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STREET FOOD AND TOURISM: AN APPROACH TO POLISH IDENTITY THROUGH CULINARY HERITAGE

STREET FOOD I TURYSTYKA: PODEJŚCIE DO POLSKIEJ TOŻSAMOŚCI
PRZEZ DZIEDZICTWO KULINARNE

1. Introduction, objective and method

Street food practices are expected to keep the local flavor of preparations and recipes, which benefits broadly the maintenance and transmission of identities and cultures. This has an extraordinary appeal for tourism. Interest of travelers on food tourism is increasing and it has given full attention by a huge amount of literature. Colin Michael Hall and Liz Sharples¹ stated the endless possibilities of tourism practices around food, which includes products, dishes, factories, restaurants, events or markets. Some of them fit well with the practice of street food. While the development of food tourism studies has reached into many different and innovative approaches, street food tourism remains as a less explored topic.

In this sense, “street food is one of the centerpieces of culinary tourism for people in pursuit of unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences”². Also, they continue reporting that “visitors from other countries almost invariably sample street food as important parts of their tourism experiences”³ since through consuming street foods visitors are able to experience a whole cooking event. The objective of this exploratory paper is to approach the street food manifestations in Poland. To achieve it, the study method relies on a combination of an auto-ethnography visual approach and non-participant observation visits to the old towns of Warsaw and Cracow. Fieldwork was conducted in December, 2019. Results show examples of Polish foods – *pierogi* and cheese – which are transferred to visitors through street food-based tourism practices.

¹ C.M. Hall, L. Sharples, *The consumption of experiences or the experience of consumption? An introduction to the tourism of taste*, [in:] *Food tourism around the world: Development, management and markets*, eds. C.M. Hall et al., Elsevier, Oxford 2003, pp. 13–36.

² B. Kraig, C. Taylor Sen, *Street food around the world: an encyclopedia of food and culture*, ABC-CLIO, Santa Barbara, California 2013, p. 17.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

2. An approach to the relationship between street food and tourism

Street food is taking a significant role within urban food tourism⁴. In this sense, street food is a pathway to display not only products but also dishes, which allow people to navigate into different cultures and places. When a product or a dish is driven into a tourist attraction, it creates a motivation on visitors and tourists who are willing to make a journey in order to explore it. For example, food carts and food trucks have become cultural and tourist attractions both for locals and visitors⁵. This is the basis for the topic of street food tourism, which still remains unexplored within the literature.

In particular, street food tourism includes a huge range of dishes and venues. It also refers to a direct conversation between visitors and hosts which is one of the key drivers of sustainable development of tourist activity, also in the framework of urban landscapes. “Food plays an important role in bringing people together by promoting social interaction and building community, alluding to yet another way that street food can enhance urban space”⁶.

Street food practices also promote tourism in a context of urban development and resilience. Paolo Corvo defines it as follows:

as food trucks and street food in general gain more appeal, they can create a specific tourist draw for a city. On-the-go tourists, busy seeing the sights of a city, have the opportunity to sample local favorites. Street food enables their immersion into a cultural experience without having to stop. [...] The food truck themselves can offer a festive and alternative eating experience to attract tourists⁷.

Here, food carts and food trucks do not only emerge as a business practice, but they also bring locals and visitors to the experience and tasting of local and fresh cuisine. In addition, street food becomes a common practice to preserve traditional culinary knowledges and values, convey products and dishes, and help creating a sense of togetherness among communities⁸. Consequently, street food appears to be a chain for maintenance and transmission of cultural and social values.

Within the context of the contemporary resurgence of street food⁹, the role played by media, consumerism, and celebrity chefs have heavily helped in raising its profile. The

⁴ J.C. Henderson, *Street food, hawkers and the Michelin Guide in Singapore*, “British Food Journal” 2017, 119(4), pp. 790–802.

⁵ *Street food. Culture, economy, health and governance*, eds. R. De Cassia, M. Companion, S.R. Marras, Routledge, New York 2014.

