the search unearthed an overlap where some establishments commonly considered to be osterias or trattorias also appeared under fine dining categories on TripAdvisor. These establishments have been categorized based on their self-description and primary identification as osterias or trattorias, despite any presence of fine dining elements within their imagery. This demonstrates the fluidity of culinary categorization and underscores the importance of self-identification in the assignment of establishments to specific categories within the analysis. Prominent examples that straddle these classifications include Osteria al Ponte del Diavolo, Osteria la Busara, Osteria Oliva nera, Osteria la Testiere, L'Osteria di Santa Marina, and Ostaria Boccadoro. These venues, although listed under 'fine dining' by TripAdvisor's standards, were retained within the 'traditional restaurants/trattorias and osterias' group owing to their explicit self-categorization, thereby aligning with the methodological framework and reinforcing authenticity within the scope of our research. A total of 40 Traditional restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias have been selected.

For a comprehensive identification and meticulous selection of Bacari, the Gambero Rosso website and the Google Places platform have been utilized. The research began with a strategic exploration of Google Places, inputting 'Bacari Venice into the search. This led to a plethora of desirable destinations falling within the price range of 1-20€, featuring terms such as bar, wine bar and Venetian cuisine. Parallel to this endeavor was the reference to the Gambero Rosso website, specifically navigating to the section titled 'Bacari Venice. Guide to the best addresses to eat'. This resource enriched the research, ensuring to encapsulate the most reputable and characteristic representations of these unique Venetian establishments. During the selection process, it became apparent that the Bacari category often overlapped with the category defined as 'traditional restaurants/trattorias and osterias'. This presented a poignant challenge due to the nature of some bacari that extend their services beyond the customary bar offerings of spritz and cicchetti to include more substantial dining options resembling those of a typical osteria. This duality was most evident in establishments that self-describe with a dual identity, functioning as both osteria and bacaro. Such instances necessitated a nuanced approach to their categorization, ensuring each venue was assigned to the most fitting group based on its predominant function and self-representation. Bacari focus on small bites and social wine drinking, while osterias offer a seated dining experience focusing on the cuisine itself.

Specifically, a bacaro is a quintessential Venetian establishment smaller than a typical osteria, celebrated for its diverse selection of wines by the glass and variety of 'cicchétì' (snacks). It is characterized by its intimate space with fewer seats and a prominent display of food on bar counters. The name and tradition hark back to Venice's wine-selling history and a culture of casual dining and socializing, offering an authentic, laid-back culinary experience with affordable prices.<sup>235</sup> Hence, based on this definition, the distinguishing features that determined a venue being classified as a bacaro rather than an osteria included: its compact size, limited seating capacity, food displayed on counters, and a relatively low-price range (1-20€). Bacari without a website or social media channels were excluded from the sample. A total of 25 Bacari have been selected.

Moving forward, it is possible to rely on the following definition for the analysis of the three strategic groups:

<b>Luxury/fine dining restaurants</b>	Establishments characterized by opulent settings and sumptuous atmospheres, specialized in haute cuisine with emphasis on high service quality and presentation
<b>Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias</b>	Establishments representing the homely and rustic side of Venetian dining, with focus on traditional flavors and a warm atmosphere, resembling small taverns
<b>Bacari</b>	Small Venetian establishments known for their casual vibe, offering small portions of local specialties conducive to mingling and socializing over wine. Characterized by limited seating, a bar-like counter, showcased food items, and affordable prices

**Table 1:** Definition of the three strategic groups

<sup>235</sup> Wikipedia. (2023, May 30). Bacaro. Wikipedia.

The Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias category stands out as the most substantial group (40), followed by luxury/fine dining restaurants (36). Concerning Bacari, 25 were selected due to the challenge of finding those with individual websites for images; indeed, for some, the selection of images was based on Facebook and Instagram pages. For data collection, a robust web search was conducted to amass a range of images from each category of establishment. For each establishment, images were acquired from websites, and in their absence, from Facebook and Instagram profiles. These visual data represent a crucial component, helping in the identification of how each group translates the Venetian culinary experience into a visual narrative. The collected images are treated as data artifacts which undergo detailed analysis to glean insights into their representational strategies. The images were then categorized for each venue. Upon observing these images, recurring elements were noted and documented. To facilitate a clearer understanding of common visual features across different venues, a comprehensive table was meticulously crafted. This detailed table methodically organizes the recurring elements from various images into distinct categories, further detailed in Appendix A. The rows of the table are thoughtfully delineated by the names of the venues, which are categorized into three strategic groups. In parallel, the columns are devoted to describing the specific elements observed in the images, such as close-ups of pleated food, venetian landscapes and interior spaces. The primary goal of this tabulated arrangement is to methodically analyze the prevalence of certain visual elements within the images and to ascertain any discernible patterns that may be indicative of a particular strategic group's identity. This systematic approach is designed to yield insights into the visual branding and thematic consistencies among the grouped venues.

A nuanced visual analysis of the collected images has been conducted, drawing upon principles from visual semiotics, anthropology, and iconography. This included evaluation of the sensory elements of the food displayed, the aesthetic composition of pictures, and the contextual settings within which the images are set.

