

## 10th IGCAT Experts Meeting

22 April 2024

Hosted by the Culinary Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture  
at King Khalid University, Abha

### PROGRAMME



© IGCAT 2024

This Programme and Speakers List is the property of IGCAT and its authors. You may copy, download, or print IGCAT content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from IGCAT publications and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites, and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgement of IGCAT and the author is given. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use and/or translation rights should be submitted to [info@igcat.org](mailto:info@igcat.org).

Published by IGCAT [www.igcat.org](http://www.igcat.org)

# Welcome

## **Aseer: The Region of a 1,000 Welcomes**

Welcome to a landmark celebration of Aseer's recent and historic achievement: being honored as the World Region of Gastronomy 2024 by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts, and Tourism (IGCAT). This recognition is not just a testament to the region's rich culinary heritage but also to its innovative spirit and deep-rooted community values. As the first region outside of Europe to receive this prestigious title, Aseer stands as a beacon of cultural and environmental stewardship, showcasing the profound bond between its people and their land.

## **The Rich Tapestry of Aseer's Culinary Arts**

Aseer's cuisine is a vibrant palette of flavors, textures, and aromas, deeply influenced by its geographical diversity and the agricultural dedication of its community. From the terraced fields to the verdant valleys, each landscape contributes uniquely to the region's culinary repertoire. Dishes here are more than food; they are narratives of history, culture, and innovation passed down through generations. Ingredients such as indigenous herbs, grains, and fruits are transformed through time-honored methods into exquisite meals that echo the spirit of Aseer.

Central to Aseer's culinary identity is the art of preservation and using nature as a medium to cook and prepare food via techniques that have been perfected over centuries to enhance flavors and sustain the community through all seasons. The region's signature dishes, from aromatic stews to rich, hearty breads, celebrate the local produce and livestock, embodying a gastronomy that is deeply connected to the rhythm of the land.

## **Sustainable Harmony with Nature**

Aseer's historical farming systems are a marvel of ingenuity and environmental sustainability. The people of Aseer have developed sophisticated methods for managing water and land, ensuring that their practices not only yield bountiful harvests but also sustain the vibrant ecosystems that characterize this unique geography. This deep understanding and respect for the natural world have fostered a culture of preservation and respect for the environment, seamlessly blending traditional practices with innovative approaches to agriculture.

## **Aseer: World Region of Gastronomy 2024**

As we gather to celebrate this momentous occasion, let us immerse ourselves in the stories, flavors, and traditions of Aseer. This symposium is not just an acknowledgment of Aseer's gastronomic excellence but also a recognition of its people's enduring relationship with their land, their innovative spirit in sustainable agriculture, and their unwavering commitment to community and cultural preservation.

**Welcome to Aseer – where tradition meets innovation, and community flourishes alongside nature.**

**Mayada Badr**, CEO, Culinary Arts Commission, Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia

# Introduction

IGCAT is thrilled to organise this IGCAT Symposium in Aseer World Region of Gastronomy 2024. It is the first time we met outside Europe, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our gracious hosts, the Culinary Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia, and the stakeholders of Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024, particularly King Khalid University, Aseer Development Agency, Saudi Arabia's Heritage Commission, Saudi Tourism Authority and Bunyan for making this milestone event possible.

Aligned with the Culinary Arts Commission, IGCAT's mission is to empower local communities by preserving and celebrating rich culinary heritage from across the globe. Our mission extends to safeguarding food sovereignty, promoting healthier lifestyles, supporting biodiversity, strengthening local and circular economies, celebrating cultural diversity, and fostering sustainable growth.

IGCAT's flagship initiative, the World Region of Gastronomy Award, serves as a catalyst for community cohesion. To qualify for the award, regions must establish stakeholder groups to address challenges and devise innovative solutions, all while preserving and celebrating their cultural heritage. Regions must drive forward projects that meet our mission and, during the symposium and Platform visit we learned about exciting projects that have been developed in Aseer by the Culinary Arts Commission, the Aseer Development Authority and Bunyan Academies.

With special gratitude to our esteemed speakers, IGCAT experts and participants who journeyed to Aseer to share their expertise and celebrate this remarkable region during its tenure. Their contributions are invaluable, and they were duly rewarded as our partners in Aseer curated an exceptional program, offering participants the opportunity to visit a myriad of projects unfolding across the region, each aimed at enriching and championing local food culture.

Our World Regions of Gastronomy Platform is swiftly evolving into a global movement aimed at enhancing knowledge on supporting cultures, biodiversity, sustainable tourism, and agriculture. Through these gatherings, we strengthen connections, collectively advance our understanding, and enrich our shared journey, ultimately contributing to a better world.

Under the visionary leadership of King of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud and his transformative vision outlined in [Saudi Arabia Vision 2030](#), Saudi Arabia stands as an exemplary model for sustainable development. The nation's bold initiatives underscore the potential for creating a sustainable future. With thanks to this leadership, our World Region of Gastronomy Award will further cultivate pride in Aseer and contribute to creativity and storytelling.

It was therefore fitting to organise the 5th World Food Gift Challenge in Aseer region, as this competition not only promotes local food and crafts but it also encourages sustainable packaging and innovations that enforce the connections between territory, sustainability and products.

This meeting undoubtedly serves as a testament that together we can make a meaningful difference.

**Diane Dodd PhD**, President, IGCAT

# Agenda

- 11:00h      **Welcome to King Khalid University**  
Prof. Saad bin Muhammad bin Dajem, President, King Khalid University
- Keynote on Challenges for the 1<sup>st</sup> World Region of Gastronomy**  
Mayada Badr, Executive Director, Culinary Arts Commission
- Opening IGCAT's Expert Meeting: setting the context**  
Diane Dodd, PhD, IGCAT President
- 11:30h      **PANEL ONE: BUILDING SUPPORT ACROSS THE REGION**  
Chair: Dr. Edith Szivas, IGCAT Vice-President
- Aseer's Development Plans**  
Abdulrahman Ahmed Assiri, Aseer Development Authority
- Putting National Plans into Action and Cross-Sector Collaboration**  
Ramon Sentmartí - Catalonia, World Region of Gastronomy 2025
- Large-scale Events and Engaging Large Audiences**  
Dr. Iulia Dragut - Sibiu, European Region of Gastronomy 2019
- 12:30h      Open discussion
- 13:00h      Lunch
- 14:00h      **PANEL TWO: ACTIVATING CITIZENS AND VALUING TRADITIONAL FOOD**  
Chair: Omar Valdez, IGCAT Board
- The Culinary Codification Project and Results in Aseer**  
Ir. Majed Almuhanna, Culinary Arts Commission - Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024
- Latitud Iche Food Route**  
Orazio Bellettini Cedeño - Manabí, candidate World Region of Gastronomy 2026
- The transformative potential of local gastronomy in a global context - The case of Serra da Lousã PDO Honey**  
Ana Paula Sançana - Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy 2021
- 15:00h      Open discussion
- 15:20h      Health break

15:30h

**PANEL THREE: EDUCATION AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING**

Chair: **Jaume Gomila** - Menorca, European Region of Gastronomy 2022

**Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024 Programme**

**Dr. Mohammed Hamoud**, Coordinator of Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024

**Bunyan's Role in Training Services for Tourism, Hospitality and the Entertainment Industries**

**Wassim Zeitouni**, Academies Director, Bunyan - Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024

**Education – a commitment to sustainability**

**José Luís Marques**, Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy 2021

16:30h

Open Discussion

16:45h

Health Break

17:00h

**CONCLUDING SESSION**

**Conclusions from the symposium and future actions for IGCAT**

**Diane Dodd PhD**, IGCAT President

# Programme

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

### Welcome to King Khalid University

**Prof. Saad bin Muhammad bin Dajem**, President, King Khalid University



#### **Dr. Saad Mohammed bin Dajem, President, King Khalid University (KKU) – Saudi Arabia**

Dr. Saad Mohammed bin Dajem, the president of King Khalid University (KKU), is a prominent leader with a multifaceted career that bridges academia and administration. With a PhD in Immunoparasitology from the University of Edinburgh's Institute of Immunology and Infection Research, Dr. Bin Dajem started as a Parasitology professor specializing in Immunoparasitology in the College of Science, Department of Biology. His leadership acumen led him to critical administrative roles at KKU, including heading the Deanship of Admission and Registration and serving as the Vice President for Academic and Educational Affairs for eight years. Dr. Bin Dajem applied his strategic vision and managerial skills in these roles to streamline academic processes, enhance educational outcomes, and strengthen KKU's position as a leading institution.

