The Place on the Plate!

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This article proposes reflections about how food and restaurants can be a comment on territorial issues. Empirically it mainly departs from two different eating experiences in Istrian restaurants in Croatia. It illustrates different understandings of what Europe can represent and how our understanding about food cultures reflect our interpretation and reflection about concepts such as cultural heterogenisation / homogenisation, national identity and globalisation.

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Cultural Standardisation or Diversity?

Cucumbers, strawberries, and the percentage of cocoa in chocolate – not many issues on the E.U. agenda capture the interest of the Swedish general public as strongly as those relating to food. In a recent newspaper article (*Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 24 Feb. 2000), the question of sugar in jam was raised. How much sugar can jam contain and still be called jam? Will the Swedish standard requirements for jam have to be adapted to those of other E.U. member countries? Presented in this way, the whole issue may appear insignificant, but the fact remains that many people are concerned about it. The Swedish jam producers concentrate on their right to preserve the traditions of their trade and its distinctive character. From the European Union's perspective, their main concern is to vouchsafe the consumer's right to know that what is sold as jam is the same product whether bought and consumed in Sweden or in Spain.

This jam debate reflects two contemporary phenomena. Firstly, the sugar content in the jam will only be a problem in a context where people and foods are increasingly mobile across borders. This in itself can be seen as a result of modern society's efficient logistic technology and increased tourism. Secondly, there is a connection between this debate and the effects of increasing mobility and a tendency towards open borders, and the ways in which these effects are reflected within the European integration politics. Will today's mobility and current politics result in a conservation or a standardisation of cultural and national distinctive features? What follows is an excerpt from a book of recipes, *Culinaria – Europeiska specialiteter* (2000), intended to further develop the subject.

"Europe is a fascinating mosaic of landscape, climate, peoples and cultures, passions and lifestyles. But regardless of whether you find yourself in countries as diverse as Norway or Greece, Ireland or Hungary or in any other country in this multifaceted continent, there is one common theme which we never tire of discussing, it is so varied and exciting: food and drink. Every country and culture has its own distinctive character expressed in culinary specialities, dishes and drinks. Fortunately, most European countries have reached a rapprochement and borders once closed no longer exist. [– – –] Naturally, the culinary horizon has also widened and with it the offering of fruit, vegetables, cheese, cured meats, wine and spirits. Whilst we are eating and indulging ourselves, however, whether at home or whilst visiting other countries, there is a risk that products will increasingly begin to resemble each other,

resulting either in an international or uniform taste. For that reason, this comprehensive book seeks to emphasise the distinctive gastronomic character of every country" (*Culinaria – Europeiska specialiteter* 2000:9).

An opposition is described in this quotation between words such as mosaic, multifaceted, variation, distinctive character and standardisation, implicitly emphasising the need to safeguard the distinctive culinary characters of Europe. In the text, increased mobility and integration are presented as threats against Europe's gastronomic diversity. The cookery book quotation as well as the jam debate demonstrates that food, together with the conceptions and feelings, which come with geographical origin, sometimes go hand in hand. The purpose of this article is to show how food is linked to geographical origin and how this place-bound affiliation[1] and food are also linked together and become a food-cultural identity.

There is a debate going on in food media[2] that focuses on the development of food cultures in today's society. At the heart of the debate a fear of cultural uniformity and homogenisation can be discerned which seem to be the result of a tendency towards globalisation and supranational politics. The jam debate illustrates how a political body can impact our culinary traditions, whilst the cookery book shows the existence of a reaction against this streamlined development (James 1996:89). To demonstrate the interaction between these two tendencies I will illustrate how different culinary expressions can relate to a regional affiliation and will discuss how this affiliation and origin is/can be linked to a more theoretical discussion about the existence and meaning of Europe as a concept. The text will move between a general discussion of the connection between food and geography and empirical examples from Istria/Croatia where I carried out fieldwork in the autumn of 1998 and 1999.

The Territories of Food

The perception of different food cultures has been increasingly intertwined with the notion of the national state. Food is associated with specific geographical areas through the defining of various "cuisines". Although *Culinaria* stresses tolerance and the dissolving of borders and boundaries, the distinction between different national cuisines forms the basic structure of the book. Thus *Culinaria* affirms these boundaries rather than dissolving them. In fact, the materialisation of "the national" through food is one of the most obvious nationalisation projects of the late 20th century (Bell & Valentine 1997:167ff, James 1996: 78, Murcotte 1996:69).[3]

The jam debate and *Culinaria*'s emphasis on European diversity also points to the presence of a specific, non-national context: Europe. How, then, does one approach the concept of Europe in food culture on a local level? Is it possible to find ways of relating to the various administrative, political and geographical entities that form Europe through every day practices? All across Europe, cooking and food products are used as a way of expressing geographical affiliation. The local culinary every day customs and expressions have become a means of defining affiliation in relation to a larger, abstract geographical context (cf. Frykman 1999). At the same time, tourist food and local products become a way to provide consumers with a local, geographically specific experience.