Visual analysis refers to the systematic examination and interpretation of visual media, encompassing everything from art and advertisements to social media and information graphics. The purpose is to decode the visual rhetoric – the interplay of imagery, symbols, colors, text, and other visual elements – to understand the deeper meanings that are communicated intentionally or unintentionally by the creator and perceived by the

audience. Visual analysis opens a window to the cultural, psychological, and sociological layers embedded within visual media.<sup>236</sup>

The application of such visual analysis is crucial in understanding the intricate manner in which Venetian eateries represent themselves to their clientele. Cultural heritage and visual representation are intrinsically linked. When analyzing food visuals, representation becomes not just about display but also about the complex interplay of visual culture, meaning-making, and the historical narrative. Each image is a witness to the process of reflection, recreation, and reinterpretation of culinary tradition, seen through the prism of current visuality norms and the collective memory.<sup>237</sup>

This research incorporates elements of content analysis to observe and catalog visual data on a quantitative level, and it applies an interpretive analysis to extract potential qualitative insights from the data. Content analysis involves examining large amounts of visual data to test hypotheses about representation patterns. It focuses on broad fields of visual content, classifying observable elements into distinct categories. This quantitative method helps answer questions about the prominence or frequency of themes or subjects in media.<sup>238</sup>

Below are some examples of how the images were analyzed, highlighting recurring elements and distinctive features.



**Figure 10**



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12**

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<sup>236</sup> Van Leeuwen, T., & Jewitt, C. (Eds.). (2001). *The handbook of visual analysis*. Sage.

<sup>237</sup> Hsu, C. H., & Song, H. (2014). A visual analysis of destinations in travel magazines. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 31(2), 162-177.

<sup>238</sup> Van Leeuwen, T., & Jewitt, C. (Eds.). (2001). *The handbook of visual analysis*. Sage.



Figure 10, 11 and 12 are sourced from the *Venissa* website, classified in this research as a fine dining restaurant. A recurring theme highlighted by the prevalent use of green is the restaurant's commitment to environmental stewardship, sourcing ingredients from the surrounding land. This underscores a deep connection to the local terroir. The showcased dish in Figure 10 epitomizes gourmet sophistication, it conveys simplicity and meticulous attention to detail, elevating the culinary experience to an art form. The garden setting in Figure 11 further emphasizes a natural ambiance, while Figure 12 promotes well-being and conviviality, showing individuals gather around a glass of wine. In reference to Appendix A identified elements, Figure 10 falls under "close-up of plated food" and "small portions/ detail of food" Figure 11 under "exteriors, outdoor tables," and Figure 12 under "wine bottles." However, the symbolic and nuanced significance extends well beyond this categorical classification.



**Figure 13**



**Figure 14**



**Figure 15**

Figure 13, 14 and 15 portray *Osteria la Busara*, categorized in this paper among osterias and trattorias. Figure 13 depicts a cozy atmosphere with warm hues, evoking a sense of conviviality and homeliness. Notably, the presence of two colorful glasses adds to the welcoming ambiance. Figure 14 showcases a generously portioned dish, symbolizing abundance and generosity. Figure 15 captures the restaurant's exterior, characterized by brown tones, an open door and dishes listed on external chalkboards. These visuals convey warmth, rustic charm, hospitality and abundance. In the research classification, Figure 13 falls under "close-up of set tables" and "prevalence of brown from wooden furnishings", Figure 14 is categorized under "close-up of plated food" and "generous portions," while Figure 15 is classified as "venue sign".



**Figure 16**



**Figure 17**



**Figure 18**

Figure 16, 17 and 18 illustrate *Bacaro da Fiore*, a Venetian bacaro. These depictions offer a typical representation of a bacaro—a place to savor cicchetti and wine in a cozy and sociable atmosphere. Figure 16 showcases wine bottles, while Figure 17 represents cicchetti, together embodying the bacaro experience. Meanwhile, Figure 18 portrays a moment of conviviality, spontaneity, and festivity. Warm hues create a rustic and inviting ambiance, while the smiles of people enjoying their drinks convey joy. These images epitomize the Venetian tradition of wine and cicchetti, infused with the lively spirit of social gatherings, portraying a welcoming setting where friends can toast to good food and wine. Figure 16 is classified under "wine bottles," Figure 17 under "close-up of pleated food," and Figure 18 under "Customers dining in the venue/photos with clients."

All these images displaying food, communicate deeper narratives, traditions, and the atmosphere that is characteristic of Venice's rich historical backdrop—an essential component of the customer experience in such a locale. Moreover, the function of these visual elements is not limited to aesthetics; they are crucial in communicating the establishment's brand identity and the cultural stories it seeks to embrace and convey. The visuals of food aim to evoke emotions, to recall cultural heritage, and to encapsulate traditions that are often integral to the identity of a place.

The observed data was interpreted to discern patterns and distinctions among the visual representation of each strategic group, aiming to understand how they might affect the perception of Venetian culinary tradition. The impact on perception can be examined through how the characteristics align with known cultural elements or stereotypes of the different dining experiences. Through examining the visual signals, a more profound comprehension is gained of how Venetian venues engage with their patrons, set

themselves apart from competitors, and leverage visual strategies that connect with local traditions while also appealing to a potentially global audience. The analytical process also explores the interplay between visual conventions and cultural significances, aiming to go beyond cataloging visual patterns to interpret their role within the Venetian gastronomic milieu. The analysis traverses from the identification of pictorial standards through the scrutiny of image modality to the eventual interpretation of potential meanings anchored in the extensive context of Venetian culture. This layered methodological approach enables a deeper understanding that reaches beneath the surface-level visual observations, venturing into the cultural underpinnings that inform these perceptions. The goal of this comprehensive approach is to blend the rich variety of Venice's culinary scene with the delicate essence of its cultural heritage, fostering a broad and multidimensional comprehension that aligns the visual presentation with the distinct cultural identity of Venice, offering insights into the city's gastronomic legacies and the establishments that preserve and rejuvenate them.

