

THE LONG-TERM LEGACY OF THE EUROPEAN REGIONS OF GASTRONOMY

- Catalonia: Case Study-

The European Region of Gastronomy Award aims to contribute to better quality of life in European regions, by highlighting distinctive food cultures, educating for better health and sustainability and stimulating gastronomic innovation. It is also a celebration of the rich cultural and food diversity found in Europe's many regions. It is an opportunity to highlight distinctive gastronomic, cultural and historical features, and to enhance opportunities for the region as a unique destination by providing wider visibility for their food, landscape and territory.

The European Region of Gastronomy Award is celebrating its second year of existence, since Catalonia (Spain) and Minho (Portugal) were awarded in 2016. It is still a baby if we compare it to the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) programme of the EU that was launched in 1985 and has provided awards to more than 66 cities across 30 countries.

So far, only nine regions have been given the award, with three regions celebrating it this year and, 2018 and 2019 regions developing their programmes. This year the award for 2020 will also be decided, making at least 10 awarded regions to date.

The ECOC Programme started out as an award aimed at highlighting cities already arguably rich in culture and heritage (Athens 1985, Florence 1986, Amsterdam 1987, West Berlin 1988 and Paris 1989). When it was the UK's turn to take the Award, the government, that was undergoing a process of decentralization, took the decision to hold a competition to decide which city would have the title. Robert Palmer, as Director of Glasgow made a convincing argument that the European Capital of Culture title would serve as a catalyst for cultural development and the transformation of the city. Glasgow, at that time was a bleak city with high unemployment and low appeal. Without doubt it is now considered to be a thriving cultural city. It is hard to demonstrate that it was the European Capital of Culture title that provided the catalyzing effect that transformed the city of Glasgow however many point to that being the starting point. This is why there are now many efforts to evaluate the long-term effects and legacy of holding the ECOC title.

It took some years before an internal competition became a feature in all European Capital of Culture processes but from the turn of the millennium onwards there is a clear bias to the selection of lesser-known cities and/or cities that needed to be "transformed." In almost all cases,

these cities are now firmly on the European map and the ECOC award is being understood as “a key platform for city positioning and a catalyst for economic and cultural regeneration.”¹

Though difficult to prove, the cultural, social and economic impacts and long-term effects in terms of urban image change and tourism development are palpable. The ECOC programme began to imbed the principle of a stronger commitment towards sustainable legacy planning and this has given birth to longitudinal studies that are providing the first true evidence base.

The European Region of Gastronomy Award has in many ways the same trademarks as the ECOC given that it will try to provide visibility to many of Europe's lesser-known regions. What can be learnt from 32 years of ECOC Awards is vital to establishing guidelines as the programme develops. It is also important to chart the achievements in Europe's founding European Regions of Gastronomy and to explore what we could do better in the future.

Intersectorial working

IGCAT's philosophy is to support **inter-sectorial working as we believe that the most interesting and positive examples in development happen when sectors work together**. The Regions of Gastronomy are therefore obliged to engage in inter-sectorial dialogue by forming a regional stakeholder group. In Catalonia, this group was initially just four institutions but during Catalonia, European Region of Gastronomy 2016 (C'REG) it has grown to include more than 800 stakeholders that support the project. Judging by the “buy-in”, the initiative can be said to be popular amongst farmers, educators, food producers, restaurants, hoteliers and citizens in general. How this is then transformed into the proliferation of new products and services will be key to establishing the long-term effects of the programme. For example, C'REG 2016 introduced the **Menu : “Som Gastronomia” (We are Gastronomy) a menu for restaurants that focuses on local products**.

Supporting SME's

By building a programme of events that encourage people to re-value local products as a unique selling point - the programme hopes to encourage new food production start-ups and creative/experience tourism offers - in short new economic models to become sustainable. A new initiative taking shape is the **Innovative Souvenir Award** that is meant to share knowledge and good practices to support local food producers in developing good sustainable business models, navigation of food and health regulations and discovery of how to integrate creativity and design in their process. It is aimed to promote local and more sustainable food chain and consumption systems by identifying the best and most innovative food products conceived and produced at a regional level and that protect cultural and food diversity.

¹ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET\(2013\)513985_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/513985/IPOL-CULT_ET(2013)513985_EN.pdf) (accessed 10_04_2017)

Citizen engagement

The European Region of Gastronomy title facilitates projects that raise awareness and stimulate pride in local food products. Developing strategies for engaging citizens is key to the programme. Building pride is an important element for encouraging new economic models - be that in sustainable tourism or innovation in agrifood. In Catalonia, C'REG 2016 introduced the **Benvolguts a Pagès** (Welcome to the Farm) project to reintroduce citizens to where their food comes from.

Developing new sustainable events and/or capitalising on existing events needs smart strategies to ensure that the authentic character of the event is not lost while at the same time encouraging sustainability recommendations and indicators to support positive development in the regions. Best practise guidelines or training of trainers programmes for skills capacity development in the regions has been considered as areas where IGCAT experts would be valuable.