### Keynote on Challenges for the 1<sup>st</sup> World Region of Gastronomy

**Mayada Badr**, Executive Director, Culinary Arts Commission



#### **Mayada Badr, CEO, Culinary Arts Commission, Ministry of Culture – Saudi Arabia**

Mayada Badr is one of the leading Saudi names specialized in Culinary Arts. She received high training under the supervision of world-class chefs, and she has great expertise in the field as she founded Pink Camel, a high-end patisserie in Jeddah, and she is a partner in two other restaurants. Furthermore, she used to be a culinary consultant and represented the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on many international occasions. Her scientific and academic career is also marked by great accomplishments. Mayada Badr holds a bachelor's degree in Design Management from Parsons School of Design, 2005, and a High Diploma in Culinary Arts and Desserts from the International School "Le Cordon Bleu" in Paris, 2009.

### Opening IGCAT's Expert Meeting: setting the context

**Diane Dodd, PhD**, IGCAT President



#### **Diane Dodd, PhD, President IGCAT - Spain**

Diane Dodd PhD is President/founder of IGCAT (International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism) and co-founder of the World Region of Gastronomy Award. Together with the awarded World Regions of Gastronomy, she has pioneered the European Young Chef Award, the Food Film Menu, the World Food Gift Challenge, and the Top Websites for Foodie Travellers competitions. She is also Regional Adviser for the global network IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Cultural Agencies) and Executive Board member of the Culinary Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia. She leads MA courses in Cultural Institutions and Policies and Events Management at the International University of Catalonia. She has been regularly engaged as an evaluator for the Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe as well as consultant for European Capitals of Culture.

## BUILDING SUPPORT ACROSS THE REGION

Chair: **Dr. Edith Szivas**, IGCAT Vice-President

This Panel focused on building support across the region through connections. Connections amongst stakeholders, connections with the local communities and connections across sectors. Interlinking sectors such as gastronomy, culture, arts, and tourism enhances the region's allure. Gastronomy showcases culinary heritage, enticing visitors with unique local flavours. Culture and arts instil pride and belonging, while tourism thrives on these connections, offering immersive experiences. By nurturing these interwoven elements, regional development flourishes, creating vibrant communities and sustainable economies.

The first Speaker, Mr Abdulrahman Ahmed Assiri, representing Aseer World Region of Gastronomy 2024, stressed the pivotal role of community engagement in elevating culinary heritage in the region. By involving locals, cooking transcends mere skill to become a cultural ambassador, preserving traditions and promoting local ingredients. Such initiatives empower communities and enrich cultural tapestries, enticing both residents and tourists.

The second Speaker, Mr Ramon Sentmartí, representing Catalonia World Region of Gastronomy 2025, highlighted Catalonia's journey as a European Region of Gastronomy awarded in 2016, emphasizing its rich food heritage, tourism model and gastronomic revolution. The impending recognition as the World Region of Gastronomy in 2025 underscores Catalonia's commitment to promoting its culinary legacy globally, fostering collaborations and showcasing its unique food production.

The third Speaker, Dr Iulia Dragut, representing Sibiu, European Region of Gastronomy 2019, emphasized the impact of large-scale events in promoting culinary heritage and engaging diverse audiences. These events serve as platforms for cultural exchange, innovation, and community involvement, fostering socio-economic development and preserving intangible heritage.

During the Q&A, Chair Dr Edith M Szivas raised the topic of honey, which stands not only as one of the iconic food products of the host region, Aseer, but also as a quintessential regional product in many of IGCAT's regions, transcending boundaries with its rich flavours and cultural significance. The Chair also asked for insights on transitioning from a European to a World Region of Gastronomy, as exemplified by Catalonia's case.



**Dr. Edith Szivas, International Tourism Strategy and Vice-President IGCAT - Spain**

Dr. Szivas is currently Vice-President of IGCAT. She is an internationally recognized tourism development expert specialising in tourism strategies and development plans, tourism investment, tourism SME development, gastronomy and cultural tourism and strategic human capital development. She has managed and worked on projects worldwide on behalf of UNWTO, UNDP, EU, USAID and various national and regional governments and corporate clients. She has extensive experience from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. She is a regular keynote speaker at tourism conferences and a research contributor. She holds a BSc degree in Import and Export from Budapest, Hungary, an MSc in Tourism Planning and Development and a PhD in Tourism Development from University of Surrey, United Kingdom.



## ASEER'S DEVELOPMENT PLANS

**Abdulrahman Ahmed Assiri, Aseer Development Authority**

Welcome to Aseer, a place where authenticity, nature, and beauty converge harmoniously! At the Aseer Development Authority we are developing and implementing major projects and plans to enhance the future of culinary arts in the region, involving the local community in the culinary field to turn our gastronomy into a product, a source, and a promoter for the region and its accompanying social customs.

We are driven by a general vision that culinary arts in Aseer are among the fundamental fields shaping the region's tourism future. We are committed to realizing Aseer's strategic vision of becoming a global year-round destination rooted in its genuine culture and diverse landscapes. By adhering to the three strategic pillars of economy, people, and land, we find that the culinary field intersects with each of these pillars, making it a key component in achieving our targets.

Since Aseer was chosen as the World Region of Gastronomy for 2024 by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts, and Tourism (IGCAT), we have been adapting our projects to meet the recommendations and targets set by the committee. This adaptation aims to create a flourishing future for culinary arts in Aseer, which will undoubtedly enhance heritage and culture in the region, propelling us towards the global recognition we aspire to achieve.

We have actively engaged the local community interested in culinary arts, involving them in projects that intersect with this field. This engagement has sparked movement, generated opportunities, and provided investment prospects for small projects and culinary enthusiasts. Initiatives such as tourism workshops and the Heritage Inventory Project, document culinary traditions and promote interaction with the land in terms of agriculture.

We have made culinary arts and traditions one of our tourism promotional priorities, which we have included in the Aseer identity that the authority will launch soon. It is one of the targets in the tourist journey crafted by the tourist destinations sector at the Aseer Development Authority. Furthermore, we have begun planning and outlining the next phase, with the highlight being the Aseer Culinary Festival, scheduled for 2025, focusing specifically on innovation in traditional recipes and food presentations.

Today, through partnership management at the Aseer Development Authority, which serves as an extended bridge to all stakeholders, we plan, work, and execute together to achieve the greatest target.

Through managing investments at the Aseer Development Authority, which aims to support all projects in the region, we are currently establishing a mechanism to support small projects and create investment opportunities, thereby enhancing the culinary sector in Aseer.

We acknowledge the importance of the title bestowed upon Aseer and the responsibility it places on us. We strive to succeed with our partners, especially the Culinary Arts Commission, and we aim to create innovative cooperative projects between culinary professionals, visual artists, musicians, and craftsmen to introduce new ideas and foster them. Additionally, we are working on creating a program to support farmers and achieve targets in agritourism through environmental sustainability management at the Aseer Development Authority, which has made significant progress in supporting honey and coffee producers in the region.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to our partners at the Culinary Arts Commission, who have contributed significantly to the development of the culinary sector in Aseer. We appreciate their efforts and seek to achieve our targets together, making a difference that will establish Aseer as a global year-round destination, rooted in its authentic culture and diverse nature.



**Abdulrahman Ahmed Assiri, Director of Heritage and Culture Promotion Department, Aseer Development Authority – Saudi Arabia**

With over 19 years of experience in cultural work, as a participant, organizer, and enthusiast, Abdulrahman Ahmed Assiri participated in the establishment of many businesses and projects that intersect with the fields of heritage and culture. He is interested in everything related to the cultural, social, and tourist history of Aseer region and he is specialised in business administration, tourism management, and hospitality.

---

## PUTTING NATIONAL PLANS INTO ACTION AND CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

**Ramon Sentmartí** - Catalonia, World Region of Gastronomy 2025

Gastronomy has long been and remains a cornerstone of Catalonia's identity. Dating back to the Middle Ages, circa 1325, the first compilation of recipes, *Llibre de Sent Soví*, one of the oldest written cookery books in Europe appeared. Written in Catalan and dedicated to Catalan Cuisine, it garnered recognition as the most influential cookery book of its era.

