ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL FOOD HERITAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: In the space of traditional food more than in any other domain, each community has historically accumulated layers of popular knowledge, resulted from the interaction with the environment and the living conditions, many of them with a proven scientific foundation. All this heritage should be exploited, being in no contrast with the idea of progress but, on the contrary, including it.
Food culture may constitute a relevant factor in the process of sustainable development, providing feasible economic models based on the resources of traditional food knowledge. In this context, the sector of traditional food culture may be a relevant tool for economic growth in a global economy based on services and the monetization of the rights of intellectual property.
The traditional food patrimony is also a relevant tool in social cohesion and a social and community development factor, contributing to the elimination of tensions and social exclusion. It represents the expression of (individual, group, regional, national etc.) identity and, equally, of diversity and difference, essential values and fundamental rights.
Promoting and preserving the traditional cultural food patrimony of a rural type represents an important way of regeneration and revitalization of urban cultural food.

Keywords: traditional, cultural food patrimony, digitalisation.

1. Introduction

We are nowadays witnessing the increasingly acute awareness of the role played by food culture in the harmonious, ecological development of a person and community, within a society of consumption and globalization.

The risks associated with society's accelerated development, food overconsumption, food practices which cultivate sedentariness (with medical consequences such as nutritional disorders or cardiovascular disease) have generated a rethinking of development strategies.

There have been initiated campaigns for exploiting food practices related to ecological cultivation, use of local food resources, food preparation after healthy recipes. However, many of these actions were left at the stage of information and publicity campaigns, because they cannot reconnect with authentic cultural heritage in terms of food.

Any innovative or change process definitively cannot be separated from a "living context" composed of already existing mentalities, behaviors, attitudes, visions, approaches and practices interesting all the agents acting in a given operative scenario. The material (environmental systems, biodiversity, natural resources, infrastructures, landscapes, economic agents, etc.) and immaterial (traditions, expertise, cultures, religions, languages, arts, etc.) resources constantly interact.

Almost paradoxically, the future of food industry, as well as global sustainable lifestyles, seems to be linked to a return to the past and to ignored or lost traditions and other rural activities or to a reinvention of new traditions based on local cultural heritage and traditional knowledge.

2. Food traditional knowledge

Traditional knowledge is a cumulative body of knowledge composed of stratified knowhow, practices and representations developed and maintained by communities with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment (Cannarella and Piccioni, 2011). Thanks to cultural inter-generation transmission, traditional knowledge acquires its character of historical continuity in the practice of using resources (Handayani and Prawito,

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2009; Parrotta and Agnolotti, 2007). The idea of tradition reminds, however, of the image of a chain coming from the past. Tradition thus represents a form of transmission or an information flow during time of ideas, praxes, habits, methods, etc., with a character of more or less continuity. This character of continuity gives traditions not only a link to the past, but also an impetus to the future.

While science is expressed through formal, systematic and codified languages, traditional knowledge tends to be a form of tacit knowledge shared by a given local community into personal, context-specific manners, which may be very difficult to formalize and communicate. These peculiar features contribute to make the achievement of an exhaustive definition of traditional knowledge a rather difficult task (Berkes and Henley, 1997a, 1997b; Ellen, 2007; Senanayake, 2006).

In the space of traditional food more than in any other domain, each community has historically accumulated layers of popular knowledge, resulted from the interaction with the environment and the living conditions, many of them with a proven scientific foundation. All this heritage should be exploited, being in no contrast with the idea of progress but, on the contrary, including it.

The aim of this paper is to present the role of traditional food heritage in the context of urban development, as practices and techniques deriving from historical or past traditional knowledge, showing a capability to operate as innovation, despite their apparently obsolete and out-of-date features.

3. Romania and the policies to promote food tradition

The concern with healthy food has increased all over the world, hence the support for ecological agriculture and the consumption of organic, bio food. The interest for the return customs related to traditional food culture is obvious at the level of European economic policies. Recording food products within national and European quality schemes such as traditional product, protected designation of origin label, protected geographical indication, constitute a proof in this respect. However, in Romania, the producers' interest in developing this segment is yet small. According to the statistics provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Sustainable Development, there have been recorded in the National Registry of Traditional Products, during 2005-2013, 4402 products, out of which only 1 has been registered at the European level in the category Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). In the same category, Italy has registered 114 products, France, 127 products, Spain, 91, and Germany, 86 (http://www.madr.ro/ro/industrie-alimentara/produse-traditionale-romanesti.html). Regarding the consumption of organic food, in Romania, this is still very low. The conclusions of a vast research project, CONSUMECO, coordinated as of 2009 by the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, which had as objective the conducting of complex research regarding the elaboration of a behavioural model of the consumer ecological agro-food products, revealed the fact that, in Romania, ecological consumption represents less than 1% of all the food, the main barrier being the very high price difference, followed by accessibility. Nevertheless, the tendency is a positive one, with a yearly increase rate of 10-20%. Regarding information about these products, to the statement "I have good knowledge about ecological agro-food products", 24,6% of the respondents answered by "partial agreement", a percentage almost equal with that of the people who believe they do not have much knowledge about ecological products (23,0%) (http://www.monapopa.usamv.ro/2010/11/29/raport-stiintific-si-tehnic-etapa-1-consumeco/).