Branding the territory

Positioning or repositioning the image of the region abroad is important to many of the regions. The development and long-term use of gastronomy as a unique selling point will be an important indicator. Catalonia has introduced the new slogan - "We are Gastronomy. Welcome to our Home. Territory, Product and Landscape." And, the annual Mercat d'escapades (market for day trips) was focused on gastronomy during C'REG 2016.

Story-telling is becoming a much more important feature in branding products and services and therefore IGCAT is now looking at how this can be introduced as a feature in projects such as the European Young Chef Award and the Innovative Souvenir Award initiatives.

Long-term strategy

The European Capital of Culture award has as criteria for selection the obligation for a city to develop a long-term cultural development plan. This is very innovative for cities and often very challenging as it requires cross-political support and a complicated negotiation with the overall development plan for the city. Therefore, if IGCAT wants to provoke long-term effects in the regions it may be time to consider a model for the European Region of Gastronomy. Catalonia has undertaken a wide stakeholder group consultation which has led to a long-term Gastronomy Plan to tackle different economic, cultural, social, technological, legal, environmental and political aspects. The question is now whether this model can be adapted and whether it should be introduced into the guidelines for applications?

Working in an international context and collaboration with other regions

IGCAT encourages the regions in the Platform to collaborate, share ideas and develop new initiatives that can give visibility to the regions taking part but also raise awareness about the importance of food diversity. For example, the **European Young Chef Award** that was celebrated for

the first time in Catalonia in 2016 had a very large impact both in visibility for the regions but, also it helped to launch the careers of young talented chefs that now see their role as ambassadors for their regions.

Could regions do more to develop this initiative further by holding regional competitions to select the finalists? Could they give more visibility to the chef finalists and develop his/her profile to support local products regionally and nationally?

Perspectives for the future

The programme and Award has grown in credibility thanks to the commitment and investment shown by the founding regions. The value of the Award is that it is given by an expert jury panel (independent from the region) thus being a source of pride for regions. The jury has thus far been made up of experts from other regions in the programme but for the first time this year will have an independent IGCAT jury member. IGCAT may consider a celebrity status jury member for the future and certainly jury members that have extensive experience in judging similar awards such as the European Capital of Culture.

Having said this, we always need to be reminded that we are not managing a competition but giving an award to regions that have met a set of criteria and have prepared an exciting programme of events for their year as European Region of Gastronomy. The more rigid the criteria the more credible the award will become. This year IGCAT published the guidelines that we have agreed to date and asks that IGCAT experts review these to consider if we are doing enough and where we need to improve.

At the same time, a lobbying paper has been drawn up in order for experts to lobby effectively in Brussels through different DGs of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions, both to gain visibility for the regions and to collect endorsements for the European Region of Gastronomy Award.

By seeking endorsements from different European institution and DGs of the European Commission, IGCAT hopes to reinforce its conviction that through cross-sectorial dialogue we can make a positive difference for our communities and regions. So far, we have received endorsements from DG Grow, DG Agriculture and Dg Culture and Education as well as the Committee of the Regions and some MEPs.

Ideally, we need the relevant European institutions to let us use their logo on our website and our certificates. It would also be ideal if different DGs could provide funds so that we could offer an incentive to regions to participate (the European Capital of Culture for example has the Melina Mercouri Prize of 1.5 million euros).

UNWTO and UNESCO have both shown an interest in this programme and so, at an international level we are exploring how this model could be adapted for other continents. Europe in this sense will gain much prestige from leading on this project which is pioneering in its grass-roots approach.

Incentives to stay in the Platform – how big can the Platform get?

One of the priorities in terms of legacy for IGCAT's Regions of Gastronomy Platform is to think about the model and the possibilities for regions to remain in the Platform after they accomplish their 5-years commitment, including the celebration of the award for one year.

Different proposals are open to discussion to find the balance between an expanding Platform and dynamic useful Platform. The larger the Platform gets the more difficult it becomes to maintain meaningful relationships between members and carry out shared initiatives.

Currently, it was agreed that after the year end, regions remain in the Platform at a lower membership fee and continue to use their logo with the year date. However, Catalonia have raised the doubt that they will not use the logo with the date as it is confusing for publicity/branding purposes. Therefore, other proposals include:

1. Regions remain in the Platform at a lower membership fee and use the general ERG logo – and must refer to their awarded year in texts.
2. Regions be allowed to put together another year of events and re-apply (for example Catalonia could re-apply for 2020) and accumulate logos with year dates.

We welcome IGCAT experts' thoughts and ideas on how to improve the legacy of the European Region of Gastronomy Award.

Dr. Diane Dodd and Jordi Vegas, 2017

This paper was written in 2017 .

IGCAT's mission is to empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

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