What then do we mean by "local"? Today, as Ulf Hannerz points out, what is local can no longer be limited to a particular geographical area. Since the cultural and social circles have broadened considerably, even the national can now be regarded as the local in some contexts (Hannerz 1990). The national states that are described in *Culinaria* can be seen as local entities relating to global ones, in this case to Europe as a large geographical context. This renders the study of "the local" anything but obvious. The cookery book represents food cultures existing in places, which are separated from the reader, i.e. various areas across Europe, whilst simultaneously connecting the recipes to local practices, although with national overtones.

Europe as a geographical entity and a bureaucratic system, and perhaps above all, E.U. politics in the examples mentioned above – symbolise the threat of cultural streamlining and a dissolving of differences. The historian Niels

Kayser Nielsen (1997, 1998), who discussed the tension between homogenisation and heterogenisation in relation to food in particular, claims that today's widespread fear of food culture dissolving is exaggerated, since culinary traditions possess an inherent cultural inertia. Kayser Nielsen points out that change and resistance can be viewed as contemporary tendencies in relation to culinary novelties on the one hand and the preservation of local culinary traditions on the other hand. An important question in connection with this is whether the geographical belonging of particular foods has become more significant, and if this is the case, how that development is expressed. Is the emphasis on food traditions and the revitalisation of food products "merely" a reaction against an increasingly internationalised society where food becomes a compensatory excuse offering familiarity and safety? When the food business focuses on geographical defined products with the place of origin clearly marked, do economic interests control the process, or is the emphasis on the place as a local arena, which provides opportunities for transactions? In order to discuss these questions, I will refer to different theories about the interaction between global and local processes as well as the ways in which food is used to create belonging in a larger context.

In this text, Europe is seen as a conceptual territory that various food cultures relate to. The term E.U. is often used to denote an administrative reality, whilst the term Europe indicates a concept. In this article, however, E.U. and Europe are used more or less synonymously. Both terms represent a territory consisting of national states, where the number varies according to the context.[4] It could be said that its geographical map works better as a concept than in reality (Delanty 1996:21, Persson & Lindström 1999:19, Shore 1999:53f).

The problem of the Swedish jam standard in relation to other European countries highlights one of the E.U.'s political dilemmas: How can a federation like the E.U. foster co-operation between such different countries? The mosaic of states and the culturally multifaceted continent present both assets and problems (Shore1999). How will the increased mobility and shorter distances of our time affect the way people experience and create geographical affiliation?

The economic geographer Gunnar Törnqvist (1999) paints three different possible future scenarios for Europe, three possible developments which may coexist, but which all make the presupposition that geographical origin plays an increasingly important role in today's society, since "placelessness" has become a possibility. The first, Törnqvist explains, is an increased division into regional units, which are smaller than the earlier national states. The second would result in a stronger integration within the E.U. and the third would see a reassertion of power by European national states over their respective territories (a.a.: 89).

In the light of these possible scenarios, the question of the role of food cultures in this development arises. How do general assumptions about national states and regions coexist with opinions about and expressions of the origins of foods? In a time when food seems to become less bound to a particular place and more mobile, it has become more important to connect food products with geographical belonging (Salomonsson, K. 1999). In agreement with Törnqvist and Kayser Nielsen, I believe that these two coexist. The questions are where, how and when does the geographical affiliation of food becomes important, and how can it be used to relate to and create pictures of contemporary geography.

The Locations of Food

One of the most visible examples of food as an expression of national belonging is in today's urban variety of restaurants. Occidental cities display a diversity of Chinese, Italian, Russian, Greek, Indian, Thai and Mexican restaurants. This contradicts the claim that globalisation and supranational politics will lead to a neutralisation of variations in food culture. When the national or regional origin of a particular dish is highlighted, the food, or the recipe, appears as an alternative, something different. The near-at-hand, local (or, in this case, even national) aspect is stressed as opposed to more stand-ardised restaurant concepts, which appear more or less without geographical affiliation. Foods which

could be said to be without geographical affiliation are for example the foods that exist everywhere, at all times, which don't belong anywhere and which materialise in the shape of various fast food concepts and products (cf. Ritzer 1993).

My point, however, is that there is no such thing as food without geographical belonging. Even the fast food concepts have their arenas. All food is bound to a specific location, whether it is territorial, regional or national, or whether it is related to a rural setting or a royal dinner. There is no dish, which does not belong anywhere. All food fits into specific contexts. Even our Swedish every day food, like sausages and macaroni, belongs to weekday meals in the family kitchen, and perhaps to nowhere else. In the same way a regional dish, like *black soup* (a soup based on pig's blood originating in the region of Skåne in southern Sweden) belongs within a context where the regional feast of *Mårten Gås* is celebrated, or where a regional affiliation to Skåne is to be highlighted. Long-time best-selling Swedish cookery books like *Rutiga kokboken* and *Vår kokbok* may appear to lack such an affiliation as compared with cookery books that refer to other countries and exotic places, but these books do have a specific identity and they do belong within a specific context. It's just that this belonging is so much taken for granted in Swedish kitchens that it goes without saying. In this respect, the term *place* is synonymous with *context*, i.e. the social and cultural context to which the food belongs.