⁶ A. Pill, *Changing food landscapes. Understanding the food truck movement in Atlanta, Georgia, USA*, [in:] *Street food. Culture, economy, health and governance*, op. cit., pp. 119–132.

⁷ P. Corvo, *Food trucks in the USA. Sustainability, young entrepreneurship, and urban revitalization*, [in:] *Street food. Culture, economy, health and governance*, op. cit., p. 139.

⁸ F. Fusté-Forné, *La cultura del menjar de carrer a Catalunya*, “Revista d’etnologia de Catalunya” 2017, 42, pp. 251–260.

⁹ G. Wessel, *From Place to NonPlace: A Case Study of Social Media and Contemporary Food Trucks*, “Journal of Urban Design” 2012, 17(4), pp. 511–531.

recent consolidation of the food truck landscape in the United States and its media repercussion – television, websites and blogs, and social media – has led to an increasing demand¹⁰. Newspapers over the country also included the street food appealing attraction in their journalistic storytelling¹¹.

Furthermore, the relationship between appearance and social media is clear. Spanish celebrity chef Aduriz affirms that cuisine has an ephemeral ingredient, in terms of enjoying it as it was a theatre play. “Nothing is more sensible and ephemeral than a dish, which disappears when it has been eaten, and it only remains its memory”¹². Similarly, Krishnendu Ray discusses that “some of us are reacting to the very techniques that make such aestheticization and discursivity possible, by giving durable form – pictures and words – to what is ephemeral”¹³. These ideas also lie on the popularization of food thanks to social media, and the changing landscape where street food spaces (for example, food trucks) does not come anymore to the people but instead people go to visit them. According to Signe Rousseau, “new media platforms like blogs, webzines, Facebook and Twitter have opened up new spaces to talk about food, and virtual communities blossomed in a very short space of time through sharing recipes and stories across traditional boundaries of place and profession”¹⁴.

Nowadays, food venues are facing a trend where they are increasingly and even excessively relying on social media, because of the characteristics of social networks – personal, interactive and immediate conversation –

Who, these days, would make an emu-egg cassoulet and *not* tweet about it? Part of the reason that we know as much as we do about food(ie)-culture, including cookbooks, is thanks to specific technologies like social media, and to the Internet in general, which in many cases serve to preserve the knowledge contained in *traditional* media¹⁵.

Within this scenario, a current trend boomed by social media is made of small plates and meals¹⁶, which are easy to eat and easy to tweet. Street food practices are also evolving in parallel to this phenomenon.

¹⁰ P. Corvo, *Food trucks in the USA...*, op. cit.

¹¹ Cf. F. Hahn, B. Krystal, *Food trucks, breweries and bike lanes: How D.C. has changed over the last eight years*, “The Washington Post” 2016, 4 November; I. Lovett, *Food Carts in Los Angeles Come Out of the Shadows*, “The New York Times” 2013, 5 December; B. Tsui et al., *Where the Dishes (Lots of Them) Come to You*, “The New York Times” 2014, January 12.

¹² A.L. Aduriz, *Horizontes en el paladar, en el curso De La Mano a la boca. Arte y gastronomía en un escenario expandido*, Santander, Cursos de verano de la Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP) 2015.

¹³ K. Ray, *Domesticating cuisine: food and aesthetics on American television*, “Gastronomica” 2007, 7(1), p. 57.

¹⁴ S. Rousseau, *Food and social media: you are what you tweet*, AltaMira Press, Plymouth, United Kingdom 2012, pp. 10–11.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

¹⁶ S. Breselor, *How the Web is changing the way we eat*, 2010, www.salon.com/2010/05/10/internet_changing_eating [15.12.2019].

