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Local Development and Heritage: Traditional Food and Cuisine as Tourist Attractions in Rural Areas

Jacinthe Bessière*

THE TRANSFORMATION OF rural society and culture cannot be understood from a local perspective alone. This is particularly true if we focus on the complexity of rural tourist development. Rural areas are now increasingly seen as places for entertainment, leisure activities, second homes and as an alternative to urban residential areas. These developments are closely connected with a redefinition of local rural identity. They reflect a cultural interest in rurality and locality in the larger society, which encourages new customs, practices and social demands. At the local level these new demands and images are incorporated into the construction and identification of new local identities.

In examining the processes of transformation and redefinition of local identity, I will consider the heritage feature – more specifically food and gastronomy – as an element of tourist development at local level. As identity marker of a region and/or as a means of promoting farm products, gastronomy meets the specific needs of consumers, local producers and other actors in rural tourism. There are numerous examples illustrating this phenomenon: the publication of books on regional cuisine is thriving, many farmers sell their produce directly and start up farm restaurants, prestigious 3-star chefs launch a regional *nouvelle cuisine*, and both the Culture and Agriculture Ministries have commissioned a complete inventory of the culinary heritage of the French provinces and have granted quality classification marks, including a hundred sites outstanding for their food throughout France (*Sites Remarquables du Goût*).

This trend leads to questions about the relationships between rural tourism and culinary heritage. Why do local cuisine and so-called 'traditional' products arouse such interest? What exactly are the constituent elements of this heritage? How far can its rising value be considered part of some new drive in local tourism? First, I will consider the relevant questions to be asked in rela-

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tion to this subject: to what extent is there a demand for French rural areas in terms of tourism and gastronomy? I will then identify a set of problems surrounding the emergence of local initiatives sharing a common heritage. What are the processes whereby local identity is enhanced, valorized and identified?

Identifying a social demand for tourism and gastronomy

Concepts such as 'peri-urbanization,' 'rurbanization,' 'urban de-concentration' and 'urban exodus,' clearly indicate that present-day rurality cannot be associated with the former 'peasant' society. The number of farmers has continued to shrink over the years while new categories of population have gradually appeared (employees, retired people, middle-class workers, etc.). The development of communications, along with significant improvements in productivity and production systems, have contributed greatly to opening up rural areas to the outside world. Rural populations have extended their networks, widening their social space and economic scope.

The recreational function of rural areas

The rising numbers of retired people, second homes, weekend and summer visitors testify to the recreational part played by rural areas. The tourist phenomenon not only calls into question the way these areas should be organized and cater for tourist purposes, but also the sizeable reversal of established tourist practices and perceptions.

Tourism in rural areas seems to be influenced and idealized today by the myth of nature, the quest for an original *communitas*, as Amirou (1995) puts it, and is often related to the mental perception of the countryside. This tendency, characterized by a re-activation of well-established stereotypes about nature and purity, holds a remarkable appeal in the collective consciousness. After all, isn't tourism a quest for identity, a place and other people? Amirou (1995) speaks of a quest for an *appartenance sociétale*, a feeling of belonging to a social group, or a quest for sociability, unity, an original *communitas*, alterity and thus an identity.

As a reaction to the complexity of the modern world in which social links either are falling apart or weakening, rural areas chosen as holiday destinations seem to offer the possibility for socializing or for finding a community identity. Therefore, people dream of friendly relationships, true and genuine values, roots. The emphasis on gastronomy is thus revealing since it integrates eating into a new cultural world from both a psychological and physiological standpoint. Consequently, studying rural tourism and its heritage component – more specifically gastronomy – leads us to consider rural space as a place to find compensation for lost identity, and as a representation of 'the good old days'. Let us remember here the mythical countryman, whose image was for centuries negative if not derogatory, but who is now idealized:

Here we have a fantasy which urges us to think today that the countryside is the mother of all our traditions, to find in the country the origin of all that honours the national character in our tastes and habits. The image of country people, deprecated for so long, has been completely reversed and has gradually gained in nostalgia as rural dwellers have left the countryside for urban centres. In this manner, peasant life has become the sanctuary of people's origins, their lost roots, and the source of an improbable authenticity. (Burguière et al. 1993)

Similar elements can be found in the study by Hervieu and Viard (1996) on French people's representations of the country: "Yes, what we love in France is its land, its peasants, its being wild and natural, a land of pleasure and memory" as they put it. The country is more of a landscape than a place of production; stage-management comes before the productive function in the general public's eye.