Food culture is a more or less a generally applicable and an all-embracing concept often used in food media, that is to say in cookery books, restaurants and texts relating to tourism. The term denotes an entity representing the distinctive culinary qualities of a territory – regional or national. Nationally or regionally defined food cultures serve to connect the consumer with the soil, with traditions and cultural heritage. The food embodies territorial belonging. Used in the definite form, the term *the food culture* gives the food a geographical identity, which incorporates notions and knowledge about other cultural expressions of that location, including history, tradition and origin (cf. Eriksson *et al.* 1999:44). When an Italian restaurant is described as "Italian", a

connection is made between place, in this case a national territory, and a cultural expression, in this case food products and traditions. The food is a materialisation expressing a concentration in space. When this connection is taken for granted the cause for and origin of food cultures are presented in a manner that renders them essential and natural. Underlying this process of connecting food culture and origin in place, it is possible to find the deterministic assumption that nature generates a predetermination of what the food culture will contain. It is important to point out that such an understanding of the concept of food cultures as more or less static entities may serve to strengthen dichotomies and categories of cultural differences between "here", i.e. within a national border, and "there", beyond the border. As a consequence, notions of cultural differences between "us" and "them" are reinforced (Abnersson & Burstedt 2000).

Geographers Ian Cook and Michael Crang point out how the connection between a territory and the various expressions of its food culture originates not only in ecological conditions but also in the process where places are constructed symbolically, which in the long run affects the ways in which the symbolic representation of the food culture is shaped.

"[…] food does not simply come from places, organically growing out of them, but also makes places as symbolic constructs, being deployed in the discursive construction of various imaginative geographies" (Cook and Crang 1996:140).

As this quotation points out, food cultures rarely, if ever, follow strict national or regional borders (Bell & Valentine 1997:169, Bringéus 1994:20). Our ideas of different "cuisines" are social and cultural constructions, which have emerged from complex historical events and patterns (cf. Goody 1982:32).[5]

When food cultures are defined and geographically labelled they are also elevated to where they become accessible to the general public. The act of describing a dish or a food product using its geographical origin legitimises its position in relation to other food cultures; at the same time, the food culture is incorporated

into a context where the differences define the shape of other entities pertaining to food culture. Thus it could be said that food cultures have created their own cartographic system (Burstedt 1997; 1999:175f).

How Come Restaurants are so Good at Taking up Space?

The connection between food, culture and space contains several levels in this text, and restaurant settings are empirical arenas where other places and spaces are articulated and shaped.

Firstly, restaurants are arenas where food culture takes place, i.e. happens. They are places where people can eat, talk, smell, taste, hear, socialise, drink, chop and fry food, hang around, etc. The restaurant as a place contains all the things that can be done on the premises. There, national and regional belonging can find practical expression. They can materialise in dishes and interior decoration interacting with staff as well as with guests (Beardsworth & Kiel 1997:120). Even if most people don't visit a restaurant every day, the possibility is there. At the same time, the restaurant is a workplace where many people come every day to earn their living. Restaurants are places where the concept of food is shaped and expressed on several levels: the day-to-day practice of its preparation, the intentions of the producers, the finished product, the encounter with the consumers, the reception of the product.

The other level where place is important to food is when dishes and ingredients are linked to a place, i.e. when the origin of the food is defined through words or objects. As I have shown above, this is often done within the field of food in terms of defining food cultures, where food, territory and origin are all connected to each other. The concept of place is to a certain extent concrete, which is reflected in how local ecology and climate shape the food culture. At the same time, the connection between food, place and culture indicates that food culture is also a result of human action, with its conceptions and relationships revolving around a location and thereby playing a part in the shaping of food cultures. If we find ourselves in a restaurant serving national or regional food, this restaurant represents a food culture, a geographical affiliation, a geography, and this location of food culture has been shaped by the environmental conditions of the area as well as by people's notions about this place. This articulation of locations deals with something that is "here", close and tangible in the form of a particular expression of food culture in the restaurant, but also with something which is "there", something distant, an abstraction, an idea or a notion.

When a geographical origin is expressed through a restaurant, the "here but at the same time there" is expressed. When a food culture is shaped in a restaurant setting it is moved from one food cultural context to another, from one place to another. The notion of the food's place of origin creates a conceptual space. This space is culturally constituted, and the food in the restaurant materialises the notion of the food's place of origin. At the same time, it must be pointed out that at the root of the notion of the food's origin there are experiences that were made "on location". Before food cultures are moved, even if it is just from a home kitchen to a restaurant where they are shaped as symbolic representatives of a culture and a location, they have been experienced somewhere, in a specific context.