3. A representation of regional (street) food in Poland

Previous research analyzed the relationships between food and tourism in Poland. In particular, authors such as Halina Makala¹⁷ have revealed how the traditions attached to Polish culinary heritages can become a tourism attraction. She reports that

what makes Polish traditional cooking diverse is the influence of different cultures and nations, historical events, the pace of regional economic development. The availability of natural resources, the farming and husbandry possibilities, the ways in which food was made and utilized, local traditions, the national temperament, religious and folk legends and customs, rituals and ceremonies connected with preparation and consumption of meals and traditional hospitality¹⁸.

Both culture and nature largely influence on the manifestations of a particular cuisine¹⁹. Makala highlights that Polish food landscapes are made of soups, fish and meat dishes, vegetables, wild plants and fruits, and cakes²⁰. Here, bread and dumplings are also playing a significant identity role²¹. In this sense, traditional dumplings can be filled with “meat, mushrooms, cottage cheese or fruit”²².

Food tourism elevates the regional cuisine to a tourism attraction, and it emerges as an avenue to discover the local, regional and national culinary heritages through foods and dishes. Dominik Orłowski and Magdalena Woźniczko point out that Polish cuisine is rapidly increasing its relationships with tourism via food markets and festivals, culinary trails, and thematic museums. They highlight, for example, the Jagiellonian Fair in Lublin, the festival “Silesian Tastes”, the Grodziec Honey and Wine Trail, the Oscypek Cheese Trail, and the Museums of Żywiec Brewery, the Bread Museum in Radzionkowo, the Gingerbread Museum in Toruń, and Dairy Museum in Rzeszów²³. In this context, Polish national cuisine is the sum of its diverse regional cuisines. All of the above examples confirm the various elements that make up the gastronomic landscapes of Poland, whose villages’ and cities’ streets communicate to visitors.

When you walk around the boulevards of Warsaw and Krakow you find many gastronomic references. This study was conducted during the month of December, when Christmas markets also have a prominent presence in the urban landscape, such as the one in Krakow central square. Hot soups, *pierogi*, artisan breads, or cheese, are offered as products and dishes representatives of Polish identity, some of them already mentioned

¹⁷ H. Makala, *Customs in Polish cuisine as tourist attractions*, [in:] *Tourism in Poland*, ed. E. Puchnarewicz, The Higher School of Tourism and Foreign Languages in Warsaw, Warsaw 2015, pp. 105–116.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

¹⁹ F. Fusté-Forné, *El turisme gastronòmic: autenticitat i desenvolupament local en zones rurals*, “Documents d’Anàlisi Geogràfica” 2015, 61(2), pp. 289–304.

²⁰ H. Makala, *Customs in Polish cuisine...*, *op. cit.*

²¹ D. Orłowski, M. Woźniczko, *Polish cuisine and its importance in culinary tourism*, [in:] *Tourism in Poland*, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–130.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 119.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 123–125.

above. The streets are full of visitors and tourists, who take advantage of the varied selling to taste a portion of Polish territory. Among all these examples, this research highlights two: *pierogi* and cheese.

Pierogi are the quintessential Polish product (Figure 1 and Figure 2). *Pierogi* are the traditional Polish dumplings, and offer a versatility in their fillings. At the same time, *pierogi* reflect different regional contexts through different raw products. The flavours include the most traditional dumplings filled of meat and vegetables, but also the sweet tastes with agricultural products or foods available in the wild, such as berries. Wild foods are an example of how the territory offers the basis of traditional cuisine and recipes. Lonely Planet guide defines *pierogi* as “square- or crescent-shaped dumplings made from dough and stuffed with anything from cottage cheese, potato and onion to minced meat, sauerkraut and fruit. They are usually boiled and served doused in melted butter. *Pierogi* can either be eaten as a snack between meals or as a main course. They’re a budget traveller’s dream”²⁴. Street food stores, as well as city restaurants, offer dumplings as a symbol of local cuisine. In this context, there is also room for synergies with growing trends such as veganism, where Warsaw stands out as one of the most vegan-friendly cities in the world²⁵.

