

## CATERING FOR THRILL-SEEKERS: NEW TRAVEL TRENDS

by Dr. Diane Dodd



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\*This speech was first given by Dr. Diane Dodd, the President of IGCAT, on the 13th June in the context of a European Region of Gastronomy Meeting in Kuopio Finland.

The **European Region of Gastronomy Award** has been developed by IGCAT with the support of regions and European institutions, to celebrate and raise awareness of Europe's rich food and culture. We believe that Europe's regions have much to offer as they are the settings where landscape, agriculture, heritage, food, gastronomy, culture, arts, hospitality and crucially people come together.

IGCAT has observed that today's exciting developments are where convergence is happening in tourism, culture, arts and gastronomy and when cross-sectorial dialogue is extended to health, education and agricultural sectors we have learnt that we can find solutions to many of our regions current challenges.

So therefore the aim of the Award is not just to celebrate the regions great gastronomy but will be given if the region propose a year of events and projects that will kick-start a process that ultimately will contribute **to a better quality of life in the region by highlighting distinctive food cultures, educating for better health and sustainability as well as stimulating gastronomic innovation.**

Curiously, it is Europe's lesser-known regions that are providing a treasure trove for the more adventurous creative and food loving travelers. As more and more people move from the routine of grocery shopping to the expectation of destination experience shopping - you can bet this foodie demographic will increase.

In fact, according to the US Centre for Culinary Development, Millennials will from this year on, start outspending the boomer generation<sup>1</sup> and this is important for us because the Millennials have also been labelled the “foodie generation”.

As a demographic, the Millennials are generally a globally orientated generation, well travelled and comfortable navigating different cultures, they value authenticity as well as get enthusiastic about fusion. They love new combinations and their ambition is to be surprised or delighted by new experiences.

But, please think about this challenge - to be surprised and delighted takes creativity and a little bit of “cunning,” This at a time when the arts, creativity, food and cooking have been absent from most European school curriculums for decades. So, therefore your average food producer, businessman or woman, hotelier, farmer or retailer will need some help.

How can our regions cater for these thrill-seekers? How can our regions cater for millennials that incidentally are also a generation that are more concerned with healthy foods and where their ingredients come from, than their parents or even grandparents generations.<sup>2</sup>

So....

We need to work with the agricultural sector to protect regional plant and animal varieties. And, we need to work with agrifood and creative industries to innovate, repackage and rebrand these products for visitors and export so that farming becomes a viable career option and lifestyle choice for younger generations.

And, we need to work with hospitality sectors to use and promote local varieties because if we don't, we will have no unique selling point. Think about it, every region in Europe can have a cheese fair but what makes yours unique are the products, the people and the traditions surrounding them.

And, we need to work with food producers to reinterpret and reinvent locally produced healthy products for today's citizens because globalized diets are putting a strain on mother earth and on our health.

And, we need to work with artists, chefs, storytellers, designers and everyone else from the creative sectors to rethink the way we present and serve not only our food but our terroir.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://corporate.univision.com/blog/2014/12/15/millennials-the-foodie-generation/>

<sup>2</sup> Halperin, Marc. (2012, March). [“Fulfilling Generation Next.”](#) *QSR Magazine*.

And, we can do this by using smart technology. Think about it - this same millennial generation - is a generation embracing social media platforms. They are the ones communicating good experiences - they are the ones using their food experiences to tell a story about themselves.

Some research has shown that 52% of 21-32 year olds would rather go to a food festival than a music festivals and 61% would rather have dinner in a new restaurant than buy a new pair of shoes.<sup>3</sup>

IGCAT watches closely these trends and has come to the conclusion that by stimulating sustainable and ethical food travel we are contributing to local economies.

And, by working closely with organisations like UNWTO Themis Foundation, we have learnt important lessons about the perils of leakage from local economies and how to put safeguards in place to ensure impacts of tourism are felt more positively. I'd like thank therefore Dr. Edith Szivas for agreeing Chair the jury.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to mention that next week I will sign an agreement with the European Travel Commission to showcase our Regions of Gastronomy events, recipes and food routes on their acclaimed VISIT EUROPE PLATFORM. In this, and other initiatives the awarded regions are starting to benefit from the cross-marketing and extra visibility that the title is giving them.

I'd now like to take this opportunity to give you a mouthwatering taste of the regions that have been awarded to date:

Catalonia 2016 with a focus on educating young adults about healthy eating and nurturing experiential and food tourism in the wider region of Catalonia so SMEs throughout the region could benefit.

Minho 2016, Portugal where the focus has been on building cohesion in and between previously competing towns. For the first time (perhaps in their history) 24 towns have signed a joint promotional strategy for gastronomy that acknowledges common traditions and aims to raise food hospitality standards for visitors.

Riga-Gauja 2017, Latvia is excitingly focusing their programme on "wild at Platte" and creating new sensorial food experiences both for locals and visitors. Their daring programme is an inspiration!

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<sup>3</sup> Bliss, MaryLeigh. (2014, October). ["Is Food The New Status Symbol?"](#) *Engage: GenY MediaPost*.

East Lombardy 2017 has a focus on championing quality food products and services, as well as valorizing built, intangible and natural heritage.

Aarhus/Central Denmark Region 2017 are celebrating their Award year in tandem with Aarhus being European Capital of Culture -inspiring collaborations between creative arts and agrifood sectors are generating new ideas and driving innovation in the region.

Galway - West of Ireland 2018 will focus on good food for everyone - raising about the exceptionally high quality of local food, as well supporting small businesses and raising standards in the hospitality sector.

North Brabant 2018 has an extensive programme to reactivate pride in local food and will be connecting gastronomy to local history and art - particularly that of Hieronymous Bosch. I congratulate once again the Mayor of s'Hertgenbosh, Anton Rombouts for the successful and ambitious vision that he brought to the region.

Sibiu 2019, Romania has built a commitment to tradition, quality and organic farming. A model for other regions and proof that regions that have been in the margins of progress can now use they're natural unspoilt landscapes to their advantage.

South Aegean 2019, Greece - on another periphery of Europe working hard to safeguard plant varieties through a seed bank and nursery, and recently having introduced a heartwarming school gardens programme to primary schools. With the first pilot edition being opened on Kos island just last week.

In short, each region is different and so each designs their bid and programme of events for the year of their Award according to their own priorities. The key to this is a shared vision on where you want the region to be in the future.

That is why obtaining the Award can be a catalyst to:

- Nurture sustainable and ethical tourism
- Preserve European's rich cultural and food diversity
- Bring back pride in regional cuisine and traditions
- Innovate for new foodie generations.

Together, as a Platform of just 9 regions and I hope soon to be 10 (!) we have achieved so much... and, we will achieve so much more with your determination and commitment.

If we continue to work together as we have until now, I am sure we will have much to celebrate!

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This speech 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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