

## Street food practice as food heritage enhancement tool: current limits and desirable developments

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### 1.- Edible identities: food as intangible cultural heritage.

Transcending the functional level of simple nourishment that has characterized it since ancient times, food today represents a testimony of culture<sup>1</sup>, which goes beyond the borders of individual States and their national identities.

A notable contribution in this direction comes from ultra-state law, in particular from the Convention for the protection of intangible cultural heritage<sup>2</sup> (adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003), which, although not mentioning areas in close relationship with food, places for the first time the emphasis on the subjective interest of communities to assign value to any expression of their cultural memory<sup>3</sup>.

The logic of the 2003 Convention lies in the belief that culture, understood in an anthropological sense<sup>4</sup>, is a dimension of reality within which each social group projects its own values and traditions.

In this way, every cultural event (whether tangible or intangible) would contribute to the construction of the identity of a people, which would manifest

itself through a real strategy for promoting specific forms of identity and precise enhancements of the history of a community.

From this point of view, food constitutes an extraordinary tool for identifying social groups and their customs as it represents the outcome of a set of «cultural processes involving domestication, transformation, reinterpretation of what is present in nature»<sup>5</sup>.

Not surprisingly, going beyond the limits of the World Heritage List established in 1972, the 2003 Convention recognizes as cultural heritage not only natural sites and monuments, but also «the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage»<sup>6</sup>.

This knowledge and practice also includes models, kitchens and food practices considered cultural heritage of certain communities, which in fact appear in significant numbers in the Intangible Heritage List developed by UNESCO from 2008 to today.

Beyond its importance as an element of identity affirmation, food is also a means of cultural exchange, representing the main form of contact between different civilizations. Not by chance in 2014, the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament approved a motion for European Parliament Resolution on the “European gastronomic heritage: cultural and educational aspects”, acknowledging the importance of food and gastronomy as artistic and cul-

(1) E. Di Rienzo, *Oltre l'edibile: su alcune valenze antropologico-culturali del cibo*, in *Economia della cultura*, 2010, 59; G.M. Almerico, *Food and Identity: Food Studies, Cultural, and Personal Identity*, in *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies*, 2014, 4; M. Brocca, *Cibo e cultura: nuove prospettive giuridiche*, in *Federalismi.it*, 2017.

(2) Convention for the safeguard of intangible cultural heritage, Paris, October 17, 2003, in <http://www.portal.unesco.org>. See A. Lupo, *La nozione positiva di patrimonio culturale alla prova del diritto globale*, in *Aedon*, 2019.

(3) J. Assmann, *La memoria culturale. Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*, Turin, 1997.

(4) A. Cicerchia, *Cultura, cibo e paesaggio: lo sguardo economico*, in *Economia della Cultura*, XX, 2010, 5.

(5) M. Pierri, *Diritto al cibo, diversità alimentare e agrobiodiversità: quali strumenti di tutela? Osservazioni su alcune esperienze significative tra diritto internazionale e sovranità nazionale*, in *Riv. quad. dir. amb.*, 2016.

(6) 2003 Convention, art. 2.

tural expression and fundamental pillars of family and social relationships<sup>7</sup>.

The acquired awareness that food is an integral part of the culture of a people to be safeguarded and transmitted has triggered, at a global level, a process of heritagization of which the food labeling procedures activated by international institutions, primarily UNESCO and European Union<sup>8</sup>, represent a significant example.

Although in different ways, both tend to sanction and formalize the food assets and the territorial identities connected to them, playing a fundamental role in affirming the relevance of food diversity. It is, in hindsight, an attempt to re-appropriation of cultural identities and values endangered by the processes of globalization characterized by the spread of increasingly approved food habits, without neglecting the obvious economic opportunity behind the branding resulting from initiatives to rediscover and re-evaluate the typical features of the individual local culinary traditions<sup>9</sup>.

Through heritagization, food and food practices in general thus take on a dimension of value different from the original one since from an expression of importance for a single social group they become of more general collective importance; a value no longer only local, but recognized by larger communities, which, starting from an area which may be limited territorially, in some cases reaches the international level.