In the fifteenth century, select recipes from the *Llibre de Sent Soví* were adopted in the Italian cookbook, *Libro di arte coquinaria*. This acknowledgment not only attested to the quality of Catalan cuisine but also elevated Catalan cooks to a status of unrivalled excellence and influence in the culinary world. Many recipes from this compilation were copied and disseminated throughout the rest of the continent. This acknowledgment of Catalan culinary excellence had a lasting and far-reaching influence across Europe.

Another highly influential Catalan cookbook emerged in 1490, known as *El Llibre del Coch*. It swiftly gained prominence in all the most powerful palaces and kitchens across Europe, with translations into multiple languages. Notably, the first ever recipe book published in Spanish was a translation of *El Llibre del Coch*, almost two centuries after its initial publication in Barcelona.

While there are many notable contributions from Catalan cuisine, I will focus on one of the most significant, not only to Europe but to the whole culinary world: Ferran Adrià and his iconic El Bulli restaurant. El Bulli earned the prestigious title of The World's Best Restaurant five times between 2002 and 2009, and Ferran Adrià was widely acclaimed by journalists and chefs alike as the most imaginative generator of *haute cuisine* on the planet. He has won many national and international prizes, among them, Chef of the Decade in 2010. Many experts agree that Adrià's creative influence can be discerned in virtually every corner of the world's dining establishments.

In 2016, Catalonia earned the distinction of European Region of Gastronomy, a recognition deeply rooted in its exceptional culinary heritage and innovative gastronomic endeavours. This accolade is not only a testament to Catalonia's rich tradition of cuisine but also to the diversity of its landscapes, the quality of its local products, and the dedication and excellence of its producers. Furthermore, Catalonia's extensive array of food-related tourism experiences further enhances its appeal as a culinary destination.

This recognition served as a catalyst for the inception of our first National Gastronomy Plan, which brought together over 130 stakeholders from diverse areas related to gastronomy: economics, innovation, communication, education, internationalisation, local development, identity and heritage preservation, tourism, nutrition, and health. This plan laid the groundwork for Catalonia's Strategic Food Plan 2021-2026 and the Strategy for Gastronomic Tourism in Catalonia 2022-2027, comprising over a hundred ongoing initiatives and policies aimed at further enhancing our gastronomic landscape.

This collective effort, engaging all key players and stakeholders within the sector, actively involved in the planning, development, and evaluation of measures outlined in these plans, has significantly bolstered collaboration among stakeholders, local government, the private sector, research centres, and academia. This collaboration has fostered the implementation of new measures, culminating in the submission of the candidacy and the subsequent recognition of Catalonia as the World Region of Gastronomy for 2025.

Among the main common objectives is the collaboration aimed at strengthening traditional Catalan Cuisine and promoting Catalonia's culinary legacy, which evokes emotional connections and as well as the values of health and sustainability. This endeavour highlights the region's wealth and diversity of products and landscapes.

Additional objectives include the establishment of gastronomic routes across the region, fostering local cohesion and development. This initiative also comprises the promotion of new venues for experiencing, learning about, and purchasing local products. In addition, there's an emphasis on the development of training programmes tailored for professionals within the sector, with a special focus on supporting small producers and local restaurants. Furthermore, we are committed to continue the gastronomic revolution started by Ferran Adrià.

The Catalonia European and now the World Region of Gastronomy awards have been instrumental in consolidating the perceived value of Catalan gastronomy in multiple dimensions. They have and will act as an economic engine, a unifying force for various stakeholders, a cultural treasure, and as a catalyst for the promotion of local products and tourism. These accolades foster greater cohesion within the region and among sectors and stakeholders associated with gastronomy, resulting in enhanced collaboration between the public and private sectors, a critical improvement, particularly in promoting healthier and more local food in schools and among young people.

Additionally, there has been notable progress in expanding facilities and resources for local and sustainable tourism, while also elevating awareness and pride in local products and producers. Furthermore, these awards are driving the development of gastronomic routes to showcase the diversity of Catalonia's pantry and wines, and to bolster international recognition not only for our renowned restaurants but also for our broader food chain and tourism sector. Ultimately, our efforts aim to bridge the rural-urban divide and foster a deeper connection between communities.

In essence, Catalonia World Region of Gastronomy 2025 award will play a pivotal role in enhancing collaboration among all stakeholders, encompassing the food and tourism sectors. This collaboration will be rooted in shared objectives and values, fostering a collective commitment to progress and mutual benefit. Catalonia has always been and will continue to be committed to contributing to a better world through its cuisine and gastronomy, promoting the safeguarding of our planet, health, wellness, and local economies.



**Ramon Sentmartí, Managing Director, PRODECA (Government of Catalonia) – Spain**

Ramon Sentmartí is Managing Director of PRODECA, a public company of the Government of Catalonia that promotes Catalan agrifood products and gastronomy in the national and international markets, as well as provides support in marketing and internationalisation for Catalan agrifood companies. He has been a key stakeholder and supporter of Catalonia, European Region of Gastronomy 2016, facilitating the development of a gastronomy plan and earning the role as IGCAT Expert (International Institute of Gastronomy Culture, Arts and Tourism). Since championing Catalonia, World Region of Gastronomy 2025 he has been given Ambassador status by IGCAT.

---

## LARGE-SCALE EVENTS AND ENGAGING LARGE AUDIENCES

**Dr. Iulia Dragut - Sibiu, European Region of Gastronomy 2019**

Deeply rooted in a specific traditional experience, Sibiu has successfully managed to bring people together in the desire to give birth to a dynamic tourism-based economy, in which the main positions are occupied by cultural heritage and regional identity.

Cuisine represents the point towards which food production is directed, the place where social relations are formed and maintained, the place for meeting between science and art. It is both the place where businesses start and an object for philosophy. This title provides a new perspective on chefs and gastronomy, a review of society's vision, without which discourse on sustainability in gastronomy would be impossible. For the title year, we organized more than 50 events for the public, for an audience between 250-20.000 people. All the events had free entrance for the public.

On 11-13 February 2019, Sibiu, hosted representatives of other European Regions of Gastronomy and organised a series of ceremonies to celebrate the opening of the title year. On 11 February, the team led by the President of Euro-toques Romania, Mr. Radu Zărnescu, held a Romanian-specific dinner interpreted in a contemporary manner at the Ice Castle in Bâlea lac. The guests had the chance to enjoy the magical atmosphere of the place, to taste traditional dishes placed on plates similar to fine dining dishes. The cold weather, the whistling wind could not prevent the organizers' intention to impress, to initiate the audience to the secrets of regional cuisine. The revolutionary idea of the menu was to use only raw materials that you can find at 1000 m altitude, like venison, berries, mutton, ram, different kinds of cheeses. Eight chefs were involved and 250 portions were served.

On 12 February, the actual opening ceremony took place in the presence of officials, representatives of IGCAT, representatives of the Sibiu European Region of Gastronomy Consortium, and those from the Presidency of Romania, as guests of the Land Forces Academy. Members of the Cultural Association Euro East Alternative (ACEEA) delighted guests with various dishes, from military to traditional. 50 chefs and 10 volunteers prepared 1500 portions of various dishes in front of the guests, thus demonstrating the mastery of Romanian chefs. The local products were appreciated by everyone and the respect for seasonality, for the uniqueness of the place, for the guiding principles of local gastronomy, gave a special flavour to that official moment.

On 13 February, the guests were led to Gura Râului, a representative village of Mărginimea Sibiului where they had the chance to discover the archetypal Universe of the Romanian shepherds. Ancestral customs, welcoming rituals, folklore and culinary customs made the last day of the events a true delight for the audience. The guests were invited to prepare the butter according to an archaic method as well as to taste sheep meat right from the oven. 50 chefs and 10 volunteers served 250 portions.

Some other examples of events organised throughout the year include:

- Participation in the World Tourism Fair in Berlin, where attendees could discover the cultural and culinary diversity of Sibiu at the presentation booth of Romania. 12 chefs served 3000 portions during three days;
- CULINARIADA, the largest competition for culinary pre-university level students, involved 100 students from 16 high schools throughout the country and helped them get a better understanding of their social role as chefs, alignment with international standards and important concepts like sustainability, respect for seasonality, and the environment;

- The Tastes of Summer event was visited by more than 20,000 tourists and residents of Sibiu during three days, giving space to local producers, as well as 95 local, national and international chefs. Radu Zărnescu built the biggest spit in the country, roasting 16 lambs simultaneously according to a secret recipe. The idea was to bring a global perspective on traditional Romanian cuisine by using local products and combining worldwide recognized techniques;
- The Tastes of Winter event was intended for visitors to get to know local beekeepers, producers and farmers, and try the winter tastes of Sibiu. Including a live cooking show and a master class by famous Chef Robert Rainford, the event 65 chefs who served 3000 tasting portions over 3 days.