Twice I went to Kastav

Autumn 1998. Croatia. In the far northeast corner of the region of Istria (some people would claim that this area is not even in Istria, since it is on the wrong side of the mountain Ucka). The weather is warm, although we are in autumn. We, four Swedish ethnologists, get on the local bus, which meanders its way up the hill, higher and higher. The closer we get to our goal, the more the road is lined with pedestrians and parked cars. We are all heading the same way, towards the annual street market at the village of Kastav at the top of the hill. The situation reminds me of similar events in Italy, and the phenomenon never ceases to fascinate me. Everybody knows where he or she is going and how best to get there. No ads in the local paper, no posters on the walls. Everybody knows that there is a market in Kastav; everybody

Kastav, autumn 1998. Photo: Anna Burstedt.

knows that there is no point in bringing the car all the way up. You just park your car in the first available spot and walk the rest of the way. You join in the crowd and the caravan of people going up the hill becomes an extended part of the market itself. There are no complaints, no reflections on how the whole thing is organised. For me as a Scandinavian, the scene is like something taken out of the Middle Ages. Constant noise, people everywhere, and the smell of the roasted whole pigs sweeps past us in the hot air. All around us business is made: trinkets, gadgets, market stuff, the things that you always find in a market but couldn't sell anywhere else. A million kinds of wooden kitchen tools, pictures drawn or painted by ten-year-old local children, personal horoscopes, handmade jewellery, wicker baskets in all sizes etc. And perhaps most important of all, in every other street corner you can sample this year's wine harvest. Not yet fully fermented, of course, but the old hands give their predictions about the finished products. We work our way up through the village along the narrow streets. It is the Middle Ages, winding, cramped alleys, which keep leading us to the next wine sampling, the

next market booth. The whole village seems to be made for the purpose of hosting a market. At any rate, it's not designed for cars.

Every ten yards or so, we walk past a temporary restaurant. Some have even been given names to mark the occasion, and I suspect that several of them keep reappearing on an annual basis. Their barbecues and frying plates all display more or less the same food: fat-dripping, homemade sausages, *cevapçiçi*, spare ribs, whole roasted pigs, sauerkraut and bread. The whole range is often served up on a single plate. Plastic plates are precariously balanced and carried past over-populated wooden tables and wobbly white plastic chairs. The situation calls for a Mediterranean linguistic and public social competence that we lack, timid Northerners that we are. This must be the most poignant illustration of tourist restaurants' adaptation to tourists that we have ever seen. Driven by an increasing hunger we continue along the village high road. A square appears behind the crowd in front of us, and at the far end we see an open-air restaurant under a canvas roof. This seems to be more of a permanent restaurant, and so we direct our path there hoping to find more a formal, organised taking up of orders. At long last we find seats at the terrace under the tent roof, by an old, rickety table surrounded by plastic chairs in different colours. We are not quite sure what is expected of us, if we should order at the counter or if a waiter will appear at our table. After a while, a smiling, elderly man turns up. Luckily, he speaks Italian, and I ask to see the menu. He laughs a little and starts numbering names of dishes I can't understand. Then he shows me into the kitchen at the back, an ordinary home kitchen equipped with a few more cookers, but not really adapted to professional use. The furnishing is worn down after many years of hard use, and many of the tiles are broken. The man shows me the various pots and pans and lifts off the lids as he repeats the names of the dishes. I point my finger to a large pot of sauerkraut, then to some small, fried sausages and an enormous frying pan filled with *cevapçiçi*. All this is very exotic to me compared to our visits to more formal restaurants during the earlier part of this trip. As we sat there on the rugged cement terrace

Kastav, autumn 1998. Photo: Eva Persson.

with our gigantic portions of, as far as we could tell, authentic Croatian everyday fare, absorbing the merry market atmosphere, the crowd passing by just a few yards from our table, we agreed that this was one of the most memorable moments of the entire journey.

Autumn 1999. Croatia. In the far northeast corner of the region of Istria (some people would claim that this area is not even in Istria, since it is on the wrong side of the mountain Ucka). The weather is chilly, although it's a sunny autumn day. We are going up the winding hillside road that leads to the village of Kastav. When we last visited the village, one year earlier, it was at the time of the big market. On this autumn day, however, there was no crowd of people and not many cars around. We drove all the way up to the village and parked in a gravelled yard. At the edge of the yard I saw trees planted along a low stone wall. On the other side of the wall was the slope of the hill and from there we could see the valley beneath. I remembered the scene from the previous year, with several large barbecues and white plastic