As an expression of cultural heritage, therefore, culinary practices must be protected and valued in the same way as any other practice, representation or knowledge included in the World Heritage List.

Traditionally, the protection of cultural heritage takes the form of direct and indirect constraints,

limits to the building power and the free legal circulation of the property (national and international), that is, through an action aimed at preserving the property in its identity and tendential static nature.

These protection tools, as is evident, are not suitable for referring to the intangible cultural food heritage (ontologically in constant evolution), of which kitchens and food practices are unequivocally an expression.

The safeguard of this particular category of cultural heritage, however, can be expressed through dynamic forms of protection<sup>10</sup>, capable of creating optimal conditions to guarantee its vitality, including identification, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission over time (art. 2.3, 2003 Convention).

To this end, the contribution of what the 2005 Faro Convention<sup>11</sup> defines as “heritage communities” of which food practices constitute an indisputable identity testimony. Communities and groups who practice these culinary traditions can, in fact, contribute to the identification not only of the elements to be included within their food heritage, but also of its most suitable forms of enhancement, promotion and intergenerational transmission.

## 2.- *The enhancements of food heritage through the street food practice.*

For the food heritage to be kept alive, it must remain relevant for a culture and be regularly practiced and learned within communities and between generations.

In our opinion, the paradigm of this dynamic pro-

(<sup>7</sup>) Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament, *Motion for European Parliament Resolution on the “European gastronomic heritage: cultural and educational aspects”*, in <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0211&language=EN&ring=A7-2014-0127>.

(<sup>8</sup>) In 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee of European Union (in <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52012IE0483>) considered that regional food value chains and cross-sectoral fertilisation of productive processes have a strong impact on local development.

(<sup>9</sup>) C. Grasseni, *La patrimonializzazione del cibo. Prospettive critiche e convergenze “sul campo”*, in *Voci*, X, 2013, 80.

(<sup>10</sup>) A. Gualdani, *I beni culturali immateriali: ancora senza ali?*, in *Aedon*, 2014.

(<sup>11</sup>) Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, Faro, October 27, 2005, in [www.Aedon](http://www.Aedon), 2013.

tection and, at the same time, enhancement of food heritage is street food practice.

The World Health Organization<sup>12</sup> (WHO) defines ready-to-eat foods as foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors in streets and other public places for immediate consumption or consumption at a later time without further processing or preparation, while the Codex Alimentarius Commission<sup>13</sup> defines it as foods that include any food (including beverages) consumed in its raw state or any food handled, processed, mixed, cooked or otherwise prepared into a form in which it is normally consumed without further processing. Both definitions place street food in close connection with the way in which food is used (generally very fast and simple), without making any reference to the connection between the fresh raw materials used for the entire culinary offer (generally coming from realities local geographies) and the traditions related to its creation and diffusion.

Despite the incompleteness of these definitions (due to the fact that both institutions focus their attention on the potential risks to human health of food sold on the street, with particular regard to its preparation), anyway the real essence of street-vended food emerges as expression of culture to bring back that cannot be separated from the road or social experience in which it was born.

It identifies and unites in fact territory and tradition, keeping one of the most important aspects of local culture alive: the eating habits of individuals living in a specific territory.

Within each ethnic group, cultural models of eating specify how, when and where one should eat and what constitutes a “appropriate” meal.

Anthropological studies<sup>14</sup> affirm that food choice

are shaped by cultural and social influences.

A plant or animal may be considered edible in one society and inedible in another. In many cultures, then, food has a social or ceremonial role. Certain foods are highly prized; others are reserved for special holidays or religious occasions; still others are a mark of social position<sup>15</sup>.

Very often, then, the selection of products that make up a regular diet is influenced by religious beliefs<sup>16</sup> (for example many people are strict vegetarians for religious reasons) or socio-economic status.

One possible reason to explain why food have come to be so strongly associated with ethnocultural traditions is that it is considered as not being a basic necessity for consumption, but as an essential element that adds value to image of a community.

Food choices, that is, serve to symbolize how a community defines itself in terms of religion, ethnicity, social class and so on.