A central concept to this methodological approach is that of optimal distinctiveness, highlighting the balance each establishment must strike between blending into the collective identity of Venetian cuisine and distinguishing themselves to appeal to diverse clientele. Optimal distinctiveness is a theoretical concept that posits an entity, such as an organization or individual, seeks to strike a balance between assimilating with its peers or context and differentiating itself from them. It asserts that there is an equilibrium point where the tension between the need for similarity (conformity) and the need for uniqueness (distinctiveness) is resolved in a way that benefits the entity's status or survival. It is about finding a sweet spot where entities feel like they belong to a larger community while also maintaining their unique identity. This equilibrium is dynamic and can evolve with changing internal and external conditions, and is not a static state.<sup>239</sup> In the setting of cultural and culinary traditions, this theory is particularly relevant as it helps to explain how entities within these traditions manage their identities to both fit in and stand out. Considering the context of Venetian eateries, optimal distinctiveness is particularly relevant for examining how these establishments navigate their identities.

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<sup>239</sup> Leonardelli, G. J., Pickett, C. L., & Brewer, M. B. (2010). Optimal distinctiveness theory: A framework for social identity, social cognition, and intergroup relations. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 43, pp. 63-113). Academic Press.

Venetian eateries must balance between conforming to the collective identity of Venetian culinary traditions and differentiating themselves to attract and satisfy a diverse clientele, including both locals and tourists. The concept of optimal distinctiveness helps to understand that distinctive cues in visuals or offerings by these establishments are strategic resources they use to achieve this balance. A luxury restaurant might emphasize opulence in its settings to mix exclusivity (differentiation) with Venetian aesthetics (conformity), while a traditional trattoria would stress local culinary specialties to convey an authentic Venetian experience that still stands out to someone seeking a 'local' experience over a typical touristic one. Bacari, on the other hand, might offer a space for more casual traditional food and wine consumption, demonstrating a slightly different aspect of Venetian culinary experience. Such an approach is multilevel, where each benchmark can be used to assess distinctiveness on different scales, such as within the organization, between organizations, and even at the level of international business contexts.<sup>240</sup> Therefore, by employing optimal distinctiveness as a framework in this research, the complex decision-making processes behind how Venetian eateries present themselves can be analyzed, ultimately leading to the identifying how they carve out their niche for sustainability and success. Moreover, this framework can be utilized to advise establishments on how to effectively highlight their differentiated aspects to stand out in a crowded market while still aligning with the broader expectations and traditions of Venetian cuisine.

### **3.4 Findings**

The study of Venetian culinary establishments reveals distinct visual narratives that align with their respective strategic identities within the city's rich gastronomic landscape. This analysis delves into the categorization of these narratives as they present themselves in Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants, Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias, and Bacari, each with unique portrayals of their ethos, ambiance, and culinary offerings. By examining the visual content displayed by these eateries, from the plating of dishes to the ambiance of dining spaces, distinct patterns emerge, shining a light on the intricate balance each establishment maintains between conforming to Venetian tradition and

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<sup>240</sup> Zhao, E. Y. (2022). *Optimal distinctiveness: A new agenda for the study of competitive positioning of organizations and markets*. Cambridge University Press.

projecting a distinct identity to attract a diverse clientele. The visual representation of Venetian dining experiences showcases a kaleidoscope of imagery crafted to transport patrons not only through taste but through aesthetics as well. A pattern of commonality and divergence unfurls upon reviewing the imagery used by different types of establishments.

Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants emerge with images of grandeur and elegance—opulent halls lit by chandeliers, expansive terraces offering sweeping views of Venice. Their culinary presentations are masterclasses in precision and minimalism, with food served on stark white or black dinnerware, underlying a narrative of exclusivity and gourmet refinement. White dominates the color palette, signifying a departure from the more earthen tones typical of other establishment types. (Figure 19, 20, 21 and 22).



**Figure 19.** Arva



**Figure 20.** Aromi Restaurant



**Figure 21.** Antinoo's Lounge



**Figure 22.** Grand Canal Restaurant

Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias weave a visual tale of warmth and rustic charm. Wooden decor bathed in brown tones, and generous portions reflect an inviting atmosphere. Establishments in this category extend their narrative to the surrounding Venetian streetscapes, rooting themselves firmly within the local context. (Figure 23, 24, 25 and 26)



**Figure 23.** Osteria da Alberto



**Figure 24.** Osteria ai do gobbi



**Figure 25.** Osteria al Cantinon



**Figure 26.** Trattoria Misericordia

Bacari, often smaller and intimate, focus their imagery on the vibrant social exchange around wine and cicchetti, the staple of these establishments. While space might be limited, the array of traditional snacks arranged prominently on the counter are not. (Figure 27, 28, 29 and 30)



**Figure 27.** Osteria alla Ciuma



**Figure 28.** Bacaro ae Bricoe



**Figure 29.** Bacaro Vintidò



**Figure 30.** Magna Bevi Tasi

Through this visual exploration, it becomes apparent that while high-end restaurants emphasize exclusivity, trattorias and osterias nurture a sense of tradition and comfort, and Bacari express the conviviality of Venetian food culture. Notably, some dining venues blend these elements, borrowing from both the luxury and the traditional realms, creating a fusion of experiences that challenge the categorical boundaries.

Table 2 provides a summary of the image analyses. It details each strategic group, indicating the number of establishments that feature images relating to certain visual elements relative to the total number of establishments examined. This data is provided also as percentages, offering a clear and detailed view of the prevalence of particular visual characteristics within the different strategic groups in the Venetian dining scene. Through such analysis, the distinctive visual footprint and the frequency with which certain images emerge can be precisely understood, providing a meaningful cross-section of the trends that distinguish each category of establishments, from luxury dining experiences to traditional trattorias, down to the Bacari that are steeped in Venetian social life. In the realm of Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants, there is a clear preference for showcasing the exclusivity and elegance integral to their dining experience. A notable 91.66% (33/36) of these establishments exhibit close-ups of plated food, emphasizing the artistry and attention to detail in their cuisine. Additionally, 75% (27/36) display their interior spaces and furnishings, and 33.33% (12/36) feature images of their opulent halls, reinforcing the luxurious ambiance they offer to patrons. This contrasts with the imagery employed by Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias, where visual narratives pivot significantly towards conviviality.