chairs scattered around, and the whole yard packed with hordes of marketgoers munching on pieces of fried meat dipped in *ajvar*. Now the place was quiet and deserted. The reason for our visit this year was not the market, but a restaurant someone had told us about. We walked up the narrow road to the main square, and there it was, at the far end of the square – *Restoran Kukuriku*. We noted with surprise that it was situated in the same building as the establishment we had visited one year earlier. As we approached, however, we realised that some changes had been made. The terrace had been refurbished, and the canvas roof was new. Inside the restaurant, the whole interior was replaced, and I was at pains to remember the rough state of the place at our last visit. The stained wallpaper, the broken tiles and the old tables were all gone. Instead, the walls were whitewashed and decorated with art in subdued colours. We seated ourselves at a side table with a bright yellow linen tablecloth underneath a white one, both immaculately clean and apparently newly starched. Although the hour was getting late for lunch, the premises were

more than half full. A man in plain clothes came up to our table and explained that the restaurant's policy was to serve the season's local dishes as they themselves deemed appropriate. Thus, there was no menu to order from. Instead, small dishes, beautifully and carefully presented, kept arriving at our table until we explained that we had had enough to eat. The meal consisted of a number of small dishes, most of them based on mushrooms since it was the season for this. The way the dishes were presented on the plates reminded us of the sober aesthetics of the late 1990s, and the flavours came from either the natural taste of the ingredients or from various herbs.

The Direction of a *Cevapçiçi*

What had happened here in the space of one year? What had actually changed? The place was exactly the same, and yet it wasn't – the restaurant was completely transformed. What was different? On the way back from *Restoran Kukuriku* and Kastav I thought to myself that I would probably never use the interview I had made there. The restaurant was different from the ones I usually looked for and studied, i.e. restaurants that emphasise their regional and national belonging through their choice of dishes on the menu and their interior decoration. At the same time, I felt that my two visits to Kastav had conveyed an increased sense of understanding for the connection between a place and its food.

Although *Kukuriku* is not aimed at tourists, and the owners don't market their restaurant as a representative of the local food culture, the restaurant is still dependant on its local connection for produce and recipes. During the interview, Nenad explained *Kukuriku*'s restaurant concept as part of the *Slow Food movement*. This is an organisation that was founded in Italy in 1986 as a reaction against a general trend in society. The name is the opposite of fast food, and the goals of the movement are: enjoyment, knowledge, development of taste, slow tourism, quality of life, preservation of culinary traditions, ecological cultivation, biological diversity, cultivation of the art of living, etc. This movement would probably look favourably upon the struggle to let Swedish jam

keep its content in accordance with "old" cooking traditions. Slow Food is a stance against culturally bland compelling processes. Just like *Culinaria*'s and the restaurant business' division of food cultures into national cuisines, *Kukuriku* can be seen as a cultural critical comment on globalisation in general and E.U. politics in particular. It is not without interest to see *how* this profile is created, although in the case of *Kukuriku* it is also a question of making a name for themselves and raising their profile in a line of business where competition is fierce.

Through its menu, *Kukuriku* expresses a geographical affiliation that is more than a result of its roots in the Slow Food movement. Istria is a region where the local cuisine is well defined and highly profiled. I noticed no marketing relating to this during either of my two visits to Kastav. Yet through the food, which is served the owners, express a connection with the culinary and geographical conceptions around the Istrian food culture. Istrian cuisine is a result of the complex history of this region. Influences from Italian, Balkan and Central European cuisines can be traced in what is today labelled Istrian food culture. In spite of the foreign influence and the culinary mix, restaurant staffs agree with the locals in this area that this is a food culture with an identity of its own, in many ways distinct from those of its territorial neighbours (cf. Burstedt 1997).

The anthropologist Daniel Miller (1998) shows how "material matters" for people, and how things are used, not only as symbols and identity markers on a semiotic level, but also because things involve people on an individual level. Not just to express identity but also in order to *experience* belonging, and because things offer people the possibility to express affiliation, to actively participate in the process of positioning themselves on the world map. When restaurants serve French, Danish, British, Istrian food, i.e. territorially limited food cultures, they celebrate the small-scale, every day, slow and resistant aspects as opposed to an international and global flow of goods, services and information. Restaurant food, which is mobilised to express belonging, functions as a material used in every day life to deal with the surrounding world. When people feel belonging

through food, they simultaneously define the food towards which they feel no affiliation. The materiality of the food grants the power to express a cultural position in relation to others. Food offers the possibility to assign a place to belonging and identity. "Eating is one of the ways that the spatiality of our bodies is brought into being" (Valentine 1999:49). Eating is a way to connect something very intimate and physical to processes and products from far away places (Bell & Valentine 1997, Mintz 1985:4).