From the nutritional function, so, food runs to the symbolic function: it represents a traditional part of a people’s culture which should be preserved. Street food practice provides a useful perspective exploring the culture of an ethnic group (that goes beyond simple descriptive analysis), because it portrays, reproducing them, not only the foods and drinks which are typical of a particular territory, but also the employed preparation techniques that are handmade, original or revised.

In other words, street food practice bring history, local tradition and cultural identity to keep locally sourced foods and to strengthen their bond with the local population, making them become part of the territory identity<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>(12)</sup> World Trade Organization (WHO), Essential safety requirements for street-vended foods, 1996, in [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/63265/WHO\\_FNU\\_FOS\\_96.7.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/63265/WHO_FNU_FOS_96.7.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>(13)</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission, 2004, in [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org); Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Food for the cities: Street foods*, in [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org), 2013.

<sup>(14)</sup> M. Koc – J. Welsh, *Food, foodways and immigrant experience*, Unpublished Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada, 2001.

<sup>(15)</sup> See S. Reddy – M. Anitha, *Culture and its influence on nutrition and oral health*, in *Biomed Pharmacol J*, 2015.

<sup>(16)</sup> J. Coates – E. A. Frongillo – B. L. Rogers – P. Webb – P. E. Wilde – R. Houser, *Commonalities in the experience of household food insecurity across cultures: what are measures missing?*, in *The Journal of nutrition*, 2006, 1438-1448.

<sup>(17)</sup> D. Privitera – F. S. Nesci, *Globalization vs. local. The role of street food in the urban food system*, in *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 2015, 718.

The foregoing therefore leads us to believe that street food plays an important role in the safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the cultural traditions in which an ethnic group identifies itself, contributing to their knowledge, vitality and intergenerational transmission, also outside their own borders.

Simultaneously and indirectly with the enhancement of the identity culture of a community, street food practice also generates the opportunity for an economic enhancement of the local food heritage as cultural heritage of humanity.

For a long time, there was doubts about the possibility of a profitable union between economy and culture in view of the difficulty of being able to assimilate cultural assets to economic assets tout court; and this because of their «public vocation»<sup>18</sup>, which, conversely, it was believed to be “protected” at all costs from the harsh reality of the economy.

The expansion of the demand for the use of cultural heritage and the related need to satisfy this widespread need of society have highlighted the economic value of cultural heritage as well as the potential profitability of the interventions relating to them.

As a result, the idea that the cultural heritage as a whole no longer represented only an unproductive weight, but an economic asset to be used to create opportunities for growth and collective well-being has made headway.

It cannot be denied, in fact, that every single food product, as result of certain culinary techniques, underlies an intangible economic value, which generates an economic profit when it is used by the community<sup>19</sup>.

There are several economic aspects related to

the exploitation of a food heritage through street food practice.

The recognition of some agri-food products as “identity goods” of a community influences, first of all, the local food production, playing an implicit and growing role in the sales of the so-called “locally sourced foods”<sup>20</sup>.

This in turn produces a positive impact on local economies, leading to a significant entrepreneurial expansion of micro-enterprises, whose activity is vital especially for the economic planning of developing countries.

Secondly, street-vended food is often unique to a city or region and because of this it is sometimes used as a tourist attraction. Consuming food and gastronomic specialties are, in fact, a step towards understanding cultural practices and taste that the country visited has to offer<sup>21</sup>.

In conclusion, street food practice allows to concretize the two souls of the enhancement of food heritage: the cultural one, in the strict sense, and the economic one.

### 3.- Street food trade as part of food informal sector: what implications?

Economically, street food sector is an important component of food distribution system in many cities in both developing and industrialized countries. Its relevance is demonstrated by the volume of trade involved, great provision of ready-made meals and mostly employment for the swarming people along the chain of the business.

According to the International Labour Organization<sup>22</sup>, 61 percent of global work force and 44 percent of all urban workers are bracketed in

<sup>(18)</sup> M. Romano, *Liberare la bellezza dallo Stato*, in *Corriere della Sera*, November 30, 2013.

<sup>(19)</sup> G. Severini, *L'immateriale economico*, in *Aedon*, 2015.