	Close up of set tables	Close up of pleated food	People preparing food / hands finishing dishes	Interior spaces/furnishing	Opulent halls	Lights, chandeliers, Candles	Exterior/ outdoor tables	Wine bottles	Close up of glasses	People working in the restaurant, team photos
Luxury / Fine dining Restaurants	36,11% (13/36)	91,66% (33/36)	30,55% (11/36)	75% (27/36)	33,33% (12/36)	27,77% (10/36)	50% (18/36)	36,11% (13/36)	41,66% (15/36)	63,88% (23/36)
Traditional Restaurants / Trattorias and Osterias	37,5% (15/40)	92,5% (37/40)	15% (6/40)	72,5% (29/40)	0% (0/40)	5% (2/40)	47,5% (19/40)	37,5% (15/40)	40% (16/40)	17,5% (7/40)
Bacari	0% (0/25)	84% (21/25)	12% (3/25)	40% (10/25)	0% (0/25)	0% (0/25)	24% (6/25)	48% (12/25)	52% (13/25)	44% (11/25)

Customers dining in the venue / photos with clients	Venue sign	View on Venice from the venue	Venice Landscapes	Venetian traditions (Carnival, redentore)	Raw materials, origins of the products	Prevalence of White	Prevalence of Brown from wooden furnishing	Generous portions	Small portions/ detail of food	Food displayed on the counter
8,33% (3/36)	27,77% (10/36)	36,11% (13/36)	27,77% (10/36)	2,77% (1/36)	19,44% (7/36)	13,89% (5/36)	5,55% (2/36)	0% (0/36)	44,44% (16/36)	0% (0/36)
42,5% (17/40)	40% (16/40)	10% (4/40)	15% (6/40)	10% (4/40)	10% (4/40)	5% (2/40)	25% (10/40)	35% (14/40)	15% (6/40)	5% (2/40)
40% (10/25)	32% (8/25)	0% (0/25)	16% (4/25)	0% (0/25)	4% (1/25)	0% (0/25)	12% (3/25)	8% (2/25)	0% (0/25)	52% (13/25)

**Table 2. Predominant characteristics of the images of Venetian eateries**



While a similar proportion of these eateries also show close-ups of pleated food at 92.5% (37/40), they differ in illustrating their interiors, with none featuring opulent halls, suggesting a departure from luxury cues and an embrace of their rustic charm. The representation of generous portions at 35% (14/40) underscores the hearty and home-like dining experience they aspire to present. Turning to Bacari, these establishments tell a different visual story altogether. Given their smaller size and more informal ambiance, none of the Bacari sampled showcase set tables or opulent halls. Their imagery focuses on the essence of the Bacari experience, with 84% (21/25) displaying close-ups of pleated food and 52% (13/25) highlighting food displayed on the counter, inviting patrons into an intimate snapshot of Venetian snack culture. Exterior visuals offer a glimpse into the environmental context of these groups. Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants engage with their locale, with 50% (18/36) highlighting their outdoor tables, a testament to their positioning in the prime Venetian real estate with resplendent external views or terraces. In contrast, Bacari, given their smaller and more enclosed spaces, are least likely to feature outdoor seating areas, evidenced by a mere 24% (6/25) including such imagery. The human element within these images also varies. Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants are largely selective in depicting people, with only 8.33% (3/36) displaying customers dining, potentially to preserve an air of privacy and exclusivity. Conversely, Traditional Restaurants and Bacari are more inclined to portray their clientele at 42.5% (17/40) and 40% (10/25), respectively, adding to the narrative of community and the welcoming, bustling Venetian vibe. In summary, Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants set an expectation of an opulent and meticulously curated culinary experience, evident from the high percentage of images showcasing their elegant interior spaces and the precision in food presentation. The prominence of white in their color palette and the absence of the typical brown tones found in more traditional settings signal a modern and sophisticated dining environment. Contrastingly, Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias invoke expectations of a welcoming Venetian atmosphere, with their emphasis on brown tones and generous food portions. The presence of common, welcoming scenes featuring diners conveys a sense of belongingness and homeliness, implying hearty meals and a vibrant atmosphere. Bacari, through their imagery, set an expectation for a casual, more approachable, and communal dining experience. The visuals focus on small plates and communal dining elements like the display of “ciccheti” on the counter and the depiction

of wine culture, suggesting a social atmosphere where interaction is as central to the experience as the food and drink.

What emerges from this visual analysis supports the definitions in Table 1 of the three strategic groups. Luxury fine dining restaurants are elegant, with opulent halls, chandeliers, and terraces, using white or black dinnerware for a minimalistic, exclusive feel. Trattorias and osterias are warm and rustic, with wooden decor and generous portions, blending into the local Venetian context. However, not all eateries selected in the sample, fully conform to the aesthetic norms of their respective group.

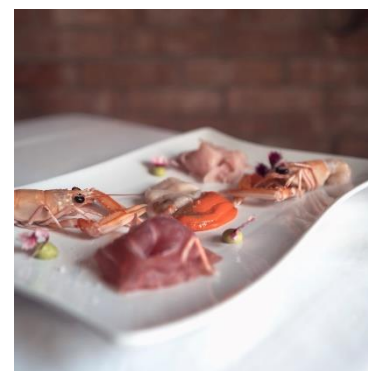
For instance, among trattorias and osterias, *Povoledo* stands out by adopting a more "luxury" approach. *Povoledo* is a Venetian trattoria classified on Google Places within a low price range from which one would not expect a sophisticated approach. However, the images speak for themselves (Figure 31, 32, 33). They depict plating, attention to detail, and a modern reinterpretation of dishes. The presence of a terrace overlooking the Grand Canal gives the restaurant the luxurious and innovative traits typical of haute cuisine restaurants. Thus, *Trattoria Povoledo* exemplifies an outlier within its category, striving for a more sophisticated aesthetic almost embracing the characteristics of the fine dining strategic group.