In order to show how *Kukuriku* keeps an eye on a European context at the same time as it resists a geographical dissolution, we return to the visit to Kastav in 1998. At the market, what were on offer were typical market foods: all kinds of meat. In Sweden, the quintessential market food is hot dogs, in Greece, *shish kebabs*, and in Kastav, spare ribs, fried sausages and grilled *cevapçiçi*. During the interview with Nenad, I told him about my visit to Kastav the year before, and how I had, strangely enough, had my meal at exactly the same place. We both commented on the restaurant's refurbishment, and Nenad explained that there was no comparison between the food that had been served last year and what was offered now. What, then, was the difference between the two visits? What was served was still Istrian food, wasn't it? After several field studies and discussions on Istrian food a clearer picture emerges of what belongs within its confines and what does not. The oblong meatball called *cevapçiçi* is a product that is usually found in a border zone, depending on whom one is talking to in Istria. To Nenad, serving this dish at his restaurant was completely out of the question. It was not until I put our conversation into the perspective of the visit one year earlier that the role of the *cevapçiçi* became obvious. The market at Kastav is a popular event where the food plays a simple but crucial role. Serving *cevapçiçi* during the market was not a problem – everybody in the area is familiar with the dish and it forms part of most people's every day menu. At *Kukuriku*, on the other hand, the preparation and serving of *cevapçiçi* would be making too strong a connection to Balkan cuisine, since the "new" restaurant turns northwards, to Europe, for inspiration. Here,

"Europe" represents something positive, an idea of "The Modern". In *Culinaria*, similarly, Europe represents something positive, an asset, consisting of local food cultures with respect for local produce and local traditions.

In a way, the Slow Food movement is a European creation, a cultured project formed by people having the time and money to spend on the preservation of food culture. The fact that *Kukuriku*, in accordance with its Slow Food agenda, gets its impulses from the north, means that it turns towards civilisation, towards the future, and, paradoxically, towards the modern. A European belonging is emphasised in this way by means of the restaurant menu. The simple *cevapçiçi* embodies a geographical conception of the Balkans as a primitive, regressive and uncivilised region compared to the rest of Europe. The belonging and the compass needle of the *cevapçiçi* are directed southwards, not the other way. True, one could claim that the Balkans in itself personifies the ideals of the Slow Food movement, but the "slow" and "local" aspects of the Balkans are of the "wrong kind". *Kukuriku* depends on its local connection, but at the same time the selection of dishes on the menu is connected with a modern, cultured celebration of the place.

Michael Herzfeld (1998) has shown how the celebration and invocation of what is national often encompasses the traditional, local and "slow" aspects. Paradoxically, this feeling of nationality, steeped in tradition, is often diametrically opposed to the development strategies of the national state. There is no room for this kind of nationalism within the modern national projects where society is to be shaped. National food cultures are often associated with a nostalgic "then", and people's attention is turned to a place and a time long ago as if they possessed an inherent power. Nenad acts in the same manner when he highlights his restaurant's local roots and ties. Instead of adopting the contemporary, increasingly industrialised and internationalised trend of food fabrication, he chooses to slow down, by means of the food, and return to the produce offered by the area. By means of the food, cultural heritage and geographical and ethnic belonging is mobilised. This materialisation and expression of the origin

of the food functions as a selling concept in local restaurants as well as in *Culinaria*, where European diversity is exemplified by local cheese production, traditional production methods and local produce. While Europe functions as the antipode here, marked by its freedom from boundaries, the food represents what is local and bound in place. To Nenad, however, Europe also contains a tempting modernity, which is in opposition to the image of the Balkans as a regressive region.

Thus, the conception of Europe and the E.U. varies according to the context. In *Culinaria* and within the restaurant business, Europe is represented as a many-faceted culinary attraction. In the example concerning the Swedish jam debate, the E.U. comes across as a threatening supranational power. The conception of Europe both as a threat of excessive standardisation and as a promise of an appealing modernity appears in the example from *Kukuriku*, where the manifesto of the Slow Food movement coexists with a wish to approach a European belonging.

Places and Geographical Imagination[6]

When food alludes to a geographical origin the meaning of the notion of "place" is brought to the fore, since it synthesises the territorial and cultural identities of food. Edward Casey speaks of the importance of place for cultural expression in the following way:

"Given that culture manifestly exists, it must exist somewhere, and it exists more concretely and completely in places than in minds or signs" (Casey 1996:33).

Here, Casey affirms the place as the concrete location where we sit, stand and walk, i.e. the reality in which we live, and he contrasts this with an abstract world of ideas, constructed by symbols and conceptions. As an antithesis to the concept of *place*, he establishes the abstract concept of *space*. Space is less of a concrete noun and refers to a spherical, abstract domain (Harvey 1996:24, Massey 1994:1). In a place, people can perform actively, whereas in a space, we are on a conceptual level.

Edward Casey describes place as the basis for everything; place is where temporal and spatial aspects take shape, and it is also the object for the repercussions of time and space (Casey 1996:19).[7] Above all, this choice of perspective is a methodological stance in order to approach culinary experiences where they actually happen, where their flavours are actually tasted, but also in order to show how place is the arena where culinary discourses have their practice.[8] Place becomes the arena for concrete action while space defines spatial conceptions, notions and concepts. Instead of using *space* in order to explain how a food culture is shaped when transferred, the term *geographical conception is* used here.