Finally, the social demand for regional identity is ideologically weighted. The return to the countryside is a re-activation of a rural and peasant identity, but also a tentative and unspoken desire for landscape appropriation and a life in valorized places where proximity, social recognition and participation are easily combined. Gastronomy is a fundamental component of tourist traveling: eating is an integral part of our holidays and rural tourism can be a part of the re-appropriation of history in terms of eating habits.

Gastronomy: escapism or liberation?

The following section is an attempt at conceptualizing eating through a brief review of social anthropological analyses carried out by researchers such as Fischler (1993), Poulain (1985) and Herpin (1988). Food is part of a physiological, psycho-sensorial, social and symbolic environment. It has, in addition to hygienic and nutritional values, psycho-sensorial and symbolic characteristics. This food symbolism appears in various guises:

- Food as a symbol: some foodstuffs are the basis of fantasy and concentrate symbolic virtues (bread, wine, cereals, the dark blood in game for hunters).
- Food as a sign of communion: food shared and eaten with others, is a fundamental social link (for example, business meals, family celebrations, daily meals). "Food sums up and transmits a situation, it is information and meaning. A true sign, that is the functional unit of a communication structure" (Barthes, cited in Poulain 1985).
- Food as a class marker: champagne, caviar, whisky, wine for everyday consumption, or tripes, are markers, distinctive signs, allowing the various social actors to identify one another and mark their lifestyles (Bourdieu 1979).
- Food as an emblem: this is the case with culinary heritage of a given geographical area or community; a kind of a banner beneath which the inhabitants of a given area recognize themselves.

Thus, man feeds on nutrients but also on signs, symbols, dreams and on imagination. Eating reveals one's beliefs and fundamental imaginary structures. Fischler (1993) shows that the 'principle of incorporation' is an invariable ele-

ment of eating behaviour. This principle has a double meaning. On the one hand, 'the eater becomes what he consumes.' Eating is the integration or adoption of the qualities of the food you eat. On the other hand, 'the eater becomes part of a culture.' Both food and cooking, as they are culturally determined, place the eater in a social universe and a cultural order. Eating habits are the foundation of a collective identity and, consequently, of alterity.

Moreover, a modern city dweller's diet sharply contrasts with traditional eating habits. The anonymity of current eating is the result of nutritional industrialization, fewer structured meals, random snacking, an impoverished culinary legacy and a greater gap between farmer and consumer. Herpin (1988) has coined the following terms to describe the evolution of current eating patterns: 'de-concentration,' 'de-installation,' 'de-synchronization,' 'de-ritualization' and 're-location.' Fischler (1993) qualifies modern 'unidentified edibles' as something between industrial artefacts and virtually unnatural and dangerous processed fare, such as in radiated food. Although somewhat excessive, this standpoint is not that far removed from the truth. Processed food is in fact devoid of tradition and identity: functionalized, standardized and recomposed 'mass' foodstuffs, such as a quick sandwich or a Big Mac, merely fulfill biological needs in the manner that a vitamin supplement might satisfy a deficiency. My aim is to understand how this transfigured diet has awakened the newly-found gastronomical curiosity which people seek to satisfy on holiday. What is this gastronomical expectation?