**Figure 31**



**Figure 32**



**Figure 33**

Even within the luxury/fine dining category, some eateries do not fully conform to their group's aesthetic norms. For example, *Venissa*, whose images have been previously presented (Figure 10, 11, 12), offers sophisticated gourmet dishes typical of high-end

restaurants but lacks overt signs of luxury, instead featuring a green, nature-focused imagery. *Bistrot de Venise* stands out with its dominant red color scheme, a distinctive trait which is not typical for the luxury/fine dining establishments analyzed (Figure 34, 35).



**Figure 34**



**Figure 35**

*La Caravella* recreates a ship-like environment with wooden decor, blending elegance with a traditional, rustic atmosphere, distancing itself from the aesthetic characteristics of its reference group (Figure 36). Similarly, *Local* presents a rustic-chic ambiance that resembles the imagery of a trattoria, differentiating itself from the narrative of luxury and opulence typical of high-end Venetian restaurants (Figure 37).

Despite these variations, all luxury/fine dining restaurants share a commitment to a meticulously detailed, refined, innovative, and modern culinary experience. They often differentiate themselves through unique concepts and decor.



**Figure 36.** La Caravella



**Figure 37.** Local

These strategic visual differentiations are deeply tied to the concept of optimal distinctiveness, which suggests that organizations and entities thrive by balancing the need to fit in within a category while also standing apart from others. By presenting unique visual cues, these restaurants signal their distinct position within the market,

aiming to attract customers seeking specific dining experiences. Optimal distinctiveness theory posits that such distinctive identities contribute to an organization's competitive positioning.<sup>241</sup>

### **3.4.1 Authenticity between tradition and innovation**

The concept of authenticity in the culinary world is a multifaceted and often debated topic. It can be viewed through a variety of lenses, each offering a different perspective on what it means for a dish, an ingredient, or an entire culinary tradition to be deemed "authentic." Commonly, authenticity is associated with a culinary tradition's adherence to its historical roots, the use of traditional techniques and ingredients, and the maintenance of a cultural narrative that connects food to its origin. In the scholarly domain, authenticity can be ironically perceived as both manufactured and fabricated, suggesting that what is often presented as authentic may actually be a constructed representation designed to meet certain expectations or ideals. This is particularly poignant in the realm of cuisine, where chefs may borrow elements from various culinary traditions to innovate and redefine the boundaries of their cuisine category, thus crafting an identity that bridges classical and contemporary practices. Authenticity can also be applied differently across various contexts within the culinary world. It could involve the verification process of determining whether something is "real," "genuine," or "true" to its origins. This verification process often depends on a variety of factors, such as the chef's background, the sourcing of ingredients, and how closely a dish aligns with traditional recipes or cooking methods. Authenticity can sometimes be objectified, for instance, through certification of local ingredient sourcing, providing a more tangible measure of the connection between a culinary entity and its claim of authenticity. However, no matter how authenticity is defined or measured, it tends to be highly valued and is seen as having a moral quality, affecting how individuals and entities are perceived and the success they attain. Authentic culinary experiences are sought after and often command greater appreciation and value from consumers. The idea that authenticity can be both a goal and a constructed perception underscores its complexity and the subjective nature of how we

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<sup>241</sup> Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 17(5), 475-482.

perceive and value culinary traditions and innovations.<sup>242</sup> In Venice, where the interplay of tradition and innovation unfolds against the backdrop of globalization and commercial pressures, the quest for authenticity becomes both an act of defiance and a testament to cultural pride.

Delving deeper into the quest to assess the culinary authenticity projected by Venetian dining establishments, a refined visual investigation has been undertaken. This exploration is exclusively concerned with the gastronomic imagery depicted in the websites of the eateries, previously analyzed according to the parameter of Table 2. This focused inquiry casts its lens solely on pictorial representations of food offerings, narrowing the scope to the spheres of luxury/ fine dining restaurants and Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias. Bacari are excluded as their offerings do not extend to the full dining experiences of lunch or dinner.

From this observational analysis, some trends have emerged. Luxury/fine dining restaurants are marked by a culinary philosophy that marries the heritage of Venice to the inventiveness of modern gastronomy. These high-end eateries craft a symphony of flavors through revisiting traditional recipes, dexterously embedding local culinary history into contemporary gourmet experiences while spotlighting local ingredients. Yet, this blend of old and new presents a sophisticated puzzle. The visual representation of the dishes, absent narrative context, often cloaks their Venetian soul beneath layers of culinary innovation. The resultant dish, while a testament to the chef's creativity, occasionally risks becoming indistinguishable from generic haute cuisine (Figure 38, 39, 40). The essential Venetian character, which should pervade every plate, sometimes fades into the background, its narrative lost without the accompaniment of textual elucidation or an in-person explanation by the chef. Despite the vibrant depictions of novelty and quality, the visual story told is incomplete. Delectable as they may appear, these dishes hold in their essence an enigma; only through the decoding of a menu's description or an oral recitation can one appreciate the nuanced homage to Venetian tradition.

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<sup>242</sup> Lehman, D. W., O'Connor, K., Kovács, B., & Newman, G. E. (2019). Authenticity. *Academy of Management Annals*, 13(1), 1-42.