When a local affiliation is expressed in a restaurant, cultural heritage and culinary traditions are evoked and together they create the desired food culture on a conceptual level. There is no need for restaurants to be situated in the place that they choose to materialise; they can stage other places than those within the actual spatial confines of the restaurant, imagined places beyond the physical place. While restaurants can be seen as an actual place its content is rather more of an idea about a particular place, which is made concrete, materialised, in whatever way the restaurant expresses this *place beyond the place*. Restaurants in themselves are arenas where the territorial connection of the food is expressed. The content of this concentration depends to a large extent on what is focused in the restaurant.

In order to analyse how place is expressed in restaurants one has to consider how the images of national and local aspects are produced, reproduced and reshaped on an every day level (Valentine 1999:48). For the anthropologist Sidney Mintz, who has published texts on the production and importance of sugar during different times in history, the use of food products comes before the symbolic meaning of the product; meaning emanates from the use of the product in various social relations.

"'Meaning' […] is not simply to be 'read' or 'deciphered' but arises from the cultural applications to which sugar lent itself, the uses to which it was put. Meaning, in short, is the consequence

Is EU to regulate the contents all over Europe, and will Swedish lingonberry jam be known as European lingonberry jam in a few years? Photo: Maths Bogren.

of activity. This does not mean that culture is only (or is reducible to only) behaviour. But not to ask how meaning is put into behaviour, to read the product without the production, is to ignore history once again" (Mintz 1985: 14).

Here, Mintz refers to a phenomenological perspective where the view is held that the conception of something does not come before the practice of that conception. A story has to be told before it becomes a story, and in the same way a dish has to be cooked at some point before it can be representative of a food culture.[9] The conception of a place the way it's expressed in a restaurant must be preceded by the experience of that conception (Jackson 1996:39). But that experience may just as well be related to a Greek restaurant as to Greece itself. Both experiences lead to the same place, albeit on different levels, and even if the two experiences of Greece are different from each other.[10] The geographical conceptions play a major role, however, in how food cultures are expressed and experienced. They form a link between an every day practice and a discourse. The empirical research from Kastav shows, for example, how restaurants can express the friction between global trends and conceptions of national food cultures and local practices.

A phenomenological view keeps the individual and every day aspects in perspective and

at the same time making an analysis possible as to how the practice interacts with contextual factors. Using the theoretical concept of place as the starting point involves the direct physical experience as well as the experience within a cultural and social context (Casey 1996:19), in the relevant *space* as well as in *place*.

"This is not to say that human experience is without preconditions; rather, it is to suggest that the experience of these preconditions is not entirely preconditioned. A human life is seldom a blind recapitulation of givenness, but an active relationship with what has gone before and what is imagined to lie ahead" (Jackson 1996:11).

When restaurants express local affiliation they simultaneously relate to a geographical notion of how their own food culture relates to other food cultures. In Sweden we have a certain amount of sugar in jam, in southern Europe the sugar content is considerably higher. Food products can be used for a geographical positioning; they describe a belonging while at the same time defining other food cultures as different, as "other". This was the case, for example, with the Istrian *cevapçiçi*.

Since food is a down-to-earth, empirical area which may appear as an easy and obvious object for a phenomenological study from an every day, experience-based perspective, it is of vital

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importance to balance the analysis by focusing on the geographical conceptions that interact and affect the actual shaping of food cultures.

"The geographical imagination is a highly significant part of that "real world" which we socially construct, and has immense influence upon the ways in which people act within it" (Massey 1999:17).

Massey puts reality, "the real world" within quotation marks, in an attempt to distinguish between a level of consciousness where reality is what people claim to live in and a researcher's perspective where reality is a social construction. The point made in this quote, however, is that in order to understand and be able to analyse the interaction between "the real world" and the socially constructed world, it is important to take into consideration not only how things are produced, but also how things materialise and embody geographical conceptions (Massey 1999:18). A geographical conception is not about where that other place is located, but what it contains – the meanings *associated* with that place. Which moods and settings are associated with, for example, Europe, Istria, Greece, Italy? Thus, food can function as an interaction between local and global trends and geographical conceptions. All this interacts in that place which is the restaurant. Karen Olwig's definition of place, or site, seems useful in the case of restaurants:

"'Cultural sites', cultural institutions which have developed in the interrelationship between global and local sites. These cultural sites attain their significance because they are identified with particular places, at the same time as they accommodate the global conditions of life" (Olwig 1997: 17, see also Howes 1996).

Although Europe may be difficult to situate on the map – it could even be said to exist merely as an idea[11] – I would like to maintain that experiences like the one I had in Kastav *create* Europe. When we act with an existing Europe as our starting point, we also situate Europe on the map. This process may not always be a conscious one, but Europe is nevertheless part of reality, of "the real world", and as a territory it is present in our actions. Since Europe exists, it forms a territory which can be related to through existing, every day actions taking place within or outside that area – either consciously, as in the case of the jam debate, or subconsciously, as in Kastav. Europe does not appear out of a vacuum, it exists to the extent that the continent is used and experienced, and that is also when the geographical concept of the continent is created (Jackson 1996:10). These geographical conceptions are created in places, the "realities" which form the starting points for people's actions, but they also have an effect on our conceptions of, for example, Europe and food cultures.