Sibiu, European Region of Gastronomy awarded 2019 was implemented by the following partners: Sibiu City Hall, Sibiu Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture, Sibiu County Council, Nicolae Bălcescu Land Forces Academy, Sibiu County Tourism Association, Mediaș City Hall, Lucian Blaga University.

Before we had started our projects meant to reach thousands of people, and we had decided to be a plastic free region. For all the food that we were about to serve to the people we decided to use bamboo cutlery of only one use, bran plates or paper plates. It was an initiative that was very well received by everyone.

The title of European Region of Gastronomy awarded in 2019 to Sibiu by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (IGCAT) was a great opportunity, the first of its kind in Romania, in order to promote gastronomic sustainability at national and international level. The message that the title launched was that: "Nowadays you cannot be called a gastronome, gourmet, passionate about culinary art, without being an ecologist." The title of European Region of Gastronomy has placed culinary activities at the core of people's lives, changing the image of chefs, food artisans, and food producers in contemporary society, since for a very longtime chefs and culinary activities have had little impact on communities and their members.



**Dr. Iulia Dragut, President – Cultural Association Euro East Alternative – Romania**

Dr. Iulia Dragut has been President of Cultural Association Euro East Alternative since 2007 and IGCAT Expert (International Institute of Gastronomy Culture, Arts and Tourism) since 2019. She has organised several national events in Romania, has played an important role as a stakeholder of Sibiu, European Region of Gastronomy 2019, and further she has participated at international events for over 15 years. She holds a title of doctor in Philosophy, cum laude and several trainer and management diplomas for Hospitality Industry. Dr. Dragut has an extensive expertise in culinary arts and sustainable gastronomy. She initiated "Gastronomic Education" (Gastronomic Education Manual and handbook) in Romania, a new school discipline that will change the way children understand food. Iulia's international recognition and engagement in local festivals underscores her dedication to culinary innovation and sustainability.

---

## Panel session 2

# ACTIVATING CITIZENS AND VALUING TRADITIONAL FOOD

Chair: **Omar Valdez**, IGCAT Board

The conference session "Activating Citizens and Valuing Traditional Food" brought together key IGCAT experts to discuss initiatives aimed at preserving and promoting traditional foods. The session featured Ir. Majed Almuhanha (Saudi Arabia), Orazio Bellettini Cedeño (Ecuador), and Ana Paula Sançana (Portugal), each representing regions recognized by IGCAT awarded or aspiring Regions of Gastronomy.

Ir. Majed Almuhanha of the Culinary Arts Commission in Saudi Arabia highlighted the Culinary Codification Project, an ambitious initiative by the Culinary Arts Commission. This project aims to document and standardize traditional Saudi recipes and cooking methods. By preserving these culinary traditions, the project seeks to foster national pride and ensure the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations. Almuhanha emphasized that codification is crucial for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, providing a structured approach to preserving and promoting Saudi culinary traditions globally. The initiative also aims to boost local tourism by attracting food enthusiasts and scholars interested in the rich culinary history of the Aseer region, designated as the World Region of Gastronomy 2024.

Orazio Bellettini Cedeño presented the LATITUD ICHE Food Route from Manabí, Ecuador, a region vying for the title of World Region of Gastronomy in 2026. Bellettini discussed how the LATITUD ICHE initiative is designed to activate citizens through a deep engagement with local food traditions. The route serves as both a tourist attraction and a cultural preservation tool, highlighting the diverse culinary practices and ingredients native to Manabí. It connects various communities, restaurants, and food producers, creating a network that supports local economies and enhances the visibility of traditional Ecuadorian gastronomy. Bellettini stressed that this initiative not only preserves traditional foods but also promotes sustainable agricultural practices and strengthens community bonds through shared culinary heritage.

Ana Paula Sançana from Coimbra, Portugal, provided insights into the transformative potential of local gastronomy in a global context, using the example of Serra da Lousã PDO honey. Representing Coimbra, the European Region of Gastronomy 2021, Sançana illustrated how local gastronomic products can gain international acclaim while preserving their traditional roots. The PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) status of Serra da Lousã honey ensures the protection of its unique qualities and production methods, thereby safeguarding local biodiversity and promoting sustainable practices. Sançana highlighted how this product not only boosts the local economy but also enhances cultural identity and pride among residents. By integrating local gastronomy into broader economic and cultural strategies, Coimbra demonstrates how regional food heritage can drive sustainable development and international recognition.

In summary, the session underscored the vital role of culinary initiatives in preserving cultural heritage, promoting sustainable practices, and fostering community engagement. Each speaker demonstrated how their respective projects contribute to activating citizens and valuing traditional foods, thus ensuring these rich culinary traditions continue to thrive in a globalized world.



**Omar Valdez, Executive Director, UNWTO Academy - Andorra**

Omar Valdez, Argentinean, holds a Bachelor degree in Public Relations and an Executive Master in Tourism Management at IE Business School, Madrid, Spain. In 2004, he joined the UNWTO-Themis Foundation as a Senior Consultant. The new UNWTO Academy, former UNWTO-Themis Foundation is responsible for implementing the work programme on Education and Training of the World Tourism Organization, with the objective of supporting Member States in the formulation and implementation of educational policies, plans and instruments which effectively contribute to an improvement in the quality, competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector through excellence in education and training. Since 2010, Omar is the Executive Director of the UNWTO Academy. Since 2022, he is a Board member of IGCAT (International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism).

---



# THE CULINARY CODIFICATION PROJECT AND RESULTS IN ASEER

Ir. Majed Almuhanha, Culinary Arts Commission - Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024

The Culinary Codification Project, initiated by the Culinary Arts Commission of Saudi Arabia, aims to document and preserve traditional Saudi recipes from various regions. This initiative is part of broader efforts to promote and protect Saudi culinary heritage and aligns with the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The project involves gathering authentic recipes, which are then compiled into a national culinary archive. This archive is created with input from local communities, including individuals, elderly citizens, and civil society groups, ensuring the preservation of cultural narratives and culinary traditions.

## Methodology

- **Data Collection:**  
The project collects recipes from various regions through public submissions and collaborations with local communities, including individuals, elderly citizens, and civil society groups. Participants are required to submit recipes that consist of at least 60% local ingredients and provide historical context and stories related to the dishes.
- **Digital and Print Documentation:**  
Recipes are documented both digitally and in print. The digital platform allows for a wider reach and easier access, while printed materials contribute to the physical archives of Saudi culinary heritage.
- **Collaborative Approach:**  
The project involves a collaborative approach, with methodologies aligned with international standards such as those set by UNESCO. This ensures that the documentation is thorough and preserves the authenticity of the recipes.

## Achievements

1. **Creation of a Culinary Archive:**  
A national culinary archive has been established, capturing a wide array of traditional recipes from different regions. This archive serves as a valuable resource for future generations and for anyone interested in Saudi culinary traditions.
2. **Publications and Resources:**  
The collected recipes are compiled into books and other publications, enriching the cultural content available on Saudi cuisine. These resources are intended to support the culinary sector and promote Saudi food culture globally.
3. **International Recognition:**  
This project contributed to Aseer being given IGCAT's World Region of Gastronomy 2024 Award, which is a testament to the project's success and the region's commitment to preserving and promoting its unique culinary heritage. This recognition is significant as it highlights Saudi Arabia's efforts to integrate culinary arts into its cultural and economic development.

## Conclusion

The Culinary Codification Project by the Culinary Arts Commission of Saudi Arabia is a pivotal initiative in preserving and promoting the country's rich culinary heritage. Through meticulous documentation, community engagement, and alignment with international standards, the project not only safeguards traditional recipes but also enhances Saudi Arabia's cultural footprint on the global stage. This initiative exemplifies how culinary arts can be a bridge between the past and the future, connecting people and promoting cultural understanding.