<sup>(20)</sup> J. Lambden – O. Receveur – H. V. Kuhnlein, *Traditional food attributes must be included in studies of food security in the Canadian Arctic*, in *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 2007, 308-319.

<sup>(21)</sup> D. Privitera, *Street food as form of expression and socio-cultural differentiation*, in *12<sup>th</sup> PASCAL International Observatory Conference*, Catania, 2012.

<sup>(22)</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) established in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles and dedicated to improving labour conditions and living standards throughout the world.

informal sectors of urban economy. In the developing world, more than half of the urban workers are employed informally<sup>23</sup>.

Street vendors contribution to urban life go beyond their own self-employment, because they generate demand for a wide range of services provided by other informal workers and by formal sector public and private actors, including transportation and suppliers from whom they source their goods<sup>24</sup>.

These factors make street food trade an appealing and relatively profitable business for the whole urban economy<sup>25</sup>.

Street food sector plays also an implicit and growing role in solving socio-economic shortcomings through the provision of ready-to-eat meals at affordable prices for a large part of the middle- and low-income working classes.

By doing so this food practice supports local economies and contributes to the achievement of food sovereignty, food security and a rural-urban sustainable food chain.

Nevertheless street vendors activity is often vastly underestimated and neglected because considered part of the “informal sector”, sometimes called the “tertiary sector” or “bazaar economy”<sup>26</sup>.

It is important, first, to define informal sector, particularly with respect to food distribution.

The term “informal sector” is widely applied to describe loosely organized and often non-enumerated economic activities that operate outside the confines of a legal framework: generally they are not sanctioned under a government regulation, are majorly based on an unskilled work force, have a lower startup cost and are fundamentally linked to rural migrants.

The word “informal” can be misleading, however, because many micro-entrepreneurs are in some ways legally recognized by the authorities, espe-

cially if they participate in such organizations as trading associations, cooperatives or unions.

Originally the informal sector was the symbol of the lack of economic development that should have temporarily absorbed unskilled workers who emigrated to the city from rural areas.

Since most of the rapidly increasing urban population (mostly in third world countries) has not been absorbed into the formal labor market, this group of people has taken up a range of self-employed, income-generating activities, both legitimate and illegitimate such as street food, which exactly form the informal sector.

Actually, it has become a permanent phenomenon, which seems to grow faster than the formal sector in the urban areas of many countries, although it should be emphasized that the division between the informal and formal sectors is not always obvious because suppliers and consumers may “cross sectors” to swap goods in both economic endeavors.

The most visible activities relating to the informal food sector are food production, catering and transport and the retail sale of fresh or prepared products, as the stationary or itinerant sale of street food. All these activities exist in most cities, although their relative importance in the supply and distribution of food and in the local employment situation varies, even from one municipal district to another.

As part of informal sector street food trade is associated with negative externalities, as hygiene problems (accumulation of waste in the streets and congestion of waste water discharges), illegal occupation of public or private space by street vendors and social problems (child labor, unfair competition to formal trade and so on).

Aware of both economic and socio-cultural advantages, national, regional and urban governments have paid more attention to give vendors

<sup>(23)</sup> See M. U. Bajwa, *Urban economy and street vendors*, in [www.dailytime.com](http://www.dailytime.com), 2019.

<sup>(24)</sup> S. Roever – C. Skinner, *Street vendors and cities*, in [www.sagepublications.com](http://www.sagepublications.com), 2016, 359-374.

<sup>(25)</sup> S. Marras – M. Companion – R. Cardoso, *Street Food. Culture, Economy, Health and Governance*, New York, 2014.

<sup>(26)</sup> B. A. Alimi – T. S. Workneh, *Consumer awareness and willingness to pay for safety of street foods in developing countries: a review*, in *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 2016, 242-248.

legal status by amending, enacting, repealing and implementing appropriate laws and providing legitimate zones in urban development plans, but have had enormous difficulties on how to implement it.

The key point is that there often exists a large gap between the general objectives, directives of administrators and the ways in which these policies can actually be materialized on the road.