The identity of the place is created in the identification process, i.e. when affiliation is expressed and/or experienced, identification and its relation to other identities of place take shape. In the same way the affiliation of a dish is found in the meeting point of its ingredients and the conception of that particular dish. In the friction between the place and the food, food culture happens – that is where we find Istria as a (regional) place, for example, and *Kukuriku* can be seen as the interpreter and presenter of this place.

The examples from Kastav point to the importance of close-range studies of what happens with geographical conceptions during the interaction between food culture and affiliation to place. Gunnar Törnqvist claims that today's increased globalisation leads to the rebirth of regionalism. From the point of view of food culture, this prediction does not appear to always hold true, since the emphasis on national cuisines remains. Still, the national cuisines we see today do have a regional character; local produce, local manufacturers and local traditions are held in high esteem. The preservation of traditional jam production, *Culinaria*'s emphasis on European diversity and *Kukuriku*'s Slow Food concept with its focus on local food culture and local produce, may all, in spite of the differences between them, be seen as phenomena expressing an alternative to the general notion of the standardising effects of globalisation. In the tension between local and global, food, with its focus on territory, manages to use opposites

such as close – far away, fast – slow, traditional – modern, centre – periphery successfully. In light of my examples, European food cultures appear to remain resistant to the predicted effect of globalisation: culinary standardisation. Food-cultural characteristics emanating from a place-related origin are still strongly articulated within the field of food. Although food cultures are constantly shaped and reshaped, and new ingredients, presentations and methods of preparation are added all the time, these new food-cultural variations live on thanks to the emphasis on their place-related distinctive traits.

Notes

* This paper has earlier been published in *Fönster mot Europa,* Studentlitteratur, Lund 2001.

1. In using the term "place-bound affiliation", I refer to when something, food or people, define themselves or are defined according to where they come from. Synonymous with this term I will also use territorial affiliation and geographical origin.

2. In using the term "food media", I refer to articles about food in the daily press, food programs on TV, cookery books and food magazines.

3. In the article Scenes from a Troubled Marriage. Swedish Ethnology and Material Culture Studies, Orvar Löfgren (1997) has pointed to the recent reluctance within the field of ethnology to deal with material studies, and how this has led to a neglect of, for example, the materialisation of national states and the effects of mass consumerism on individuals. He propagates a revitalisation of empirical fields focusing on the material importance of every day life. Food, in this context, becomes a way for me to approach issues dealing with the importance of materiality in society.

4. It may seem that the map of Europe is permanent, but there are also colourful EU-maps that show which countries were among the founding members. The different colours on these maps indicate which year the respective countries entered the Union, which states are expected to join before 2005, etc. There are also other maps of the EU area that indicate participation in other trade and exchange treaties.

5. Many theorists bring up as a point of social criticism the importance of remembering the social, historical, cultural and economic processes behind food-cultural representations, like global food transports and complicated social conditions (cf. Cook and Crang 1996, Howes 1996, Hooks 1998).

6. The term "geographical imagination" is a development of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" which refers to the imagined community of national states, and Edward Said's discussion of the Orient as an idea and as a socially and culturally constructed territory.

7. The geographer Doreen Massey would assume a different starting point, emphasising the need to see space as something socially constructed, where place is defined as a part, a level of the space: "If, however, the spatial is thought of in the context of space-time and as formed out of social interrelations on all scales, the one view of a place is as a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings" (Massey 1994:5, see also Saltzman & Svensson 1997:13).

8. A helpful discussion on how a "direct perception of environment, formed out of a practical activity, generally speaking comes before all constructions" can be found in Hornborg 1997:213.

9. Cookery books are a special case here, since they contain instructions as to how dishes should be prepared. However, these instructions are preceded by an actual preparation, a practice. A recipe is a synthesis of an experience, a transformation from experience into notion.

10. This line of reasoning highlights the issue of how "genuine" a food-cultural presentation is. Many restaurants market themselves as more genuine than others in order to show how well they have succeeded in recreating their geographical origin, and even in the context of tourist tours, some experiences are pictured as more genuine than others (Burstedt 1999). The act of defining something as genuine may involve a subconscious exclusion of something else as false. I mean that all food-cultural experiences should be interpreted as genuine, since they actually happen (cf. Persson 1999). Every place becomes genuine when it is experienced, no matter if the experience takes place in Greece or in a Greek restaurant in Sweden.

11. Although I argue in this article for a phenomenological experience-related perspective as opposed to a more constructivistic view, I would like to underline that I am not saying that the idea and notion of Europe is less real or that it exists less. An analysis of empirical findings, based on either experience of text must refer to both as equally "genuine".

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