**Ir. Majed Almuhanha, Head of Research and Preservation of Culinary Assets, Culinary Arts Commission, Ministry of Culture – Saudi Arabia**

Ir. Majed Almuhanha is Head of Research and Preservation of Culinary Assets at the Culinary Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia, where he also is Project Leader for the World Food Atlas initiative. An expert in Saudi heritage, with a special focus on traditional foods, Ir. Majed Almuhanha is one of the team members at the Culinary Arts Commission who worked on the methodology for the Culinary Arts Documentation Project. Furthermore, he has an extensive experience in intangible cultural heritage and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

---

## LATITUD ICHE FOOD ROUTE

**Orazio Bellettini Cedeño** - Manabí, candidate World Region of Gastronomy 2026

A strong vision for the future is required when overcoming multi-crisis such as those that Manabí and Ecuador have faced after the earthquake that occurred in 2016, the pandemic of 2020 and increased violence and insecurity. The World Region of Gastronomy Award is an opportunity to increase our capacity to work together and build a vision for the future together. Work that we have already started and I want to share with you in this presentation.

In the Ecuadorian province of Manabí food is the only sector with the potential to promote collective action to transform the crisis into an opportunity. Gastronomy from Manabí was declared intangible cultural heritage of the whole country by the Minister of Culture of Ecuador. Food is source of identity, individual and collective self-esteem and a sector with enormous touristic potential.

That is why, civil society organizations, local governments, private companies got together to co-create the gastronomic route Latitude Iche. With the support of the local private sector, the Northern Pacific region of Manabí Commonwealth – MANPANOR formed by four counties (Sucre, San Vicente, Jama and Pedernales) where the epicenter of the earthquake occurred eight years ago. The group of organizations that decided to facilitate the co-creation the first joint experience-based gastronomic route of Ecuador soon realized that this process required training, innovation and entrepreneurship strategies focused on young people and territorial opportunities.

For this reason, and with the support of IDB Lab and the Italo-Ecuadorian Fund for Sustainable Development - FIEDS, in 2021 was established a space that is called the Iche Ecosystem because it integrated four different units the School of Food and Hospitality, the Restaurant, the Culinary Innovation Laboratory and the Gastronomic Entrepreneurship Incubator as the backbone organization that catalyzes the establishment of the gastronomic route.

Despite the fact that the Iche Ecosystem was established in an area relatively distant from urban centers, the School of Food and Hospitality has trained more than 50 graduates and more than 120 entrepreneurs, 90% of whom are under 30 years old. Of the graduates of the Iche School, 60% have become entrepreneurs, 15% have been employed in gastronomic businesses in the gastronomic route, Manabí and other provinces of Ecuador, increasing their income by 40% and benefiting more than 1,200 people who work directly or supply the tourism and gastronomic MSMEs of which they are part.

In its first 24 months of operation the Latitude Iche Gastronomic Route and its restaurants and hotels has attracted more than 20,000 local, national and foreign visitors who have learned about the culture, landscapes and products of Manabí.

Latitude Iche has also connected Manabí with the world. Our gastronomic route Latitude Iche was presented by the Ministry of Tourism at the FITUR 2024 fair held in Spain as the most promising sustainable tourism destination in Ecuador. In addition, the film "The Latitude Iche Route – A Journey Through the Flavors of Manabí" won the category World Region of Gastronomy in the IGCAT's 2023 Food Film Menu. Most importantly, Latitude Iche was the starting point to join local governments, academy, civil society organizations, private sector to present the candidacy of Manabí as World Region of Gastronomy 2026.

Belonging to the Regions of Gastronomy platform has enabled Manabí to begin collaborations with other regions that are making gastronomy, culture, tourism and art the catalyzers of their sustainable development. As an example of the potential for these collaborations, Catalonia and Manabí, with the support of IGCAT, are already exploring to implement in Manabí the "Welcome to the farm" initiative implemented for the first time in 2016 in Catalonia with the goal of organizing visits to farms to get the opportunity to (re)connect to the rural environment of their region and (re)discover local quality food in the very places where it is grown/bred, explained directly by the farmers who produce it.

Manabí's candidacy as a World Gastronomic Region is the result of the joint work of several organizations and sectors from Ecuador and other countries committed to transforming this recognition into energy that will allow us to build in Manabí and Ecuador, based on gastronomy, a more just, innovative, inclusive society, that is proud of its identity and connected to the world we all want. We look forward to welcoming you to Manabí!



**Orazio Bellettini Cedeño, Social entrepreneur, Co-founder and Executive Director, FUEGOS Foundation - Ecuador**

Orazio is a social entrepreneur with experience in promoting multi-sectoral sustainable development processes and incorporated as IGCAT Expert (International Institute of Gastronomy Culture, Arts and Tourism) in 2023. He graduated from the Escuela Agrícola Panamericana, Honduras with an Engineering degree in Agricultural Economy, from the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador-PUCE with Master Degrees in Political Science and Business Administration as well as from the Harvard Kennedy School with a Master in Public Administration and Public Policy. Orazio has advised international agencies, civil society organisations and governments in México, Guatemala, Perú, Spain and Paraguay in issues related to the role of knowledge in the policy process, education, social change and transition to more sustainable agro-food systems. Orazio was awarded as an Ashoka and Avina Fellow in 2008 and Rockefeller Foundation Fellow in 2013. In 2017, Orazio co-founded FUEGOS a civil society organisation that seeks to make food a catalyser of social transformation of Manabí, Ecuador and Latin America. He is currently leading the bid of Manabí, World Region of Gastronomy candidate 2026.

---

# THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF LOCAL GASTRONOMY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT - THE CASE OF SERRA DA LOUSĂ PDO HONEY

Ana Paula Sançana - Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy 2021

Local gastronomy is one of the pillars of a region's culture and identity; It not only nourishes the body, but also nourishes the soul, passing on traditions, history, and values from generation to generation. It is not by chance that it is said: we are also what we eat.

From the heart of our country, in the heart of Lousă mountain range, springs an inimitable treasure: the Serra da Lousă PDO Honey.

The natural history of this mountain range has always been intimately linked to man. Heir to a remarkable pastoral activity, Lousă Mountains have undergone major silvicultural transformations, by the hand of the Forest Services, often with the help of rural populations who stubbornly resisted the growing rural exodus.

Beekeeping has been one of the means of subsistence in the mountains and valleys of Serra da Lousă, dating back to immemorial time, as evidenced by the beekeeping terminology frequently adopted in the toponymy of this vast area, which demonstrates the importance and antiquity of the activity in the region.

Serra da Lousă PDO Honey has, in this way, a very strong connection with its territory of origin, a vast mountain space characterized by the use and vocation of forestry, with an arboreal stratum, particularly the shrubby, being characterized by a flora in which ericaceous trees predominate and give the honey a very unique odor and flavour and it's unique characteristics such as the amber to dark amber or even very dark color, resulting from the floristic composition and greatly influenced by the lesser or greater presence of chestnut trees and by the strong smell and taste, with some astringency, accentuated by the nectar of the heather.

These unique characteristics allowed it to differentiate itself markedly from other national honeys and assume a prominent role in local gastronomy, thus transcending mere food, becoming a mirror of the cultural identity of this region, playing a vital role in the economy, boosting tourism, promoting local agriculture and creating jobs. Not forgetting that beekeeping is a sustainable activity as bees provide essential ecosystem services to the planet.

The fact that our honey has the Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO), which is a mention of quality and authenticity granted to products whose characteristics and quality are exclusively attributed to the place of production, has also been an important link between honey and the territory. This certification guarantees not only the geographical origin, but also the traditional production methods that give it its uniqueness and excellence, also valuing the work of local producers, promoting the sustainable development of the region.

When our honey reaches each of the four corners of the world, it carries with it the name of the region, the reflection of an identity.

Coimbra as a European Region of Gastronomy, allowed us to witness a fusion of historical influences, a reinforcement of the Gastronomic tradition and Regional Identity of Honey and, in turn, of the territory. We are unable to dissociate endogenous products from their production areas. Coimbra also has a rich culinary tradition that values local ingredients and traditional preparation techniques, thus providing the ideal context to promote distinctive local

products, such as Serra da Lousã PDO Honey, as an integral part of its regional identity and as an element present in this important journey that was the European Region of Gastronomy.

In the list of its initiatives to promote local gastronomy, Coimbra European Region of Gastronomy played an active role in the promotion and enhancement of Serra da Lousã PDO Honey. From gastronomic events to fairs and festivals, itineraries and recipes, this product has been treated as one of the local culinary treasures, increasing its visibility and prestige both nationally and internationally.