Under these circumstances, we believe that one way to satisfy a social need such as healthy food, is integrating it at the level of cultural needs, such as the affirmation of identity through food customs and honouring the cultural heritage by rediscovering the traditional food patrimony. Feeding is subordinated to a paradigm which surpasses the biological component of the human being, forever tending towards the affirmation of the individual's

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cultural component. All these will be possible by exploiting the immaterial patrimony of traditional food, with the help of the most important human resources, creativity and sociability.

3. The digitization of traditional food knowledge

The European Agenda for Culture, launched in 2007, argues that the cultural sector is an indispensable element for reaching the strategic objectives of the Union in terms of prosperity, solidarity and security. The Sectoral strategy in the domain of culture and national patrimony for the period 2014-2020 states that "Culture is not a secondary dimension of the socio-economic development, it is part of the very social tissue on which relies the building of any development strategy" (http://www.umpcultura.ro/noutati_doc_98_strategia-sectoriala-in-domeniul-culturii-i-patrimoniului-national-pentru-perioada-2014-2020-modificata_pg_0.htm) .

According to the reference frame regarding the domains and functions of the cultural and creative sector, taken into consideration by the present strategy, one of the cultural domains is the immaterial patrimony, with the functions of dissemination (spreading, also through the new models of development in the online environment), protection (research, exploitation) and cultural education/intervention.

In this context, the research and preservation of the traditional food patrimony can be achieved by creating an electronic encyclopaedia, which will quantify both knowledge on traditional food extracted from historical, ethnographic and linguistic sources, and the living thesaurus of networks and food behaviours collected through interviewing the older people. In rural places, there is an elder generation who still practice subsistence-based food production (growing, cooking and preserving their own foods). Their recipes, preservation techniques and growing technologies are of great interest to a growing urban food consuming population. This knowledge base is a precious cultural heritage asset and is at risk of being diminished with the passing of elder generations. The digitization of this knowledge is a way of saving this priceless heritage. The purpose for creating an online encyclopaedia will be not only to inform the wide public on the authentic Romanian traditional food culture, but also to educate it with a view to exploiting the inherited food patrimony, in the spirit of equity and tolerance.

The computerization of the traditional food patrimony responds to the desiderata of the European policies for which the digitalization of cultural resources is regarded as a key factor, which will contribute to improving the accessibility and the uninterrupted flow of information in an economy of knowledge. Once transposed electronically, the food cultural patrimony may become a resource for a wide range of informational products and services, in sectors such as education or tourism. That is why, on the long term, it is considered that the digitalization of cultural resources and the creation of a unique access platform inside a digital library represents an initiative with a considerable economic potential, which may lead to enhancing competitiveness all around Europe, thus respecting the provisions of the Strategy from Lisbon. (cf. Calimera Guideslines, http://www.calimera.org/lists/guideslines/digitisation)

4. Conclusion

Food culture may constitute a relevant factor in the process of sustainable development, providing feasible economic models based on the resources of traditional food knowledge. In this context, the sector of traditional food culture may be a relevant tool for economic growth in a global economy based on services and the monetization of the rights of intellectual property.

Promoting and preserving the traditional cultural food patrimony of a rural type represents a relevant tool in the regeneration and revitalization of the urban area. The model

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of traditional nourishment may represent a solution to the urban problems of food in the context in which it is exploited through an educational tool addressing a wide audience.

Cultural goods have also lately achieved the value of social goods. Thus, any initiative of cultural education related to the traditional food patrimony may also be quantified like a way of sustainable economic development. Rediscovering culinary tradition as a way of assuming cultural identity and of personal development may contribute to increasing the consumption of autochthonous products and, implicitly, developing local economy. Exploiting the traditional food patrimony is supported by raising the living standards, developing transport infrastructure and modifying the patterns of spending leisure time/holidays (developing rural tourism and, implicitly, cultural tourism). Traditional food is often associated with the idea of ecological products, hence its direct connection with the concerns for enhancing life quality. But, beyond its social and economic benefits, exploiting the food cultural heritage has obvious consequences in terms of assuming the system of traditional values, in the spirit of social inclusion. The traditional food patrimony is a relevant tool in social cohesion and a community development factor, contributing to the elimination of tensions and social exclusion. It represents the expression of (individual, group, regional, national etc.) identity and, equally, of diversity and difference, essential values and fundamental rights.

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