CHAPTER VI



On the streets of Pleșcoi village, 2015.



Making of “Eva a trăit la Pleșcoi” (Eve Lived in Pleșcoi), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu.
Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.

Entrepreneurs of Tradition. Pleșcoi Sausages

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ABSTRACT

A component of intangible heritage identified in the area caused the creation of a local brand: the "Plescoi sausages" became a distinctive traditional brand. It is presented in a way that, apart the discussion regarding the importance of keeping and protecting a special technique, is also concerned with putting into contextual frame the evolution and the importance of this gastronomic product, in relation with anti-consumerism and anti-globalisation movements.



Introduction

Closely linked to identity, cultural heritage is a dynamic process, as it bridges the gap between generations and helps to pass on the community's values, thereby constantly fostering social cohesion. However, this specific cultural content, which is passed on and inherited, must be adapted to contemporary values and characteristics; in other words, it must respond to the meanings and functions that people today attribute to cultural phenomena (Loulanski 2006). At the same time, heritage can contribute to the sustainable development of a region—firstly, by strengthening social cohesion amongst its members; secondly, by promoting and encouraging the region's distinctive culture beyond the community's borders; and, last but not least, thanks to the significant economic value of cultural heritage (see Mourato and Mazzanti 2002). The economic development of a particular region can be stimulated by the conservation and redefinition of local heritage—provided that the necessary resources are found to assess and promote it.

The cultural and natural heritage of a territory can thus become a strategic part of a sustainable and resilient development project for the society of the future. This would require not only political will at local level and economic resources, but also a systematic effort to raise awareness of the need to identify, protect and promote those elements of tangible and intangible heritage that retain their significance even for a modernised society—an effort aimed at changing people's attitudes towards heritage. Everything that builds identity and makes a contribution to a societal project constitutes heritage, and those heritage items which still play a role in building solidarities useful for the inhabitants' everyday lives can be integrated in local professional, museum or tourist initiatives that create the economic and educational framework needed to harness heritage for the benefit of local communities. In this way, communities can be encouraged to reconsider their attitude towards their own way of life and traditions, and to continue practising certain types of activities, customs, traditions or elements of folklore, whilst recognising the role of cultural heritage in their material and spiritual prosperity, as well as the need to integrate it into their daily lives and



On the streets of Pleșcoi village, 2015.

future projects. The traditional culture of the past should not be merely remembered, but also understood and embraced.

We therefore consider the creative initiative of the Buzău Geopark team to be a timely one, given its aim to promote the region's unique cultural character. Based on the premise that cultural heritage complements natural and geological heritage very well, and that these three components can make a valuable contribution to the utilisation of local natural resources and the sustainable development of the region, the Geopark team and its partners, together with local communities, have opened several venues dedicated to the identification, conservation, promotion and interpretation of local heritage through the organisation of local exhibitions. These illustrate what the communities in question perceive as their heritage and, by extension, their identity, and reveal what the communities perceive as current crises and future challenges. This re-evaluation takes the form of preserving traditional methods or models, or transforming local dishes into a local brand, against a backdrop of the industrialisation of traditional recipes and the loss of old culinary techniques.

Pleșcoi sausages

Pleşcoi is a village in the Berca commune, about which many locals say that the centre actually moved from Pleşcoi to Berca: "the Pleşcoienii were rich, they were doing business because they were horse dealers. The Berca people had nothing, but they got rich due to oil." The assertion has a clear nostalgia, although there are few who have grasped the pioneering



Entering the village of Pleșcoi, 2015.



Promoting local products from Pleșcoi village, 2015.



Shop for local products from Pleşcoi village, 2015.

times of the Berca Extraction Scaffolding (oil mining). It was only in the post-war era that the extraction Scaffolding came into full swing of production growth, polarizing the workforce in neighbouring communes. Meanwhile, it has reduced its activity to "a common workplace," just like the other economic objectives in Berca (the "Rubin" glass factory or the brick factory) (Lixandru 2013).

What made this place so famous, now down from the commune's residence to its component village, were the butchers' products: sausages, *pastrama*, dried beef sausage and *babic*. At a first glance, looking at the geographical area of these products on the map of Buzău County, it does not seem to be a considerable one (Berca, Mărăcineni, Săpoca, Cernăteşti). Zooming a little to the scale of the map, we can see that the position of Buzău County is similar to a turning plate, at the intersection of four provinces of Transylvania, Moldova, Muntenia and Dobrogea (Caiet... 2016). Buzău County, like the neighbouring counties in the west (Săcuieni before 1845, when it was disbanded, and Prahova after 1845), was crossed by the shortest roads that the Brăneni shepherds travelled to Brăilei Pond where they carried their flocks to hibernate (Caiet... 2016).