How?

- The collaboration between local honey producers, restaurants, chefs and educational institutions has contributed to the creation of unique dishes and gastronomic and tourist experiences that highlight Serra da Lousã PDO Honey;
- The integration of this product into renowned restaurant menus and gastronomic events has catapulted honey to a place that goes beyond its use as a home 'remedy', placing it at the center of unforgettable gastronomic experiences;
- Within the scope of promotional actions, the delivery of 'Food Gifts' in the form of miniatures of Serra da Lousã PDO Honey, in events on a national scale such as the 'Lisbon Tourism Market', allowing a very wide dissemination of the product; (BTL)
- Press Trip "Coimbra Region | European Region of Gastronomy", in an interactive experience where journalists had the opportunity to learn about the entire production process, from the apiary to the table, with a tasting in the field;
- Appointment of the young Chef Rita Oliveira as ambassador of the Honey product;
- Dott Platform - flavour market for online sales of Coimbra products - European Region of Gastronomy;
- Creation of a recipe book in [tastecoimbraregion.pt](https://tastecoimbraregion.pt) involving Honey in several dishes;
- Edition of the "Boa cama - Boa mesa Guide" Região de Coimbra, A million gastronomic stories;
- Gastronomic Charter of the Region of Coimbra, with the evidence of honey in traditional recipes;
- Measures to support restaurants: a passport, 19 menus with the best that the gastronomic tradition of each municipality has to offer and discount vouchers for an incredible journey to discover regional gastronomy and its "stories", which includes our Serra da Lousã PDO Honey;
- Honey fairs with national projection;
- Documentary of the Intermunicipal Community of the Region of Coimbra - "Serra da Lousã PDO Honey" which won at the International Food Film Menu Festival 2022, in the category "Food Gifts from the Regions of Gastronomy". The documentary is written by Filipa Queiroz and directed by Tiago Cerveira.

In the context of globalization, local gastronomy has emerged as a transformative force. Consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of sustainability, authenticity, and supporting local communities. Therefore, products such as Serra da Lousã PDO Honey have a competitive advantage, as they offer a unique and genuine experience, differentiating themselves from mass-market products.

The Coimbra Region, as a popular tourist destination and with all the associated promotion, attracted more visitors eager to explore new dimensions. Serra da Lousã PDO Honey, as an emblematic product of the region, has become an attraction in itself for tourists interested in experiencing authentic flavors and discovering the history behind its production, through visits to the school apiary and tastings at the production places.

Through innovative marketing strategies, with the use of social media and gastronomic tourism, local producers have consequently been able to reach a global audience, generating not only revenue, but also promoting cultural heritage and strengthening ties between local communities and global consumers.

The Gastronomic Tourism product should, therefore, function as an anchor factor to aggregate in itself numerous other offers, ranging from handicrafts, to the built heritage and nature itself. These are inseparable aspects, as the gastronomy of this region carries with it a cultural and natural heritage that cannot be ignored.

The local gastronomy, personified by Serra da Lousã PDO Honey, has become a symbol of the region, rooted in local traditions and history, serving as anchors for development. So, in this enchanted valley, Serra da Lousã PDO Honey, reveals itself as a poem of nature, a verse that unfolds in each journey. Each spoonful is an invitation to contemplation, a dive into the depths of the soul of this magical place, where honey is more than food: it is poetry, it is memory, it is the very essence of life. Let us celebrate our origins.



**Ana Paula Sançana, Technical responsible for the beekeeping, Lousamel Beekeepers Cooperative - Portugal**

Ana Paula Sançana is technical responsible for the beekeeping of the Lousamel Beekeepers Cooperative. She has a Degree in Agro-Livestock Engineering by the Agrarian School of Coimbra, Postgraduate degree in Social Economy, cooperatives and Mutualism in Coimbra Economics Department University, and a Postgraduate degree in Rural Development and Food Security. An IGCAT Expert (International Institute of Gastronomy Culture, Arts and Tourism) since 2022, she has extended experience in technical support for the production of honey and bee health, being also responsible for several lectures and communications about bees and biodiversity, bees and sustainability. She has contributed in articles, conference papers and posters of scientific character. Advisor and co-advisor of internships in the area of environmental engineering, organic agriculture and veterinary medicine. She is currently doing a PhD in agronomic and forestry sciences with particular interest in the impact of *Vespa Velutina Nigrithorax* on national beekeeping. Communicating the importance of bees is something that enthralled her, which is why she wrote a children's book as a way of communicating this theme with children.

---

# EDUCATION AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Chair: **Jaume Gomila** – Menorca, European Region of Gastronomy 2022

In the intricate tapestry of regional development, the interwoven threads of education and gastronomy form a powerful catalyst for nurturing economic prosperity, cultural richness, social cohesion and environmental stewardship. This comprehensive exploration aims to unravel the multifaceted dynamics of this relationship, drawing inspiration from exemplary cases that illuminate the transformative potential of education and gastronomy in shaping vibrant and sustainable communities.

Aseer World Region of Gastronomy provides two pioneering examples in education. First, the King Khalid University (KKU) stands at the forefront of educational innovation and excellence. With a bold vision to rank among the top ten endowment institutions by 2030, KKU is committed to leveraging education as a transformative force for societal progress. Through investments in scientific research, innovation and community partnerships, KKU is blazing a trail of excellence in digital transformation, e-learning and technical infrastructure management. Its global recognition for research endeavors and commitment to community engagement underscore KKU's role as a beacon of knowledge and service in the Saudi educational landscape, paving the way for a brighter future for generations to come. Secondly, the Bunyan Academy, is shaping the future of hospitality with a commitment to excellence in training services for the tourism, hospitality and entertainment industries. Through tailored training programs, industry-relevant curricula and hands-on learning opportunities, Bunyan equips students with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their careers. Partnerships with leading companies and organizations provide invaluable networking opportunities, while success stories of Bunyan graduates serve as a testament to the academy's impact on shaping the future of the industry. As Bunyan expands its footprint and explores new avenues for growth, its dedication to fostering talent and driving innovation remains steadfast, ensuring a bright future for the hospitality sector in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

In the heart of Portugal, Coimbra is also a beacon of educational excellence. Coimbra's designation as European Region of Gastronomy 2021 marked a pivotal moment in its journey towards sustainable development. The synergy between education and sustainability emerged as a driving force behind Coimbra's success, with initiatives like the Hospitality and Tourism School playing a central role in nurturing talent and promoting best practices in the industry. By integrating sustainability subjects into its curricula, organizing field trips to local producers and engaging students in community projects, Coimbra exemplifies the transformative power of education in fostering economic prosperity, cultural richness and environmental stewardship.

In its own way Menorca European region of Gastronomy 2022 is similarly embracing the future by focussing on education, sustainability and gastronomy in educational endeavours. Menorca, also stands as a testament to the profound connection between heritage and innovation in culinary arts. Menorca's journey towards gastronomic excellence was propelled by a culture of lifelong learning fostered through institutions like the Adult Schools of Menorca. This commitment to intellectual inquiry and cultural preservation earned Menorca prestigious accolades, including UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status and recognition as a World Heritage Site. These honors underscore the island's unwavering dedication to sustainability, cultural heritage and culinary innovation, setting a shining example for regional development worldwide.



In conclusion, the exemplary cases of Menorca, Asser and Coimbra underscore the transformative potential of education, sustainability, and gastronomy in driving regional development. By embracing a multidimensional approach that prioritizes equitable stakeholder engagement, global collaboration and lifelong learning, regions worldwide can emulate their success and chart a course towards a brighter, more sustainable future. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, the synergy between education, sustainability and gastronomy serves as a guiding light, illuminating the path towards prosperity, resilience and inclusivity for all.



**Jaume Gomila, Chairman, Adult Schools of Menorca and IGCAT Executive Board Member – Spain**

Jaume Gomila is both a restaurant owner on the island of Menorca and expert in the fields of education and culture. In his former role as Director General for Culture for the Balearic Islands (2015-2017), he was responsible for supporting the Mediterranean Diet declaration as Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO. He is now also Chairman of the Adult Schools of Menorca and has been instrumental in Menorca's successful bid for the European Region of Gastronomy 2022 title. He is a philologist, teacher and culture manager. He has professional degrees in Music and Theatre and he is postgraduate in Literature Studies by University of Barcelona. He has been working in all the creative and heritage sectors.