Today's city dweller escapes in a real or imagined manner from his daily routine and ordinary fare to find solace in regional and so-called 'traditional' food. Fischler (1993) has developed the concept of a 'back-to-nature myth' as a counter-tendency to urbanization. The emergence of multiple counter-current trends has been brought about by technical and industrial civilization. Against modern technical society, a counter-trend is oriented both to the past and to the future. The current notion of 'back to nature' is, according to Fischler, opposed to the concept of man mastering nature. This expresses a deep yearning for balance and a return to the past. This desire for nature and the past is a complement to urban living. Modern city dwellers have a commuter lifestyle of weekends or holidays away, sometimes combined with the countrified decoration of their homes, such as rustic ceiling beams and open fireplaces.

There is a reversal in awareness about food; cuisine with a country touch, and 'natural' products have increased in popularity: black bread or bread baked in brick ovens, farm fresh products, country buffets and straight-from-the-farm delicatessen meat. Regional cuisine and country home-style Sunday lunches are often featured at higher priced restaurants. An increased distrust of agro-industrial products coincides with the real or imagined side-effects of chemical and processed food, colouring additives and the like. Advertising and marketing professionals are unscrupulous in hoodwinking consumers into believing that they are actually buying grandmother's jam or farm-fresh pâté, which are in fact mass produced.

The transmission of culinary know-how is, furthermore, not what it used to be. There is a frittering away of skills. The daughter or granddaughter no longer inherits secret family recipes. Modern home cooking goes beyond traditional family dishes, creating nostalgia for food eaten in one's childhood and adolescence. Newly-found aspirations translate this nostalgia into the desire to go back to culinary roots, as if this were a return to the beginning. It is as if eating were a quest for nutrimental truth and essence hidden within a dish.

Furthermore, the myth of the natural may be illustrated by the principle of incorporation, defined previously: by eating a so-called natural or traditional product, the eater seems to incorporate, in addition to nutritional and psychosensorial characteristics of the food, certain symbolic characteristics: one appropriates and embodies the nature, culture and identity of an area. It also represents integration into a social world as opposed to the universe of industrialized food. Eating farm-fresh products, for example, may represent for the urban tourist not only a biological quality, but also a short-lived appropriation of a rural identity. He symbolically integrates a forgotten culture.

French product quality accreditation.

The modern consumer tries to be thoroughly aware of the various elements in the food he eats. The 'unidentified edible object' must tell the story of its source, preparation and identity by labeling. The consumer demands a closer relationship with the producer of his food, whether it be real (as in buying straight from the farm), or imaginary (through rustic-looking labeling). Adequate labeling allows a certain guarantee and gives the consumer a comfortable feeling about the history, identity and nature of the product. Symbolically, these signs represent imagined qualities and help to compensate for the distance between the source of the food and the consumer of the product. French regional products are protected by labels defining quality. These labels certify that the product satisfies national regulations and norms.

- *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC)*: a major label guaranteeing quality and origin, created in 1905, comprising 350 wines, twenty-nine cheeses and dozens of products as varied as Chasselas of Moissac grapes, Le Puy lentils or Bress poultry.
- *Le label rouge*: Red label created in 1960, lists 254 products (poultry, meat, smoked and cured meats, fruit, vegetables) and includes 30,000 farmers and 2,250 companies.
- *Le label régional*: regional label confers its classification for a specific region to products highlighting local character.
- *L'appellation Montagne*: this label covers mountain zone commodities. Only two products currently exist (lamb and Drôme honey).
- *Les certificats de conformité*: this certification is accorded to processed food products that are in compliance with the set norms on preparation, processing and keeping quality.

- *Le label biologique*: this marker defines what by law constitutes biological products and farming methods which are environmentally safe and contain no synthetic noxious chemicals.

New social aspirations have emerged due to the current economic crisis and with them new trends in gastronomy. It seems that culinary traditions in rural areas are drawing new inspiration from the present critical situation surrounding urban fare. Hence, urban tourists help to celebrate and broaden rural culinary tourism through their modern gastronomic behaviour.