**Figure 38.** Wisteria



**Figure 39.** Club del Doge



**Figure 40.** Canova Restaurant

Luxury restaurants' digital showcases often highlights their "creative traditional cuisine" or dishes "revisited with ingredients from the lagoon", however, these the veracity of these statements is not verifiable through the observation of photos, as from the images, smells and tastes cannot be perceived. Furthermore, some restaurants prioritize images of the location. An observed preference for presenting ambient snapshots over extensive culinary portfolios suggests an imbalance; the images champion the space's aesthetic and often relegate the food to a secondary status. This visual selection thus constrains a comprehensive evaluation.

On the other hand, traditional restaurants/trattorias and osterias, often romanticized as the custodians of regional authenticity, frequently interpolate their menus with a selection of universal Italian staples such as pizza and carbonara (Figure 41, 42). While these dishes certainly have their place in Italy's culinary mosaic, they do not embody the distinct gastronomic heritage of Venice.



**Figure 41.** Trattoria Dona Onesta



**Figure 42.** Hostaria Venexiana

It seems that in an effort to cater to the palates of a diverse patronage, trattorias are extending their culinary embrace beyond local tradition, weaving in global favorites that,

while popular, are not unique to the Venetian food scene. This inclusion of mainstream dishes, likely a strategic choice to appeal to the tastes of a global clientele, subtly shifts the trattorias' menu away from unique local flavors in favor of a more universal culinary repertoire. The implications of such a shift are twofold: while undoubtedly broadening the trattorias' appeal to tourists, it may also dilute the Venetian culinary identity they seek to represent. The visual messaging employed leans heavily on showcasing seafood—a nod to Venice's maritime roots—but even here, discernment is key. The showcased dishes such as pastas with clams do invoke the spirit of the sea, yet they are not exclusive to Venice and are routinely featured in coastal cities far and wide. This gives rise to the question of authenticity, not just in the origins of the ingredients but in their preparation and presentation as true Venetian fare. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the images represent only a fraction of the entire menu and Venetian dishes can be found on the menu. Then, what becomes apparent from the imagery is that while authentic Venetian dishes do find their way onto the menu, their presence in visual representations is surprisingly scarce, overshadowed by the imagery of a more globalized cuisine. This could suggest a visual strategic pivot towards an international appeal that, while effective in attracting a wide audience, perhaps does so at the cost of eclipsing traditional Venetian culinary authenticity. Therefore, while trattorias uphold the image of traditional dining, the story their visuals tell is less about an unwavering commitment to tradition and more about a balancing act between local authenticity and international touristic appeal.

Hence, through the focused lens of this investigation, a definitive divergence emerges in the culinary narratives presented by Venetian dining establishments. Luxury/fine dining restaurants mix Venetian tradition with innovation, creativity and, at times, with a thoughtful nod towards sustainability, resulting in a sophisticated milieu that elevates local heritage with contemporary flair. Trattorias and Osterias traditionally seen as bastions of conventional fare, seem to chart a different course. They venture beyond the confines of time-honored recipes to a broader gastronomical horizon that includes universally recognized dishes. In doing so, their menus reflect an adaptation to a changing culinary landscape, yet this very adaptability comes with a compromise, a gradual retreat from the authenticity once intrinsic to Venetian cuisine's distinct identity.

Reflecting on these observations, an intriguing contrast surfaces between the earlier visual analysis rooted in the Table 2 parameters and the more recent examination concentrating on culinary presentations. The ambiance of trattorias and osterias, with

their rough-hewn charm and warm, unpretentious interiors, paints a vivid picture of the quintessential Venetian experience, yet their menus often eschew pure tradition, unexpectedly yielding to an array of international selections. On the other side, luxury restaurants present an interesting juxtaposition. While the criteria previously scrutinized in Table 2 might have suggested a departure from classical Venetian culinary practices, a closer look at their culinary offerings reveals a thoughtful cultivation of heritage, albeit reimagined.

Exploring the interplay between tradition and innovation in Venetian culinary heritage was also a central theme at the 'Evolving Flavors: Gastronomy, Sustainability, and Innovation' event, held on May 9th, 2024, at the San Giobbe Campus Economico of Ca' Foscari University. Professionals in the field discussed the importance of preserving Venetian culinary traditions, which have experienced some loss, and explored contrasting approaches taken by trattorias, osterias, and higher-end restaurants.

A notable highlight of this gathering, framed by the auspices of the INTERREG Central Europe Programme, was the interview with Luigi Cassan. As the entrepreneurial force behind Dogaressa Catering, renowned for its exquisite banqueting and event orchestration, and as the proprietor of the esteemed Venetian eatery Antica Besseta, Cassan brought to the table a reservoir of expertise. His dual engagement with both the dynamism of event planning and the rootedness of traditional cuisine lends him a unique perspective on the delicate interplay between enduring culinary heritage and the imperatives of modern gastronomy. In a reflective contemplation on the culinary soul of Venice, Luigi Cassan delivered poignant insights into the genesis and preservation of the city's gastronomic heritage. He observed that once, the very heartbeat of Venetian culinary authenticity was sustained by the local taverns, those hallowed bastions of tradition where true Venetian dishes thrived. Yet, Cassan lamented a current trend: a dwindling number of trattorias and taverns remain as stalwart defenders of Venice's gastronomic integrity. Too many have succumbed to the siren call of tourism, adopting a facade of Venetian cuisine while serving pseudo-Venetian fare that only echoes the depth and substance of the lagoon's true culinary tradition.