Cheese, on the other hand, is an element that showcases a very strong connection between the territory, its people and regional traditions²⁶. Cheese is a product that reveals the chain of authenticity from the landscape to the table. That is, cheese is originated from what animals eat, which gives to milk a specific taste according to the ‘taste’ of the land. A taste that cannot be recreated anywhere else in the world. Poland is a land of cheeses, where the Oscypek cheese emerges as one of the most famous²⁷. Oscypek cheese is traditionally produced in the southern rural and mountain areas of the country, it has a Protected Designation of Origin and it

can only be produced between late April to early October when the sheep feed on fresh mountain grass. [...] The cheese’s history can be traced back to the Vlachs, a tribe that arrived in Podhale from the Balkans around the 12th and 13th centuries and brought the tradition of shepherding and cheesemaking to the region. The name *oscypek* comes from the word *scypać*, which means ‘to split’ in the local dialect. This is related to the moulds which are split into two parts²⁸.

²⁴ Lonely Planet, *Poland in detail*, 2020, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/poland/in-location/eating> [15.01.2020].

²⁵ Happy Cow, *10 Top Vegan-Friendly Cities*, 2019, <https://www.happycow.net/vegtopics/travel/top-vegan-friendly-cities> [15.12.2019].

²⁶ F. Fusté-Forné, *Tasting cheesescapes in Canterbury (New Zealand)*, “New Zealand Geographer”, 72(1), pp. 41–50.

²⁷ T. Adamski, K. Górlach, *One tradition, many recipes: Social networks and local food production – The Oscypek cheese case*, [in:] *Naming Food After Places: Food Relocalisation and Knowledge Dynamics in Rural Development*, eds. M. Fonte, A.G. Papadopoulos, Routledge, Abingdon 2016, pp. 173–195; C. Ren, *Non-human agency, radical ontology and tourism realities*, “Annals of Tourism Research” 2011, 38(3), pp. 858–881.

²⁸ O. Mecking, *Poland’s surprisingly beautiful cheese*, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20180327-polands-surprisingly-beautiful-cheese> [15.12.2019].

Cheese also connects livestock traditions with tourism, which is exemplified with a large supply of cheese in cities' streets (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Urban stores and street shops offer a wide range of local and regional cheeses, made from goat, sheep or cow milk. Also, *terroir* communicated by Polish cheese reflects both the traditional lifestyles of Polish people, that is, the traditional practices of rural communities, and the natural context in which the animals graze, all of them transferred to cheese. As a consequence, tourists are able to sample the Poland' sense of place through cheese. In this sense,

the manufacturing of the Oscypek PDO is linked to the experience, the tradition, the knowhow passed on from generation to generation, and to the specific and exceptional skills of the *bacha* (head shepherds). In addition, the specific vegetation in the manufacturing area of the Oscypek cheese significantly influences the final taste of the sheep's milk used for its production. These are endemic species that only grow in the Podhale region and which constitute the flora of the meadows, the pasturelands and the mountain pastures²⁹.



Figure 1. A *pierogi* food stand in a Christmas street market, Krakow

²⁹ Qualigeo, *Oscypek PDO*, 2015, <https://www.qualigeo.eu/en/prodotto-qualigeo/oscypek-dop> [15.12.2019].



Figure 2. *Pierogi* served in a restaurant, Warsaw



Figure 3. Polish cheese selling in a Christmas street market, Krakow



Figure 4. Traditional street cheese tasting

4. Conclusion

This exploratory article discusses examples of (street) foods which convey a part of Polish food heritage and its culinary identities. Polish foods such as *pierogi* and cheese showcase the landscape of a particular gastronomy and its *terroir* – Polish cuisine and Polish *terroir* – which attracts both locals and tourists. This paper illustrates it through the case of street food tourism³⁰, by revealing some of the iconic products present in the streets of Warsaw and Krakow. However, this article only reviews a small part of Polish culinary heritage – *pierogi* and cheese – which is larger and richer than the limited representation provided here. At the same time, this study only focuses on two cities in Poland, which is also a limitation. Products and dishes representatives of Polish regional cuisines must be discussed from a broader perspective, by analyzing the similarities and differences between regions, and historical and sociocultural backgrounds. That said, foods such as those reviewed here, added to other products and drinks such as wine, can play an important role in the development of food tourism in Poland³¹.