Theoretical identification of the heritage component

Let us explore the construction and reproduction of concrete and abstract features of the mechanisms of tradition transmission corresponding to new identifiable expectations in tourism. Heritage, whether it be an object, monument, inherited skill or symbolic representation, must be considered as an identity marker and distinguishing feature of a social group. Heritage is often a subjective element because it is directly related to a collective social memory, "a combination of recollections recognized by a given group" (Baeta Neves Flores 1995). Social memory as a common legacy preserves the cultural and social identity of a given community, through more or less ritualized circumstances. The common heritage appears as a ritual code. It is recognized as a unifying sign or remembered as a common setting in a designated area. Tourism thus permits participation in consumption and celebration of a series of local rites, including numerous events set up to show off heritage riches, allowing the tourist social and cultural integration in the local group by absorbing and reproducing cultural codes. Gastronomy would be such a code.

The concept of heritage leads us to a discussion of the continuity between past and present. Heritage provides historical depth and a permanent pattern in a perpetually changing world. As a temporal link, it is indistinguishable from tradition. The etymology of the concept 'tradition' is in the Latin *traditio* and the verb *tradere*, meaning 'to transmit,' or 'to deliver.' Hervieu-Léger (1996) defines tradition as "the combination of representations, concepts, theoretical and practical know-how, behaviour, attitudes, etc. that a group or a society accepts to ensure the continuity between past and present." Nora (1993) describes tradition as "a remembrance having become historically conscious of itself."

Beyond that continuity, beyond that legacy which is passed on, heritage (along with traditional practices) is part of the present, and at the same time holds promises for the future; the problem of the past is a modern one. People have always known how to make up technical, socio-economic and symbolic solutions using heritage components. Heritage is therefore no longer considered solely as a link between past and present, but also as a reservoir of meaning necessary to understand the world: a resource in order to elaborate alterity and consequently identity. So, we may view heritage more as a social construc-

tion than something fossilized and unchanging that gets handed down as such. Heritage continuously builds up and changes. It is an evolving social product constantly under review and ever changing. The expression 'migrating memories' (Baeta Neves Flores 1995) captures this dynamic feature. Consequently, the trilogy of heritage/memory/tradition, involves dialectical arguments opposing the stable and established with the dynamic and ever-changing. This casts doubt upon such oppositions as tradition/modernity, continuity/schism, stability/dynamism. We can therefore define the mechanism of building up and handing down heritage as a dialectical interplay between 'interior/exterior' and 'tradition/innovation,' a game in which the players are both archaeologists and innovators at the same time. Figure 1 shows that the heritage component is the real heart of the matter.

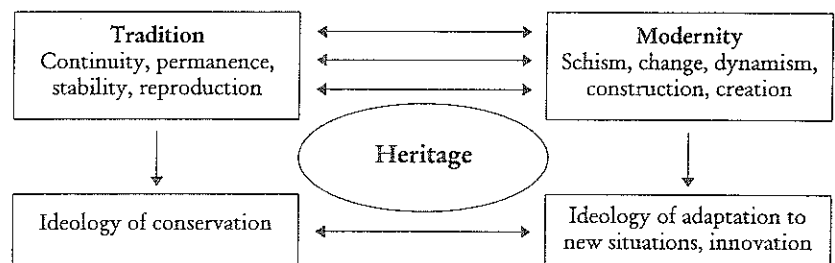


Figure 1: *The interplay between tradition and modernity in the construction of heritage*

I offer the hypothesis that the dynamics of building up heritage consist in actualizing, adapting, and re-interpreting elements from the past of a given group (its knowledge, skills and values), in other words combining conservation and innovation, stability and dynamism, reproduction and creation, and consequently giving a new social meaning which generates identity. In this way, heritage elements would produce and reproduce identity and unity. Perhaps the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in the construction of heritage would translate a kind of post-modernity?