The culinary entrepreneur passionately articulated the culinary ethos that guides his restaurant, where he tries to carry on the authenticity of the Venetian culinary tradition. The Antica Besseta restaurant offers a locally sourced menu, which celebrates the



ingredients of local origin coming from the waters of the Venetian lagoon. He tells how this vision is also shared by many of his colleagues and high-level starred chefs operating in Venetian cuisine. Moreover, he illuminated the importance of culinary evolution, advocating for a harmonious blend of tradition with innovation, a delicate balance that honors the past while embracing the fluidity of change. Emblematic of this approach is his response to the advent of the blue crab in Venetian waters. Rather than resisting this ecological shift, Cassan embraced it, ingeniously integrating the blue crab into his dishes, for example replacing the Granseola, thus transforming and enriching his menu offerings. However, it highlights the environmental problem that led to the introduction of blue crab. Luigi Cassan conveyed a message brimming with optimism for a renaissance of genuine Venetian culture and heritage within the city's culinary realm. He recognized a burgeoning public esteem for the rich tapestry of Venetian specialties, a sentiment that has progressively taken root amidst the patrons and connoisseurs alike. In his reflection, Cassan acknowledged a notable improvement in the caliber of Venetian dining experiences, underlining a visible uplift in quality even as the city's gastronomic landscape is increasingly punctuated by mass-market eateries which may dilute the Venetian culinary authenticity. In the midst of this culinary blend, he underscored the indispensable role of tradition, casting the iconic Rialto market as the beating heart of Venetian authenticity. It is here that the pulse of the city's ancestral cuisine can be felt most vividly, the heritage-bound practices of the market families, their time-honored methods, and their unwavering dedication to quality encapsulate the essence of Venice's gastronomic soul. Cassan urged the local institutions to recognize the vitality of this community, advocating for renewed belief and robust support for these custodians of culinary tradition. Cassan has finally emphasized the vital imperative of the safeguard of the Venetian traditions for the preservation of cultural identity and culinary heritage.

### **3.4 Research limitation**

The reliance on online platforms such as TripAdvisor and Google Places for the categorization of establishments could introduce a bias. These platforms largely depend on user reviews and the establishments' self-representation, which may not always provide an objective or comprehensive view of the entities being studied. This can result in a selection bias, skewing the sample towards restaurants that are more active online or

have a more digitally savvy customer base. Secondly, the filters and search terms used to collect data from these platforms carry the potential for confirmation bias. By looking for specific terms like 'traditional' or 'luxury', the research may inadvertently exclude relevant establishments that do not use these keywords in their online profiles. This can also limit the diversity of the sample, impacting the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation may revolve around the subjective interpretation within the visual analysis of the establishments' imagery. Even though principles from visual semiotics, anthropology, and iconography were applied to craft a nuanced analysis, such evaluations are inherently open to the researchers' personal biases and perspectives, potentially affecting the objectivity of the results. Furthermore, the quantitative aspect of the research relies heavily on the presence and frequency of certain visual elements, potentially overlooking the qualitative aspects such as the historical significance, narrative context, and socio-cultural implications of these visual cues. Lastly, there is a temporal limitation to consider. The research provides a snapshot based on data available at the time of study. The dynamic nature of culinary establishments, customer preferences, and online presence means that the findings may not accurately reflect the situation over an extended period.

### **3.5 Implication for entrepreneurs and practitioners in the Venetian culinary sector**

The research harnesses the concept of optimal distinctiveness, providing invaluable insights on competitive positioning, which bears crucial implications for entrepreneurs and practitioners within the Venetian culinary sector. This theory underscores the need for a delicate balance between conformity and differentiation – a balance crucial for any establishment aiming to forge a unique identity within the market while adhering to the collective conventions of Venetian cuisine. For entrepreneurs, these findings shed light on strategic decision-making processes pertaining to market positioning. The study suggests that luxury establishments tend to harmonize authenticity with innovation, striving to retain the intrinsic Venetian culinary identity while concurrently infusing distinctive elements to captivate a global audience. Entrepreneurs are thus encouraged to consider how they can weave authentic Venetian tradition with creative twists to their offerings. This is not merely to stand out but to add value and enhance the recognition of Venetian gastronomy in a market saturated with options. The study reveals that visual cues and portrayals are not just aesthetic choices but strategic resources employed to communicate

an establishment's identity and ethos. Furthermore, this study carries implications for cultural preservation amidst commercialization, particularly relevant for destinations like Venice where the culinary experience is a significant draw for tourism. Practitioners are confronted with the paradoxical challenge of safeguarding Venetian culinary heritage while also adapting to the tastes and preferences of a global clientele. Entrepreneurs and practitioners must be cognizant of these ongoing debates, ensuring that while they strive for uniqueness, the essence of tradition that defines Venetian cuisine is not compromised. Entrepreneurs and practitioners in the hospitality industry are called upon to be both innovative and respectful custodians of culture, navigating the delicate balance between preserving a cherished heritage and adapting to the challenges of a constantly evolving and competitive market. However, practitioners should also note that visual representations on digital platforms must align with the culinary authenticity that visitors seek; else, they risk misrepresenting the very essence they aim to portray.

### **3.6 Suggestion for further research**

While the research on the Venetian culinary landscape has provided thoughtful insights into how establishments balance authentic Venetian cuisine with the need to attract a diverse audience, it has also illuminated areas ripe for further investigative exploration. The notion of optimal distinctiveness, as the guiding framework of the study, poses significant implications for understanding competitive strategies in rich, cultural, and tourism-infused markets. Future research could focus on several avenues that promise to deepen the understanding of the interplay between tradition and differentiation within the culinary sector. One particularly enriching direction would be to explore the longitudinal effects of optimal distinctiveness strategies on customer retention and loyalty. Understanding how the balance of authenticity and uniqueness affects repeat business over time could offer valuable insights for long-term competitive positioning. Moreover, the current research is grounded in a tripartite categorization of establishments - Luxury/Fine Dining Restaurants, Traditional Restaurants/Trattorias and Osterias, and Bacari. Future studies might consider expanding these categories to include emerging culinary trends or niches within the Venetian food scene, providing a more nuanced perspective of how new entrants navigate positioning and identity within a well-established market. The application of cultural, semiotic, and iconographic frameworks to