Although various strategies have been explored, attempts to regulate the sector have often proved contradictory or inconsistently enforced<sup>27</sup>.

The Directive (EC) no. 123/2006<sup>28</sup> (also called “Bolkestein Directive”) is a good example that illustrates contradictions in the regulatory framework.

It regulates the services in the internal market, letting any interested economic operator to obtain a concession for his asset on the basis of a public tendering procedure and precising rules on the duration of licenses and on the methods of reassignment once they have expired.

However, the planned liberalization of the street sales market is hampered by a list of specific prohibitions, including the rule according to which the number of authorizations to access and exercise a service activity can be limited when there are unspecified imperative reasons of general interest or reasons related to the scarcity of natural resources or available technical skills.

In other cases, then, street clearing operations have been the preferred action of municipalities to control informal activities, particularly just before major public and tourist events, on the assumption that orderly streets improve the image of the

city to visitors<sup>29</sup>.

In these scenarios street vendors have been banned outright, often evicted by force from public spaces and relocated to planned markets or restricted to sell in certain areas, especially when their traditional vending sites overlapped with sites for proposed urban development.

Thus vendors operate in a permanent state of uncertainty and their vulnerability inhibits investment and long-term development of their activity.

#### *4.- Food sold on the street between hygiene issues and strategies to enhance food safety*

Informal sector foods - such as street food - can pose a higher risk to food safety as these foods are not subject to the same rigorous standards required for the formal packaged food sector.

The analysis of the dangers of street food in the countries indicates that while the foods differ from one country to another, the hazards identified in preparation and sale are very similar.

The deposit of atmospheric contaminants, the release of toxic substances from unsuitable contact materials, the development of mycotoxins in poorly preserved foods, the improper use of insecticides or disinfectants to try to remedy bad hygiene conditions, are some of the main factors of food-related risk the phenomenon of street food.

Few countries have a specific regulations for street foods and vendors handle their businesses according to informal rules dictated by their social environment in polluted sites with poor environ-

(<sup>27</sup>) In the “Kenya Vision 2030” national development plan, for example, the informal sector is recognized and presented as sector which should be supported. Moreover, two national texts, the Micro and Small Enterprise Act from 2012 and the Urban Areas and Cities Act from 2012, promote the development of informal commercial activities. However, local by-laws contradict these national legal texts, often leading to conflicts between the street traders and city authorities. See S. Racaud – J. Kago – S. Owuor, *Introduction: contested street: informal street vending and its contradictions*, in *Articulo - Journal of Urban Research*, 2018, 17.

(<sup>28</sup>) Directive (EC) No. 123/2006. See G. de Minico, *Looking beyond the Services Directive 2006/123/EC. The way forward*, in [www.Astrid-online.it](http://www.Astrid-online.it), 2017, 14.

(<sup>29</sup>) In China, for example, the vision of modern urban streets and sidewalks has helped to generate increasingly restrictive policies on street vending and spurred new forms of urban regulation and policing. See A. Hanser, *Street Politics: Street Vendors and Urban Governance in China*, in *The China Quarterly*, 2016.

mental hygiene.

At international level, the WTO<sup>30</sup> and FAO<sup>31</sup> have developed numerous assistance programs to help national and municipal authorities to ensure the safety and quality of street food.

Food safety management systems emphasize the practical implementation of the Codex Alimentarius guidelines, especially the general principles of food hygiene and analysis of critical control points, together with revised regional guidelines for measures to control street food.

Also the European Union aims to safeguard consumer health, through Regulation (EC) no. 178/2002<sup>32</sup> (which establishes the principles of food safety and the European Food Safety Authority) and a series of harmonized provisions governing official controls, including the latest Regulation (EU) no. 625/2017<sup>33</sup>, which offers an overview of the official controls on feed and food, animal health and welfare.

Although these recommendations provide a basis for improving the safety of street food, their application has some limitations because they do not provide a mechanism for determining the priority actions to be taken and do not consider the specialty of certain raw materials (as, for example, fish, meat and milk), the operations and the socio-economic conditions in which foods are prepared or the cultural factors that lead to specific risky behaviors.