---

## **ASEER, WORLD REGION OF GASTRONOMY 2024**

**Dr. Mohammed Hamoud, Coordinator of Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024**

Aseer, with its rich cultural heritage, sustainable practices, and vibrant local traditions, stands as a beacon of authenticity, proving that a region deeply rooted in its past can lead the way into a sustainable and innovative future, earning its place as the first non-European World Region of Gastronomy for 2024. The food in the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia reflects its unique geography and culture, incorporating traditional ingredients and cooking methods.

### **Food Practices**

Local farmers in Aseer often use traditional and sustainable farming techniques. These include crop rotation, organic fertilizers, and minimal use of pesticides, which help maintain soil health and biodiversity. This approach reduces the environmental impact of agriculture and promotes long-term sustainability.

### **Local Farmers**

Aseer promotes the growth of local agriculture by supporting small-scale farmers. Initiatives such as farmers' markets and cooperative organizations provide a platform for farmers to sell their products directly to consumers, cutting out intermediaries. This support helps sustain local economies and encourages more people to engage in agriculture.

### **Local Products**

Aseer focuses on preserving indigenous crops and food sources. This includes maintaining the genetic diversity of traditional crops and promoting the cultivation of local varieties. By prioritizing local produce, Aseer ensures that its food practices remain sustainable and aligned with the region's ecological conditions.

### **Turning Point**

Vision 2030 has brought a renewed sense of energy and opportunity to the Aseer region, promoting tourism, economic diversification, cultural preservation, and sustainability. This comprehensive approach has helped transform Aseer into a vibrant and attractive destination while supporting the region's long-term growth and development.

### **2024 Activations**

In 2024, we will work with stakeholders across the Aseer region. By collaborating, we can unlock new opportunities and achieve even greater success. Together, we can promote local farmers' growth, foster innovation, and create more sustainable practices among local restaurants. Through open communication and a shared vision, we can make a positive impact in the region.

### **The Legacy**

The focus on sustainable practices has paved the way for long-term growth, promoting local agriculture and responsible tourism. The collaborative spirit fostered in 2024 can continue to drive innovation and cultural appreciation within the Aseer region for years to come, with over 25 projects and more than 15 stakeholder institutions committed to working together.

Aseer's culinary heritage reflects a harmonious blend of tradition, local sourcing, and simple cooking techniques. This approach has not only preserved the region's rich food culture but also positioned Aseer as a destination for those seeking authentic culinary experiences.

Aseer 2024 is the first World Region of Gastronomy outside Europe to earn this important accolade, recognizing Aseer's commitment to protecting and promoting local food and cultural uniqueness.



**Dr. Mohammed Hamoud, Coordinator, Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy awarded 2024 – Saudi Arabia**

Dr. Mohammed Hamoud has been Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Tourism and Archaeology at King Saud University (KSU) since 2011. He has an extensive experience in historic preservation practices in the USA and worked on several projects in the historical urban landscape in Barcelona. Based on this experience, Mohammed combined the American and European schools with regard to concepts, theories, and implementation of cultural heritage. Mohammed has a first master's degree in Historic Preservation from Eastern Michigan University (USA) and a second master's degree in Landscape Intervention and Heritage Management (UAB University, Barcelona). In 2022, he earned his Ph.D. focussing on cultural heritage management and the engagement of local communities. He is currently the Executive Manager of Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy awarded 2024.

---

# BUNYAN'S ROLE IN TRAINING SERVICES FOR TOURISM, HOSPITALITY AND THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES

**Wassim Zeitouni**, Academies Director, Bunyan - Aseer, World Region of Gastronomy 2024

This presentation will provide an overview of Bunyan Academy: an introduction to the company and its mission in providing training services for the tourism, hospitality, and entertainment industries such as:

- **Tailored Training Programs:** Highlights about the customized training programs offered by Bunyan Academy and how they meet the specific needs and challenges of each industry sector in Saudi Arabia
- **Industry-Relevant Curriculum:** The relevance of Bunyan's curriculum, which is designed in collaboration with industry experts to ensure alignment with current trends and best practices.
- **Experienced Faculty:** The expertise of Bunyan's faculty members, who bring a wealth of real-world experience to the classroom and the corporate training.
- **Hands-On Learning:** The hands-on learning opportunities provided by Bunyan, including internships, practical classes, and industry placements.
- **Industry Partnerships:** Highlight Bunyan's partnerships with leading companies and organizations in the tourism, hospitality, and entertainment sectors, which provide students with valuable networking opportunities and industry insights. These partnerships include CAC, Red Sea Global, Hilton, RCU, and many other respected organizations across the kingdom.
- **Success Stories:** Success stories of Bunyan graduates who have gone on to excel in their careers in the tourism, hospitality, and entertainment industries.
- **Social Contribution:** the role of Bunyan and its contribution in the prize won by Aseer Province.
- **Future Outlook:** Discuss Bunyan's plans for expansion and growth, including new training programs, partnerships, and initiatives to further support the development of future hoteliers and the hospitality and tourism sector in the kingdom.



**Wassim Zeitouni, Academies Director, Bunyan - Saudi Arabia**

With over 23 years of hospitality experience and a Master's from EHL, Wassim Zeitouni has thrived in diverse hotel roles while simultaneously teaching Hotel Management students since 2010. Since 2017, he has leveraged his expertise to coach hospitality professionals, guiding over 13 SMEs to awards and shaping eco-tourism strategies for NGOs. Currently spearheading Bunyan Academy in Saudi Arabia, he delivers EHL diplomas and designs impactful courses in areas like Leadership and Cost Control Management, blending hands-on experience with academic rigor for lasting industry impact.

---

## EDUCATION – A COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

José Luís Marques, Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy 2021

Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy 2021 (with an extension of six months, January to June 2022, due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis) represented an important assumption of Gastronomy as a factor of heritage and cultural identity, as well as a touristic product, for an entire region composed of 19 municipalities, covering an area of 4,336 km<sup>2</sup> with approximately 460,000 inhabitants. The contribution to the development of the Coimbra Region territory was significant, being this a rural-urban continuum with diverse and different natural landscape among the 19 municipalities, different social characteristics, and different economic growth level. Here we can still find areas with population decrease every decade (demographic census), with the subsequent aging of people, and where economic recession is always a threatening factor. It was, and it is our purpose to bring economic development, social well-being, and cultural identity to the whole territory and its population (cohesion), through food production, nutrition, culinary arts, gastronomy and tourism. Education and sustainability are key factors to achieve these goals and were crucial in the Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy strategy and actions.

The impact and success of this strategy was based in the local work carried out within the territory, among municipalities and their agents, in partnerships between state organizations and private companies, the promotion and support of local producers, the focus on seasonal products and short distribution chains. However, it is necessary to look beyond our own territory and integrate supra-territorial dimensions, always acting in accordance with national guidelines. This was and continues to be a strategy aligned with national tourism policies, where sustainability is an unavoidable and now mandatory path for private companies, as well as for state organizations, which must demonstrate good environmental, social, and governance practices in their management reports. The Tourism 2027 Strategy of Turismo de Portugal, the national tourism authority, includes the Sustainable Tourism 20-23 Plan, a fundamental period that encompassed the realization of most activities related to Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy.

At the Hospitality and Tourism School of Coimbra – an education vocational training school – we were central partners of the Coimbra, European Region of Gastronomy consortium, and we inherited some of the best practices developed along the project, practices we now assume for our own educational plan. The main activities that can demonstrate this relation between projects are:

- a) Sustainability subjects included in the main curricula of all our training courses, whether we work with young students (hotel management, cooking and pastry, restaurant service and bartending, tour guides, etc) or with professionals already working in the tourism sector (hotels, restaurants, bars, cafeterias, tourism animation enterprises, etc). With these academic programs we can reach young people and adults in our different paths to qualify tourism workers, being through formal education, lifelong programs or community projects for people of all conditions and ages. Critical thinking and problem solving are strongly present in the subjects students attend, due to what environmental challenges mean in present times and what they represent to future development.
- b) Field trips to local producers related to products students are studying and working with, acknowledging the characteristics of seasonal products and the way they should be prepared to the customer. Producers are also invited to visit the school, promoting theoretical and/or practical masterclasses about their products, production environment and business management.