We have just seen that heritage evolves in relation to its period, environment and actors. But what about the means of developing and selecting heritage? With which criteria and values will the social group or actors create and re-create heritage? The idea of heritage as a world gathered in an 'imaginary museum,' as Malraux called it, allows us to compose our own heritage, in other words, to proceed to our own selection of customs, objects and places which we find most fitting and which ought to be preserved. A possession or knowledge that we give up or waste cannot be called heritage since we ascribe no particular value to it. Returning to the definitions previously given, we should consider notions such as selection, value, attachment or choice. Heritage is not a mere collection of things and products but a real social selection; a

selection or a choice made according to the particular value accorded by the members of a social group. Some people call this the 'relational essence' of heritage: links or references between the object and the individual. At the very centre of heritage identification are knowledge and recognition, 'heritage awareness,' a judgement common to other individuals concerning the specific importance granted to those objects. Is there a link between these values and the previously-mentioned 'tourist values'? Is there a convergence between the value of selection drawn from heritage by the local actors, and the values inherent in travel and the 'tourist quest' from a symbolic or mythical point of view? Is there a convergence between an external construction process of a tourist type and an internal construction process of a heritage type?

The connection between a social group and heritage may apply to small communities as well as whole societies. Difficulties may arise if non-members happen to grant a special value to an item of heritage and somehow consider it as theirs, until they eventually play an active part in its protection. Take the example of newcomers or residents not belonging to a specific village community, or tourists appropriating a heritage, and thereby creating conflicts. Consider the construction of heritage in rural areas which are mostly frequented by town residents (either tourists or newcomers): can the selection and building up of heritage be done by city dwellers? My suggestion is that, in some rural areas, city dwellers develop a local heritage consciousness.

Heritage must be legitimized in order to be genuine: this means giving the consumer a maximum guarantee of the historical content, origins and roots, which are the most important conditions for a successful heritage market. Some heritage or traditions may be misunderstood, misrepresented or may even be considered as genuinely inherited, when they are in fact recent artificial constructions void of any historical substance. Such 'folklore' products may become a form of escape therapy, and may have a dimension especially created for one particular occasion. It is reassuring to enhance the present with reference to a more glorious past, features of which are selected and re-introduced in our present lives. "These are mechanisms meant to invent 'popular cultural heritage' which plays a part in the building of national identities," according to Cuisenier (1995).

Finally, while building up heritage, the actor or social group selects, classifies and underscores a lost value, within a society stressed by the loss of its own traces. We live our present lives with the omnipresent concern to protect our past, to perpetuate disappearing threatened knowledge and techniques. Fabre (1996) describes this phenomenon in terms of 'the beauty of death': objects are grasped just as they are about to disappear and their beauty is measured through the shock generated by emotion and memory. This phenomenon can be compared to a 'resurrected effect of memory.'

Culinary heritage belongs to this sphere. Deeply rooted in a particular place as well as in a particular space and time, the cooking traditions of a specific area reveal the character of the society and mentality of its members. These

traditions are an obvious legacy of those who lived before us, and they bear witness to previous eating habits. The culinary heritage of rural areas is strongly linked to a peasant identity and to specific eating habits and production. It brings about a style of eating which is full of imaginary symbols. Its consumption is a 'total human act' (Morin 1973) resulting in the construction of an identity for the tourist or city dweller lost in his eating rut. The culinary heritage we find in rural areas corresponds to the memory of a whole group, to its roots, which generates a feeling of belonging to this particular area, investing it with value.

Skills and culinary practices may therefore differentiate one area from another. They are an integral part of individual, collective and territorial identity construction. Promoting a specific gastronomic product by conserving skills and techniques leads to re-enacting history, re-appropriating what has been lost and also helping to create, innovate and accept change. Numerous national and European authorities regulate the agro-food sector with labels and certifications of all kinds (AOC, AOP etc.), which impose a constant traditional/innovational dynamic of modern techniques of consumerism, supply and demand, in a market ever ready for progress.

Culinary heritage: as a source of local initiatives and a factor in territorial identity construction

According to Pecqueur (1989), local development is "a method of mobilizing various actors resulting in a strategy to adapt to outside forces as a collective, cultural and regional identity." Heritage can be seen as a social and resource structure for local achievement. To what extent can heritage be conserved and transmitted without upsetting its identity? How are local actors rallied around a common regional project for the promotion of their heritage?