Moreover, it should not be neglected that in the east there is Brăila, a former Porto-franco area and was under ottoman administration, being an ideal market for mutton products. This position offered a commercial advantage to any local produce, which the original butcher's products from Pleşcoi provided over time. At the same time, such a settlement explains the influences that traditional culture has absorbed. Some examples give us the legends of Pleşcoi sausages (found on www.carnatiplescoi.ro), which applies to other butchers, where the status of this space makes it possible to communicate between different worlds and mutual

Inside the local products shop, Plești, 2015.



influences. Continuing this road marked by influences of all kinds, the testimony of Otilia I. (43 years, 2015, Pleşcoi) is suggestive when it says that for the establishment of its own meat product outlet (Gabişti - from Pleşcoi), Pleşcoi and Pleşeşti, she was inspired by the way of presenting similar shops in Spain where she worked for a while, first succeeding in drawing attention, then creating a brand and implicitly an important craftsmanship experience they have practiced all their lives but are no longer active, especially because of their age, but also because of lack of customer orders. Unlike other artisans or semi-industrial manufacturers, SC Produse Tradiționale Gabioti from Pleşcoi SRL also has a website, being the only company that makes the products in Pleşcoi visible.

There are, however, a number of artisan producers not so visible to those who are passing through Pleşcoi but who provide local consumption and not only. The volume of their business was at a level that satisfied them with sufficient profit, without risking the expansion of production. Thanks to the constants of this level, they were placed in time in the informal economy area. The local community recognizes their products, although there are also opinions that sausages are not done as they once were: "Now they add pork ...," the cold cuts are being prepared all year round.

It is difficult to fix the time when the meat products Pleşcoi brand is said to have reborn. But there were some moments that brought them back to attention. In June 2006, the press in Romania made the *Pleşcoi Revolution* known to the public. It was a "peaceful communication action meant to identify, protect and promote many traditional food products, the true inheritance of real Romania, an integral part of the Romania brand" (Ioan 2007). The announcement sounded mobilizing: "FLASH MOB—Come on SUNDAY 25th of June 2006 at 14:00 pm, in front of McDonalds Restaurant in Piața Romană. For 1 minute, we will silently savour a traditional Romanian Pleaşcoi sausage! The fight started! You come, too!" (Ioan 2007).

The initiator was not a local producer, but the *Wine Press Club*, which invited other civil society organizations or the business community to join in order to react against "Romania's mcdonaldisation, against the industrialization of traditional recipes and the disappearance of the old manufacturing techniques, the takeover of the brand by industrial giants without respect for recipes and tradition," all of which have the effect of transforming a traditional product into a consumer one (Ioan 2007). The suggested solution was the knowledge and harness of the local gastronomic heritage, aiming "not only to identify and protect the traditional recipes, but also to promote tourism in the respective areas, creating opportunities for sustainable development for the small rural communities and avoiding the proletariat of the Romanian household" (Ioan 2007). And for all these goals to be feasible, the affiliation of the *Pleşcoi Revolution* to the *Slow Food* movement, headquartered in Italy, and the organization of a national fair of traditional products, appeared as mandatory steps.

A year later, on September 22nd, 2007, in the presence of 300 people, the Peasant Club of the Romanian Peasant's National Museum read the Pleşcoi Proclamation and the sculpture of Adrian Ilfoveanu (in 2007) was unveiled, "Eva lived in Pleşcoi," made from 70 kg of famous sausages, but they lacked on the Romanian market. The two symbolic gestures of artistic expression drew attention to the danger of "losing our cultural identity" and denounced "cheap and easy" consumerism, "fast-food civilization." In the documentary film "Eve lived at Pleşcoi," Adrian Ilfoveanu said, "It's a very old age Eve, hundreds of years old, a very old sausage—they gathered in a contemporary manifestation, in fact. Sure, I also had some fears. It is the first time I sculpt in meat, with meat." The organizers of the event, also held in a symbolic place—the Romanian Peasant's National Museum - were firm, indicating that

"if hundreds of years were needed to consolidate traditions and their affirmation, we are now destroying them with the speed at which we eat a hamburger."[1] In this discourse two attitudes are dealt with, a representation one and a critical one, recognizable in the *Slow-Food* stream, to which this event was connected, having in fact to do with a shift of emphasis that would lead to the marketization of a rediscovered tradition, as opposed to the usual sale of indeterminate products or a brand unaffected by discontinuities.



Poster "Eva a trăit la Plești" (Eve Lived in Plești), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu. Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.



Making of “Eva a trăit la Pleșcoi” (Eve Lived in Pleșcoi), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu.
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The exhibition “Eva a trăit la Plești” (Eve Lived in Plești), artists: Adrian Ilfoveanu and Nicu Ilfoveanu.
Photography by Marius Caraman, 2007.



