

A CITY AND A REGION DEVELOP CULINARY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY THE CASE OF LJUBLJANA AND CENTRAL SLOVENIA

by Prof. Janez Bogataj, PhD



Honorary Professor - University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Prof. Janez Bogataj lectures as Guest Professor at the Turistica - High School for Tourism in Portorof and he is the President of the Expert Committee for the Marking and Evaluation of Products of Arts and Crafts at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia since 1990. Since 1977 he is member of the committee and curator for the Biennial exhibit of Arts and Crafts in Slovenia.

An old proverb says: We eat in order to live, but we don't live just so we can eat. Today there is no longer a dilemma about the role and importance of food and of individual dishes, which are increasingly becoming the bearers of information about the diversity of local and regional cultures. Every dish, whether or not it

is the product of a long tradition of cultural heritage, a modern interpretation thereof or a completely new invention, has its own story, a narrative about the specific qualities of the natural and urban environment, the forms of economic endeavour, social relations, every-day lives and holidays of the local and regional population. Today we often speak about multiculturalism and cultural diversity. However this emphasis seems unnecessary, since we cannot speak of any special qualities of the present day. Every environment, so to speak, was also multicultural during past eras of historical development, and this led to cultural exchange, new knowledge, adaptation and enrichment - and the culinary field was no exception. It is therefore completely absurd to approach these issues in a one-sided manner. In the fields of culinary arts and gastronomy we therefore also have to support (with the help of gastrodiploacy) efforts to identify culinary and cultural diversity on the one hand and to preserve and develop characteristic local and regional dishes and culinary knowledge on the other. We are adhering to this idea and principle in Ljubljana and Slovenia as well, particularly in its central region.

In 2006 we carried out an extensive research project and established the Gastronomic Strategy of Slovenia. The basis of this strategy was the determination of gastronomic regions and the establishing of culinary pyramids. One of the main criteria for the determination of the regions was the finding of concentrations of culinary characteristics and concentrations of certain local and regional foods and dishes in particular geographic areas. We took into account both culinary cultural heritage and contemporary culinary creativity. We therefore divided Slovenia into 24 gastronomic regions with 210 characteristic, representative or core foods and dishes. The entire system soon generated a number of positive effects, particularly in the area of culinary recognition and promotion for tourism purposes and in other areas. For example, knowledge of local

and regional culinary specialities became very popular in the elementary school system, where the children achieve amazing results every year in a cooking competition called "Cooking and All."

Local and regional culinary endeavours have developed very successfully in the capital, Ljubljana, and the surrounding Central Slovenia region. In 2013 a gastronomic strategy was developed for the city and the region using the same methodology as was used for Slovenia in 2006. In the same year a promotional catalogue was published which had a major influence on thinking about offering different, i.e. local and regional foods in restaurants. In 2014, a book on characteristic Ljubljana dishes was published under the title "Ljubljana has Long Been Renowned for its Food", which not only presented the city's culinary heritage but in particular posed a challenge for its modern interpretation and with it a specific type of recognition. These dishes are currently being added to the menus of various restaurants. The City of Ljubljana and the entire Central Slovenia region, which support and enable the entire project, are directly present in all of these professional endeavours.

The emphasis on learning about and developing local and regional culinary cultures and cultural diversity is another successful project, which is entering its third year of successful implementation in Ljubljana this year. This project or events are called "Open Kitchen." Every Friday from spring to autumn, representatives from up to 200 restaurants from Ljubljana and all over Slovenia gather in part of the Ljubljana Marketplace and sell "Positive Street Food" from the stalls. The range is especially culinary multicultural: from characteristic Slovenian and Ljubljana dishes to dishes from other European and global milieus. The response to the events at these culinary marketplaces has been exceptional. We can speak of new forms of communication in an urban area, contents which provide insight into the culinary habits of different cultures and allow people to experience different tastes, view cooking demonstrations in front of an audience and enjoy a complete experience of part of Ljubljana's old town centre.

And, if we want to know about the meaning, purpose and content of gastrodiploamacy, the case of Ljubljana is a perfect confirmation of the formulation that (cit.): "gastrodiploamacy is a form of public diploamacy which uses gastronomy as a tool for communication and attraction." I believe that the Ljubljana "Open Kitchen" events also demonstrate that gastrodiploamacy is not a one-way but a two-and-more way exchange and communication. They are in essence a method of presenting the authenticity of local, regional and national cuisines, which are open to people and are not carried out behind the closed doors of restaurant kitchens. The selection of dishes is also not based on reading menus, but on looking, smelling and tasting foods which are cooked in front of people. In fact, Valentin Vodnik, the author of the first Slovenian cookbook, which was published in Ljubljana in 1799, wrote: And why is our nose just above our mouth?

© IGCAT 2015

This paper was written in 2015 for the "Art of Food" meeting organized by **IGCAT**.

The Expert is promoted by **IGCAT** as he share IGCAT's mission of empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

For further information please contact info@igcat.org

Published by **IGCAT** www.igcat.org