The promotion or 'valorization' of culinary heritage encourages independent and collective initiatives and is seen as a process by which local action and appropriation cater for the development of rural tourism. In an ever-changing environment, the evolution of rural space is focused on common memory and the transmission of skills. Heritage may play a major role in declining areas. Under which circumstances and how do local actors try to get the most out of these heritage resources, linking the 'tourist offer' to local products and culinary traditions? How is their heritage created and augmented? What strategies do they use to meet the social demand for heritage? This leads us to consider, through Crozier and Friedberg's (1977) terminology of 'strategic analysis,' the concrete or geographically located action systems (*système d'action concret, localisé*). Establishing concrete initiatives in a given geographical area, is the dynamic process by which individual or collective actors with a shared memory promote a common heritage project. At this point, according to Wachter (1987), "local development aims at bringing together all local actors in a geographically limited area to merge their individual determination and strategic

skills in order to serve a new dynamic economy characterized by a general interest in quality." He adds that one of the conditions for local development to succeed and extend its influence, is whether or not there is a local identity. This may be called heritage support.

Food and rural tourism in France

The heritage component, and more particularly food, is likely to be a factor in tourist attraction, integration and social dynamization. Highly cultural, culinary heritage is right at the heart of France's rural tourist market. It is also where the actors' interests and consumers' expectations meet. Various tourist offers illustrating culinary heritage valorization can be found in rural France.

- Farm fresh products: these are sold by farmers, either directly to the consumer (street markets, mail-order and, in the majority of cases, on farms), or through middlemen (supermarkets, restaurants, co-operatives). Among these are products processed on the farm, such as cheese, jam, meat, chicken) or farm produce (fruit and vegetables). The tourist label 'Farmstead Hospitality' promotes direct selling on the farm, and is an overall guarantee in terms of quality, origin of products and hospitality on the farm.
- Farmstead inns (*fermes-auberges*) are working farms accepting guests for meals; they also may be granted the label 'Farmstead hospitality,' thus guaranteeing quality.
- Family inns (*tables d'hôtes*) are granted this label by *Gîtes de France*. These inns, in addition to the standard bed and breakfast, offer a traditional meal prepared with local produce.
- 'Stay on the farm' (*fermes de séjour*): such farms, when granted the label 'Farmstead hospitality,' offer rooms, meals prepared from farm-fresh products and shared at the family table, leisure activities and farm visits.
- Snacks at the farm (*goûters à la ferme*) also have norms set by the label 'Farmstead hospitality.' These afternoon snacks are prepared from farm-fresh products. They are often followed by a visit to the farm or a leisure activity.
- Local culinary heritage events: these are local fairs organized around a specific local product (Bresse poultry fair), the opening of a museum (cheese museum, wine museum), the establishment of gastronomic itineraries (wine tours in Alsace, gastronomic circuits in the Drôme), the opening of sales outlets, local markets, the organization of cooking sessions (learning how to prepare *foie-gras*) and also tours of companies and co-operatives (cheese factories such as Société Roquefort), which are a new type of tourism called industrial tourism.
- Traditional restaurants. In rural France, famous cooks or multi-starred chefs transmit worldwide a valuable image of their region. The regional 'new cuisine' represents a return of famous chefs to popular regional cooking.

Thus, heritage development is truly a collective concern. A large number of

communities claim it, defend and praise it, viewing it as a source of income, a label and a tool for local development. It is also an alluring feature for outsiders to a given area.

Heritage development, for which territory? The example of the Haut Plateau de l'Aubrac

Local economic development also raises the problem of defining territories. Indeed, as actors define their heritage and combine efforts in relation to the resources available, a territorial construction often develops on the basis of *terroirs*. The term *terroir* refers to a specific area with an outspoken cultural and historical identity. It includes the accumulation and transmission of local know-how. This is how we come to speak of local cultural produce and local cuisine. Through collective action guided by a local project, the resources of the past are activated to build the future. The local territory is thus reconstructed through skills, know-how and is the result of the combined efforts of actors equipped with specific resources derived from a collective history and shared memory. Collective heritage is the catalyst for dynamism and territorial construction, and heritage promotion is a creative process resulting in the establishment of a restored territorial identity.