- c) Training competition between students from the same school or with students from different schools – inclusively international competitions. The sustainability concept and best practices relating to its principles are, nowadays, some of the most important items on evaluation during competition's programs.
- d) Students Green Teams or Brigades (voluntary work) which are responsible for managing some projects in the school campus, like recycling bins (all kinds of materials), clothes and food support for the needed, educational sessions for children visiting the school, etc.

Participating in several editions of the European Young Chef Award, inclusively organizing the regional phases, participating in the World Food Gift Challenge, defying our local producers to promote and sell their products on an innovative and sustainable way, and contributing to the making of several short documentaries that were presented at some of the Food Film Menu editions, inspired and strengthen our projects at the Hospitality and Tourism School of Coimbra, developed our teachers and students knowledge, skills and experience and brought to our organization the recognition of our stakeholders and public in general.

In conclusion, the designation of Coimbra as European Region of Gastronomy in 2021, and six more months in 2022, was not merely an honorary title, but rather a consistent opportunity of development to a territory, people, enterprises and organizations, educational and training innovation, competences and entrepreneurship mindset, towards a better future for all and for the planet.

This is also what is inspiring us at Turismo de Portugal on defining the next and necessary strategy to tourism as a sustainable industry (economic, social, environmentally): More Tourism; Better Tourism.



**Jose Luis Marques, Director, Coimbra School of Hospitality and Tourism (Tourism of Portugal) - Portugal**

IGCAT Expert (International Institute of Gastronomy Culture, Arts and Tourism) from Coimbra Region, European Region of Gastronomy awarded 2021-22, José Luís Marques has been working in education and training for almost his entire professional life, with the exception, of his experience at the University of Coimbra Social Services. His core knowledge and skill areas include: Education and Training; Tourism and Gastronomy; Public Management; Social Sciences; Public Relations and Communication; Health and Safety (Work Environment). He has been the Director of the Coimbra School of Hospitality and Tourism since 2019.

---

## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM AND FUTURE ACTIONS FOR IGCAT

**Diane Dodd PhD, IGCAT President**

IGCAT Experts' Meetings are an opportunity for sharing and learning about best practices from across the globe and in particular from within the World Regions of Gastronomy Platform. We were humbled to be hosted by the Culinary Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia in the King Khalid University, Abha on 22 April 2024; a world class campus and perfect setting for our knowledge exchange.

Many ideas and examples were shared and can be found in the presentations but, in these conclusions, I hope to capture three common threads that emerged:

### **Human capacity building and the importance of investing in young and older people**

The new King Khalid University campus in Abha is an incredible place and will surely provide inspiration and training for many young people in the years to come. It was heartening to see many students present at the symposium, promising because they are our future.

The importance of storytelling and creativity emerged many times during our discussions. The significance of arts, heritage, and the environment in visitor and citizen experiences cannot be underestimated.

When we talk about sustainability, IGCAT emphasizes a people-centred approach. We must constantly strive for quality of life, health, and nutrition above gluttony and profit.

We should support smaller producers, smaller family-run hotels/restaurants, and help them shine because every Saudi Riyal spent in a locally-owned business is a Saudi Riyal that will stay in the region. Thus, we can see how investing in the protection of our local food and culture safeguards our circular economy.

If small is not attractive to you, consider a quote from Ramon Sentmartí, Catalonia World Region of Gastronomy 2025: "think big to have a big impact."

Large events bring communities together; festivals can celebrate your produce and can be diverse (from honey to pomegranates) - the seasonality of food products opens endless opportunities. We see how opening your farms can have an impact because these are not just leisurely endeavours but also opportunities to educate citizens.

At IGCAT, we always advocate that regions invest in locals first, and then responsible and respectful visitors will follow. We also note the educational aspect because we need to collectively work towards redirecting consumer choices towards local food. If they don't eat it, they will stop growing it, and this can have a huge impact on the diversity of our local food offer.

In order to safeguard the variety of plants and animals on this earth, we need you to know them, cherish them, and use them. IGCAT applauds the wonderful visitor experiences in Aseer, in particular the Grape Farm that is educating people on the importance of organic and autochthonous food production.

## **Shared vision**

Orazio Bellettini, candidate for Manabí World Region of Gastronomy 2026, emphasized the power of co-creation, asserting that it is best achieved through a shared vision.

Bringing stakeholders together to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and mutually enhance each other's efforts is indeed a substantial undertaking. However, IGCAT has learned that by spotlighting others, we in turn reflect positively upon ourselves.

We can achieve significantly more by working together. Initiatives aimed at preserving, mapping and communicating our food heritage serve an important purpose. With this as a resource, people throughout the region can utilise its resources to build new business opportunities and safeguard plant and animal varieties as well as traditions, recipes, and songs before they fade into obscurity.

From a public policy perspective, it is important to support new businesses so as to facilitate:

a) Out-of-the-box thinking and enhance creativity among stakeholders.

Visitor experiences require meticulous curation, a skill set that demands professional guides, excellent front-of-house staff, and superb Maitre D's...

b) Effective communication strategies for small businesses. Farmers, fishermen, and preservation site managers possess invaluable knowledge, yet may require assistance in effectively conveying it.

Practical ways of giving support include commissioning high-quality audio-visual content and high-resolution images, designing websites, Apps and Portals that create a route into the region; facilitating interpretation and translation, etc.

On this note, IGCAT welcomes submissions of short films to its Food Film Menu competition, where food takes centre stage in showcasing your region's stories. Through this initiative, IGCAT aims to elevate the visibility of regions on social media platforms and film festivals worldwide.

Remember, visibility is paramount; if you're not seen, you don't exist.

Finally, it is also important to support and signal out those who champion sustainable principles. By building into criteria for support sustainable principles you underline the public good of the work.

As an example, you may wish to refer to the Top Websites for Foodie Travelers, that offer International visitors the opportunity to see images and videos, gain information and present booking options - thus supporting small businesses that are at the forefront in safeguarding our intangible heritage.

## **International collaborations**

IGCAT is dedicated to knowledge sharing and facilitates symposiums and Platform meetings, creating opportunities for shared projects to emerge, ideas to intersect, and friendships to blossom, thereby fostering cultural exchange and dialogue.

At this meeting, 11 regions are represented by key partners or coordinators who hold the key to your peers and potential partners within their regions. Collaborating together is immensely enriching, and I urge you to seek out partners in other Regions of Gastronomy to collaborate with. The success of IGCAT's World Food Gift Challenge underscores the importance of such collaboration and the willingness to work together. Additionally, simple initiatives



like chef exchanges between international partners are easy to organize but attract international press coverage that local events may not.

On this note, we are thrilled to return to King Khalid University on Thursday for our 5th World Food Gift Challenge, where 25 food and craft gifts from 8 regions will compete. The jury will seek out products that tell the story of each region, products that act as ambassadors for their respective regions.

At IGCAT, we host at least four international competitions each year because we understand the significance of recognition, the joy it brings and we know that people are attracted to success. However, if there is one message from this symposium that has resonated with me, it is the one from Orazio Bellettini, who stated that the World Region of Gastronomy Award gives people hope.

What greater mission could there be than to give people hope?!

## About the World/European Regions of Gastronomy

[World/European Regions of Gastronomy](#), guided by [IGCAT](#), are working together to strengthen food security through the celebration of distinctive food cultures; create employment by stimulating creativity and gastronomic innovation; nourish children and adults through culinary and cultural education; driving environmental sustainability in tourism, hospitality and agricultural sectors; supporting balance and sustainable tourism practices; highlighting and supporting expertise from within rural and urban communities, creating connections and sharing good practices; and contributing to community health and well-being.

## About IGCAT

IGCAT aims to **empower local communities** by raising awareness of the importance of protecting and promoting distinct regional food, culture, arts and natural assets as part of sustainable and balanced tourism and development strategies. This is essential to safeguarding our planet, health, wellness and local economies.

IGCAT is a non-profit institute established in 2012, working with regional stakeholder consortiums in the fields of gastronomy, culture, arts and tourism. It counts on the expertise of a worldwide [network of experts](#) and works in partnership with specialised intergovernmental organisations.

IGCAT founded the [World/European Region of Gastronomy Award](#) and is the official secretariat for the [World/European Regions of Gastronomy Platforms](#). Furthermore, the Institute has developed the [European Young Chef Award](#), the [World Food Gift Challenge](#), the [Top Websites for Foodie Travelers Award](#) and the international [Food Film Menu](#).