

Connecting Regional Identity and Regional Products: 'Fakelore' or Contribution to a Sustainable Society?

The Case of North Brabant (The Netherlands)

Prof. dr. Arnoud-Jan Bijsterveld

Professor of the Regional History and Ethnology of Brabant



IAMA, Budapest, June 22, 2009

Regional Products in the Global Arena: Connecting People with the Origin of Food

North Brabant: a 'strong' region

- 5,000 kms² (14.5% of Dutch surface)
- 2.4 million inhabitants (15% of Dutch population)
- 57% (nominally) Roman Catholic; 6% Protestant; 5% Muslim



North Brabant: a 'strong' region



- 140,000 companies and 1.1 million jobs: 25% of Dutch industrial employment
- 20% of Dutch industrial production
- Produces 15% of Dutch BNP; is the Netherlands' second economic motor
- Brainport Eindhoven: knowledge-intensive industry
- High levels of education



North Brabant 1900-2009



A history of rapid economic development and cultural change

- Declining number of people working in agricultural sector (from 25 to 3.7 % of labour force)
- Economic transformation from labour-intensive to knowledge-intensive industries
- Cultural and social emancipation of Catholics
- From economically and culturally backward to second economic motor and culturally thriving



Romanticizing the Arcadian past...

BRABANTIA



- Industrialization and secularization led to loss of sense of belonging
- 1930s-1950s: fear of losing cultural identity
- Response: regionalist movement propagating more or less true images of the past and invented traditions: 'Brabantia Nostra'
- Resulting in a strong regional identity



But what happened to food culture?

- Romanticizing an imagined agrarian and rural past
- Idealizing traditions and customs regarding food
- 'Burgundian amiability'
- Forgetting the harsh reality of the past
- 'Fakelore' replaces folklore



The Brabant sausage roll and coffee lunch

But what happened to food culture?



'bottled according to Brabant custom'... invented in 1973



'a quality cheese prepared according to old-fashioned traditions'... in a German cheese factory

- 'Fakelore' replaces folklore, also in products
- 'Fairytale' to market products
- Resulting in a loss of sense of authenticity, connectedness, and quality
- Lessening instead of strengthening regional identity: not sustainable



'a traditional winter pastry bread from the time of the guilds'... invented by a smart baker in the 1930s

Connecting to a real past with even better stories!

Starting points:

- A history shared with parts of Belgium (former Duchy of Brabant)
- A history of simplicity and poverty, idealized in Vincent van Gogh's 'The Potato Eaters' (1885)
- Until 1950, most people involved in growing and preparing their own food
- Vast reservoir of collective memory, recipes, stories



Exploring Brabant's food culture

Menu

ter gelegenheid van het huwelijk

van

TREES TIBOSCH

en

JOEP VAN MERWIJK



Schijsdell, 20 januari 1960

- Plea for using oral history (interviews) to document regional customs regarding production, preparation, and consumption of food and drink (= regional food culture)
- Closely linked to religious and cultural traditions
- Easy to tap into as people's memories are just beneath the surface
- Everyone has memories concerning eating and drinking!
- Objects, menus, and photos are obvious aids



- Goals: gathering stories and recipes to document past food culture (1940s-1960s)
- Using these as sources of inspiration for events, exhibitions, workshops, cooking classes, et cetera
- Creating new consciousness, appropriation, and innovation of regional food culture



EUREGIO BENELUX
MIDDENGEBIED

PROJECT MET FINANCIËLE STEUN
VAN DE EUROPESE UNIE

suikerbonen
&
besluit met muisjes

Een cultureel
erfgoedproject
in het Benelux
Middengebied



Deliverables



Traaise* bloedworstsalade

Ingrediënten voor 4 personen

- 15 plakjes amandelen
gewassen (ca. 100 gr)
- 12 plakjes artisjokes
(ca. 300 gr)
- 100 gr witte kaas
(ca. 300 gr)
- 2 kleine appels (gewassen)
- 100 gr witte
koriander of dillie
- 1 ui
(ca. 100 gr)
- 2 eetlepels gerookte
gerookte
koriander
kruisbriem, roos, kori-
ander, peperkorrels

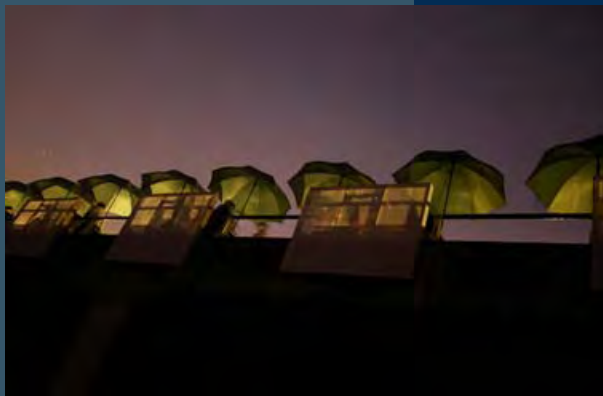
Bereidingstijd:
15 minuten



- Cookery books with new recipes, brochures, tourist routes, dinner and hotel arrangements, et cetera
- Websites with stories and background information
- Set of basic values identifying old and new Brabant food culture
- Exhibitions and meetings huge success (over 10,000 people)

Evaluation and expectations

- Catering industry craving for input and ideas
- Low-key 'folklore' or popular culture provides easy entry to general audience
- Regional food culture links tangible with intangible heritage: objects and food with stories and experiences
- Easy link with tourism, art, and heritage institutions (experience economy; tourist packages)
- Regional television and Internet offer free dissemination
- Large educational possibilities



Pitfalls and challenges

But

- Information has to be ready-made (packages)
- Little commercial attitude among heritage partners
- Little heritage-mindedness among commercial partners
- Risk of approaching the same consumer public all the time (middle-class, well-to-do, middle-aged, with an interest in regional identity, et cetera)
- No institute to coordinate acquisition and transmission of knowledge to producers, caterers, and consumers, as in other regions



THE ART OF ITALIAN GASTRONOMY



So the question remains...

The regional products chain

producers; logistics; retail

Goal: sustainable production and sales

Means:
enrootedness
in the region;
producer
cooperations

Means: marketing;
branding; market
concepts

Sustainable regional
products

Region/identity/culture

Goal: enhancing identity

What
are the
means
here??

Inhabitants/consumers

Goal: raising consciousness
and enabling appropriation

In conclusion...



- Although North Brabant is a region with a strong economy and a strong identity
- Its regional food culture is based on either romantic 'fakelore' or commercial 'fairytale': not sustainable.
- Nevertheless, a potentially rich reservoir of veracious regional food culture is ready available
- Through fieldwork and oral history knowledge (stories, experiences, recipes...) can be gathered
- And used for product innovation, tourism, education, and cultural renewal through appropriation
- As major ingredients for sustainability, to the benefit of people, planet, and profit



Thank you for your attention



UNIVERSITEIT  VAN TILBURG

LEERSTOEL CULTUUR IN BRABANT