Food Heritagisation

Food heritagisation is the socio-cultural process through which different agents identify food and gastronomic resources embedded in a given place, attach new values to them, and formally recognise them as part of their collective heritage in an attempt to pursue their specific aims.

1. Introduction

Food heritagisation can be conceived as the socio-cultural process through which different agents identify food and gastronomic resources embedded in a given place, attach new values to them, and formally recognise them as part of their collective heritage in an attempt to pursue their specific aims [1]. Food heritagisation is therefore a process and social practice that is constructed more than fixed. It consists of the dynamic actualisation, adaptation, and reinterpretation of elements from the past attached to a given group, its knowledge, skills, and values. Food heritagization entails different stages and underlying dynamics. Among them are "heritage recognition", "heritage legitimisation", and "heritage valorisation".

2. Heritage Recognition

Bessière [2] and Bessière and Tibère [3] argue that heritage recognition underlies three different dynamics, namely "heritage realisation", "heritage awareness", and "heritage identification". Heritage realisation arises when a group of actors acknowledge the existence of a shared vision and judgement on some elements of the foodscape. Heritage awareness and identification occur when actors recognise their importance, identify "collective heritage objects", and eventually undertake a path towards their protection. The relationships that develop in the globalised post-modern society are one of the main factors behind the recognition of food as cultural heritage. These dynamics can stem from changes triggered by the industrialisation such as the standardisation and homogenisation of foodscapes, as well as the introduction of regulations that undermine the survival of traditional production systems. The stress resulting from these events can foster a need to fill a sense of nostalgia for bygone food and culinary worlds to counteract the perceived loss of identity and sense of alienation that stem from these dynamics. The triggering of these reactions requires certain preconditions, such as changes in the social context including the development of urban middle classes; emergence of gastronomic and cultural elites; as well as improvements in the political and economic situation, for instance, in post-conflict and post-crisis times. The transition from realisation to awareness and eventual identification entails the participation of heterogeneous groups of actors in the selection of the heritage components and a value system to define their attributes . In this path, the heritagised object undergoes a process of reinvention and resignification that changes its meaning both for the community and for a wider range of local and extra-local actors.

3. Heritage Legitimisation

The identification of collective heritage objects can engender an institutional acknowledgment of their "genuineness and authenticity"[2] . Bessière and Tibère [3] call this stage "heritage legitimisation", the process through which various actors officially recognise it as part of the collective heritage (i.e., internal legitimisation process). Legitimisation also has the function of authenticating heritage objects externally (i.e., external legitimisation process). The legitimisation and authentication of heritage require a strong interconnection between endogenous and exogenous elements, and local and extra-local actors. Cohen and Cohen[4] identify two modes of authentication, namely "cool" and "hot". Hot authentication involves local actors—bearers of the knowledge associated with the heritage object—in the recognition and definition of its features. Cool authentication concerns the official attribution of the status of heritage by experts and authorities or, as

Smith[5] defines, by authorised heritage discourse. Legitimisation involves the definition of the tangible and intangible boundaries of the heritagised food, as well as the codification, certification, and institutionalisation of its associated physical features.

4. Heritage Valorisation

In some circumstances, legitimisation can lead to the creation of new economic opportunities for local communities (e.g., value chains and food tourism). This can happen when the heritagised element is a food traditionally intended for subsistence or is marketed through informal networks. On other occasions, legitimisation occurs when the resource already has a commercial value, at least at the local level. This circumstance may arise in the face of an expansion and increasing formalisation of the market. The shift from local to extra-local markets prompts the need for heritage protection. The valorisation of food heritage involves a process that intentionally alters the value and meanings of a component of the foodscape to improve its position within a given social context and, in so doing, increases its prestige and desirability.

Authorship

The entry is the result of the collective work by Zocchi, D., Fontefrancesco, M., Corvo, P., and Pieroni, A.

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