³⁰ J.C. Henderson, *Street Food and Tourism: A Southeast Asian Perspective*, [in:] *Food Tourism in Asia*, eds. E. Park, S. Kim, I. Yeoman, Springer, Singapore 2019, pp. 45–57.

³¹ J. Makowski, J. Mietkiewska-Brynda, *Wine tourism in Poland?*, [in:] *Tourism in Poland*, op. cit., pp. 131–140.

In this sense, the planning and implementation of food tourism in Poland must rely on the tracing of both its cultural and natural bonds – the relationships between ‘food’, ‘people’ and ‘land’. Further research should approach (street) food tourism in Poland from both ‘host’ and ‘guest’ perspectives. What are the understandings of local foods and customs, and the meanings attached to (street) food tourism? What role is playing ‘place’ in food tourism experiences? Here, food tourism is expected to be understood within the context of rural tourism development in Poland³². Tourism in rural areas is a process of awarding tourism value to ‘rurality’ – its food, its people, its landscape. Food tourism departs from the food production, which is originated in the land, both as a result of agricultural activities and the natural provision of foods (e.g. berries, mushrooms, trouts). Furthermore, the process of transferring foods from rural to urban environments is another issue which requires further attention, drawing from the preservation of the authentic culinary identities. How traditional and innovative food venues (Figure 5) can boost the tourism attraction of Polish food identity?



Figure 5. Street food and drinks (mulled wine stalls) served in a giant barrel

³² Cf. S. Grykień, *Tourist farms in Lower Silesia, Poland*, “GeoJournal” 1998, 46, pp. 279–281; L. Przezbórska, *Relationships between rural tourism and agrarian restructuring in a transitional economy: the case of Poland*, [in:] *New directions in rural tourism*, eds. D. Hall, L. Roberts, M. Mitchell, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot 2003, pp. 205–222.

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Streszczenie

Turystyka spożywcza oznacza odkrywanie miejsca przez jedzenie i gastronomię. Turystyka kulinarna staje się coraz popularniejszym trendem na całym świecie. W kontekście praktyk związanych z turystyką gastronomiczną żywność uliczna pojawia się jako współczesny przejaw relacji między żywnością a miejscem. Ten artykuł ma na celu przybliżenie zjawiska *street food* w Polsce. W szczególności koncentruje się on na opisowym badaniu jakościowym prowadzonym w celu scharakteryzowania turystyki opartej na „ulicznym jedzeniu” jako strategii rozwoju turystyki w środowisku miejskim. Pokazano przykłady jedzenia – pierogi i ser – które dla odwiedzających stanowią elementy polskiej tożsamości gastronomicznej. To badanie opisowe ma wkład w badania nad turystyką gastronomiczną w Polsce, a zwłaszcza w polskich miastach, w których dziedzictwo kulinarne stanowi czynnik przyciągający turystów.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka gastronomiczna, rozwój regionalny, obszar miejski, miejsce światowego dziedzictwa

Abstract

Food tourism means to discover a place through its food and gastronomy. Food tourism activities and experiences are a growing trend in destinations worldwide. Within the context of food tourism practices, street food is emerging as a contemporary manifestation of the relationships between food and places. This exploratory article aims to approach the culinary representations of street

food in Poland. In particular, this study focuses on a descriptive qualitative design to explore the street food based tourism as a strategy to develop tourism in urban environments. Results show food examples – *pierogi* and cheese – that convey Polish gastronomy identities to visitors. This descriptive research contributes to food tourism research in Poland and, specifically, in Polish cities, where culinary heritages represent a factor of tourism attraction.

Keywords: food tourism, regional development, urban area, World Heritage Site

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