Turning to local development as a territorial construction process endowed with both local co-operation and a collective legacy, culinary heritage may be used as a means to boost development. Numerous communities have realized that an area may be revived using its cultural value and identity as a starting point by encouraging local actors to promote transmitted skills and expertise. One area which has fully understood this approach is Le Haut Plateau de l'Aubrac in Central France, where the promotion of heritage and development of a local identity have successfully merged.

This volcanic plain combines strong personal character and archaism. Snuggled on the edge of Aveyron (Midi-Pyrenees), Lozère (Languedoc-Roussillon), and Cantal (Auvergne), this area has launched a multi-featured strategy of local development based on valorizing heritage resources and gastronomy. Deeply rooted in a specific and common traditional experience, it has succeeded in putting places and people together to give birth to a dynamic tourist economy where heritage and regional identity are the common denominators. In addition to the recovery of Laguiole's craft production (knife making) and going beyond nostalgia oriented towards the past, Aubrac inhabitants have launched a genuine process of heritage promotion focusing on the culinary element. Aubrac culinary heritage, seen as a cultural code, a sign of recognition or a unifying trait, seems to be a major resource for local initiative. As early as the beginning of the 1960s, there appears to have been strong determination to preserve those local products which were just about to vanish forever. They drew strength from a heritage deeply rooted in history and memories, long-established bonds between the population and its land, and the severity of the weather and the roughness of the environment.

The Laguiole, the local cheese, is one of the best examples of culinary promotion. While the number of *burons* (typical shepherds' sheds) still operational was relentlessly declining, a group of young cattle breeders, using the inherited skills of their ancestors, created a cheese co-operative, Coopérative Fromagère Jeune Montagne, at Laguiole in 1960. There, the thousand-year-old craft of the local shepherds (*les buronniers*) is being preserved and improved by present-day innovation and production techniques. In 1961 the local cheese was awarded an AOC. This distinction has pushed the limits of the production sector (consisting of forty *communes*) far beyond the original boundaries. Today, the cheese co-operative employs thirty people and boasts of faithfully following the tradition handed down from twelfth-century Aubrac monks.

The idea of re-enstating the local Aubrac cow with its genuine nobility arose in the 1970s. This breed – a strong local identity marker – was threatened by the growing number of crossbreeds. Now about sixty cattle breeders on the Aubrac Plateau are promoting it. The elevation of other gastronomic heritage components (the traditional 'aligot' dish made of mashed potatoes and fresh farm cheese, delicatessen meat, the local cake 'la fouace,' and the well-known chef Michel Bras' two-starred restaurant in the Michelin Good Food Guide) contribute to the complex process of re-creating gastronomic knowledge and skills of the Plateau. Aubrac is thus given a new legitimacy, a new identity as a strongly united cultural community.

This example clearly shows that the construction and re-creation of heritage objects are important in the development of a regional identity and new social entities. Whether called cultural areas, *pays* or 'labeled zones,' these new territories based on endogenous development are perhaps more durable since they are based on deeply-rooted memories and knowledge.

Heritage valorization represents not only a fashionable trend but also social, economic and political determination. Indeed, if local authorities are experiencing an identity crisis and are discovering a new-found interest for their own gastronomy, heritage promotion may turn out to be profitable. As tourists come into their area, they buy local products or eat in restaurants or on farms, thus representing a sizeable source of income for local communities.

Heritage promotion dates back to the 1980s when the French government decided to publish a list of the culinary heritage in the inventory of French traditional treasures, along with churches and castles. This initiative was funded by the National Council for Culinary Art. Such an initiative reveals the current awareness and a real determination to preserve and safeguard the culinary heritage of provincial France. In addition to this, there are one hundred sites certified as outstanding for their food (*Sites Remarquables du Goût*) throughout the whole of France. Future research should identify those areas qualified as having formed our gastronomic history, to complete our culinary heritage inventory and launch new tourist sites to the general public.

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