Two years later, on November 6th, 2009, the Association for the Promotion of Pleşcoi Sausages, was registered with a specific purpose: "promoting and defending the economic, commercial, professional and legal interests of its members—meat processing companies and Pleşcoi sausage producers—while at the same time supporting the development and implementation of its own or group strategy in this sector of activity."[2] In the same status, the mission of the association was equally well defined, consisting of "promoting traditional meat products and especially Pleşcoi sausages in order to continuously improve their competitiveness and product quality, as well as the fulfilment of the legal formalities necessary to obtain protected geographical indication—PGI[3] and the use of quality symbols for this product at national and European level."[4]

The two episodes mentioned above, in opposition to the general direction dictated by an increasingly influential consumerist trend, are illustrative of the new re-configuration trend through the use of tradition, a brand and a cultural map. In this sense, Pleşcoi sausages become an ideal pioneer, primarily by recognizing this product[5] and by establishing a new tradition of local consumption (Dumitrescu 2015). In this case study, it is interesting to note the balance that is established between the local and a wider socio-economic and cultural area. Beyond the implicit prestige that this product generates for the benefit of the community, precise localization is the main argument for IGP, DOP, and STG certifications. However, at the same time receiving a representation function, the product is adopted by a wider community on the whole the county level.[6]

Besides, the popularity of Pleşcoi sausages is indisputable, compared to other Romanian brands already certified at a European Union level.[7] Following the EU accession, the *acquis communautaire* has made it necessary to obtain that European passport in order to access an international market and perhaps to rethink the message with which products such as Pleşcoi sausages penetrate this global market. Thus, the so-called supermarket phenomenon of traditions was inevitable (Dumitrescu 2015). The global becomes accessible through the local, with the exotic meaning, being subsidiary and a tourist attraction capital with which it was desirable to integrate a future marketing campaign. The well-known Pleşcoi sausage, which has been recognized by government officials, has begun to be exploited in sales strategies and by retail chains that have sought to win customer fidelity through offers on a recognized, but high quality, price (example Carrefour, Cora, etc.). In this tension between the local, traditional and modern urban area, Pleşcoi sausages continues its road to recognition and sale. The first provides the other food, the second becomes the alternative by virtue of which traditional space can be re-created, refreshed (see Popescu 2002).

Beyond the fable territory on which the identity of Pleşcoi sausages is built, the legends also indicate the many influences that made it possible for a particular gastronomic product to appear, which the locals perpetuated during the socialist period, despite the oppressors encountered (convictions for those whose production exceeded the needs of their own households), but they also promoted it with obstinacy in the post-socialist period, having to compete with supermarkets and hypermarkets, in order to go through the bureaucratic procedures that make the granting of the Protected Geographical Indication conditional upon access to the market Community.

With a stabilized recipe over time, despite its non-compliance with the industrial producers, Pleşcoi sausages recycle the past in the first place to re-affirm and strengthen the brand, and then to make the most of the present, as it is a tradition for consumption practices.

Conclusions

Promoting gastronomic products specific to the area and turning them into a brand (starting from the relevant example of Pleşcoi sausages), by obtaining quality certifications such as "Protected Geographical Indication" for as many as possible, based on recipes with continuity in local gourmet tradition can be another viable way through which traditional space can be reinvigorated. The use of local gastronomic heritage is possible in correlation with the promotion of tourism in the respective areas, thus offering new opportunities for sustainable development.

NOTES

1. The statement belongs to Gheorghe Moisescu, one of the authors of the "Pleşcoi Proclamation", made public during the event "Eva lived at Pleşcoi" (Crivat 2007).

2. Acc. to The Statute of the Association for the Promotion of Pleşcoi Sausages, Cap. II, point II.1 (Caiet... 2016).

3. Request registered in 2012 by TRI 94 PROD COM SRL, SC Valmar 05 SRL and SC Produse Traditionale Gabioti din Pleşcoi SRL (Manta 2013).

4. Acc. to The Statute of the Association for the Promotion of Pleşcoi Sausages, Chap. II, point II.1 (Caiet... 2016, 7).

5. In the publication "Renaşterea Buzoiană" (2006), whose title does not seem to be a coincidence, there are 10 recipes which have among the ingredients the Pleşcoi sausages: Cheese potatoes and Pleşcoi sausages, Baked cabbage, Pasta with Pleşcoi sausages, bean dish with Pleşcoi sausages, Romanian pizza, rice and sausage crockpot, Caesar's hodge-podge, ciorbă with Pleşcoi sausage, Potatoes and Pleşcoi sausage pudding, Spicy Pleşcoi sausage goulash.

6. Cristi Bîgiu, President of Buzău County Council: "We tried to promote these brands. Unfortunately, last year ... and here I am glad and thank the Ministry of Agriculture for the involvement, we even tried to take more products with which we can take pride with from Buzău County at a fair in Italy. Unfortunately, not all producers were interested in participating, but it was an action in which the costs would have been minimal, all being borne by the County Council. I presented them, these sausages were a success somewhere near Rome, I do not remember the town anymore. And with your support, an official record of these sausages will bring recognition including to Buzău County" (Campus TV Buzau 2014).

7. Marian Grigoraş, Director of the Agricultural Direction of Buzău: "Today we have a territory animation where the Pleşcoi sausages originated, the traditional products of this area. We want to actually put in place a European passport, that is, to have that Protected Geographical Indication. To be sold in Europe as a traditional product" (Campus TV Buzau 2014).

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