analyze visual narratives presents a wealth of potential for extending research into the symbolic meaning behind these narratives. An investigation into how these visual representations influence not only consumer perception but also consumer behavior and decision-making processes would be particularly valuable. Beyond the visual element, there could be a comparative study into the narratives around sustainability and local sourcing, which are becoming increasingly salient in the culinary world. Assessing how these themes are integrated into the strategic messaging of Venetian culinary establishments could offer insights into broader trends in consumer values and expectations. The research also indicates potential avenues for future exploration, such as the risk of diluting the authenticity of Venetian cuisine versus its preservation through commodification. Understanding the broader implications of culinary tourism on the preservation of Venetian traditions is also critical. Further studies could delve into how the influx of tourists influences local culinary practices and the extent to which entrepreneurs should adapt to these external preferences without forsaking their heritage. Lastly, research into consumer behavior, specifically how tourists versus locals respond to the balance of traditional versus internationalized menus in Venetian eateries, could provide entrepreneurs with clearer guidance on menu design and service delivery. Hence, the body of work stemming from this research acts as a catalyst for continued research that can foster a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances in the intersection of culture, commerce, and consumerism within the Venetian culinary universe.

## Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to explore the Venetian culinary landscape by visually analyzing images from a diverse array of restaurants. The study aimed to uncover how these establishments embody the concepts of tradition and authenticity, depict Venetian culture, and integrate innovative elements alongside traditional ones.

Recognizing food not just as sustenance but as a vital aspect of intangible cultural heritage underscores its cultural and symbolic significance in defining community identity. Thus, preserving culinary practices and traditions over time becomes paramount. Nevertheless, tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive; they are symbiotic. Innovation builds upon tradition, enhancing it with contemporary elements. Consumers are willing to embrace culinary innovations if they honor tradition while integrating modern elements. Innovations must enhance the product's value while preserving its essential identity to be perceived as authentic. The concept of authenticity in gastronomy is also interconnected to the idea of sustainability, as local products and ingredients are defined as authentic.

Beyond defining the cultural identity of a community, culinary traditions play a crucial role in shaping the identity of a city, particularly in tourist destinations that leverage food and culinary heritage as a means of attraction and promotion. The quest for authenticity in local cuisine is indeed a key driver for culinary tourists.

Venice stands as a quintessential example of a tourist city where culinary traditions have evolved since ancient times defining the cultural identity of the city.

Analyzing the images of diverse Venetian eateries emerges that luxury restaurants portray elegance, opulence, and meticulous attention to detail in their presentation of dishes, while traditional eateries offer a more comfortable, warm and friendly ambiance and *Bacari* focus their imagery on intimate places of lively social exchange around wine and *cicchetti* prominently placed on the counter. However, there are exceptions, such as *trattorias* adopting a sophisticated style or luxury restaurants aiming for distinction with unique elements, all while maintaining their commitment to culinary sophistication.

Regarding the concept of authenticity, the analysis of images reveals some key insights: traditional restaurants, *trattorias* and *osterias* maintain a more authentic ambiance, but their dishes often cater to an international clientele. While traditional dishes may be listed on the menu, they are not always prominently featured in photos. In contrast, luxury restaurants, which may initially seem less traditional and more innovative, offer a

Venetian cuisine that utilizes local ingredients in a reinvented and elevated manner. However, there is a risk: if these reinterpretations of dishes lose their traditional essence, they may be perceived as gourmet creations lacking authentic Venetian roots.

These findings suggest the need for further research to examine how to safeguard Venetian culinary traditions and incorporate innovation without compromising their authenticity in the eyes of consumers.

## Appendixes

### Appendix A

Description of recurring visual elements in the analysis of images

**Close up of glasses:** Detailed shots zooming in on glasses (empty or full)

**Close up of plated food:** Detailed images showcasing the intricacies of plated dishes

**Close up of set tables:** Detailed shots capturing the arrangement of tables, emphasizing the dining setup

**Customers dining in the venue/ photos with clients:** Photographs featuring clients enjoying their dining experience within the restaurant

**Exterior/Outdoor tables:** Images displaying the outdoor dining area and tables, offering a view of the restaurant's external setting.

**Food displayed on the counter:** Images of food arranged and displayed on the counter

**Generous portions of food:** Images showcasing larger-sized portions of food, emphasizing abundance

**Interior spaces/furnishing:** Photographs showcasing the indoor ambiance, decor, and furnishings of the venue

**Lights, Chandeliers, Candles:** Focused shots of lighting elements such as chandeliers and candles, contributing to the atmospheric aesthetics

**Opulent Halls:** Pictures capturing grand and luxurious interior spaces

**People preparing food/hands finishing dishes:** Close-ups of individuals engaged in the final touches of food preparation, highlighting the craftsmanship involved

**People working in the restaurant, team photos:** Images showcasing the restaurant staff at work, including team photos

**Prevalence of brown color from wooden furnishing:** Images emphasizing the predominant use of brown color, particularly from wooden furnishings

**Prevalence of white color for plates, decor, and furnishing:** Images highlighting the dominant use of white color in various elements like plates, decor, and furnishings

**Raw materials, origins of the products:** Visuals emphasizing the raw ingredients and the origins of the products used in the restaurant

**Small Portions of food:** Images spotlighting smaller-sized portions or tastings

**Venetian landscapes:** Images of Venetian landscapes unrelated to the specific location of the venue

**Venetian traditions (Carnival, Redentore):** Images Capturing moments related to traditional Venetian events such as Carnival or Redentore

**Venue sign:** Images of the distinctive signage associated with a venue, providing the name or the logo

**View of Venice from the venue:** Shots showcasing the restaurant's perspective of the Venice landscape

**Wine bottles:** Images highlighting the presence of wine bottles



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