Generally, regulation represents the most common approach to controlling the street-vended food sector and its safety.

However, extensive regulation of street vendors

may only guarantee that all will be, in some manner, in violation of the law (and subject to penalties) and does little to educate street-vendors in the most important aspects of safe food handling. One of the basic principles in existing legal texts is that food production and sale are subject to prior authorization and official controls.

When such local regulations exist, enforcement is a major problem considering the large number of street food vendors and the fact that, for certain types of vendors, their mobility makes difficult, if not impossible, to control.

Many countries base their control system on the licensing systems<sup>34</sup>, the release of which may include restrictions on the type of food to be sold and on the place where it can be sold.

Registering or licensing vendors has many advantages for authorities, because it enables authorities to identify persons employed in such enterprises and the types of food sold, to raise revenue and to provide an opportunity to give food handlers training in food safety.

Getting an official license and sanitary permit, giving receipts and charging sales taxes are considered particularly onerous and difficult, requiring a lot of time, expense and contacts in the bureaucracy. For this reason a significant percentage of vendors normally remain unlicensed and authorities often lack the resources to prevent them from continuing to work.

Furthermore, consumers pay little attention to whether a vendor is licensed or not, as licensing rarely relates to the quality and safety of the food served.

<sup>(30)</sup> World Trade Organization (WTO), *Essential safety requirements for street-vended food*, cit.

<sup>(31)</sup> Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Good Hygienic Practices in the Preparation and Sale of Street Food in Africa. Tools for training*, in [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org), 2009; FAO, *Promises and Challenges of the informal food sector in developing countries* in [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org), 2007; FAO, *Street foods (FAO food and nutrition paper)*, in [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org), 1997.

<sup>(32)</sup> Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002.

<sup>(33)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017. For a comment on this regulation, see F. Albisinni, *Regulation (EU) 2017/625: Official Controls, Life, Responsibilities, and Globalization*, in *European Food and Feed Law Review*, 2019, p. 118-131.

<sup>(34)</sup> In 2014, the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) has adopted, for example, a regulation on safety and food standards (Street Vendors act in *Gazette of India, Government of India*. Retrieved 4 May 2014), according to which (by virtue of the powers conferred by section 92 of the Food safety standard act of 2006), registration or the granting of a license is mandatory for all food business operators in the country. See A. M. Panwar – V. Garg, *Issues and challenges faced by vendors on urban streets: a case of sonipat city, India*, in [www.ijetmas.com](http://www.ijetmas.com), 2015.

There is then to say that the number of licenses provided by some countries is quite low, because it is believed that uncontrolled and unrestricted growth of street vendors would lead to greater competition or difficulty in planning, or as is often said, both.

Other countries have no general regulation and street food control exists in the form of repression of offences and *ad hoc* regulatory provisions determined by local authorities or ministries as problems occur<sup>35</sup>.

The penalties include prison sentences (that are often only for a few days) and fixed fines which vary considerably from one country to another. Depending on the case, the infringement is punished by one or both of these penalties.

## 5.- Conclusions

Street food practice emerges as a representation of the local food heritage of both developing and industrialized countries.

Through it, in fact, communities dynamically develop their sense of social and cultural belonging, at the same time ensuring the knowledge, survival and intergenerational transmission of their culture and traditions.

However, its enormous potential is often underestimated because its informal nature leaves room for a problem of improper planning that often arises out of inadequate or contradictory laws that restrict opportunities to the growing informal sector.

A majority of urban markets are in fact concentrated in old cities or the old parts of the cities and hence are unplanned, with issues of haphazard settlements of vendors as well as improper parking system and unhygienic conditions.

In line with local social and cultural contexts, local and national authorities have implemented rules to bring the sector toward standardization.

However, to date, the policies and programs implemented have not been sufficient to launch street food as a tool for enhancing food heritage, probably also due an excessively restrictive regulation and the imposition of high overheads that often have had the effect of reducing the sector's ability to provide food and an attractive urban environment to local consumers and tourists.

The enhancement of food heritage through the practice of street food requires, instead, that it is duly recognized and supported by the authorities. As the frontline administration, the local authorities particularly have a key role to play in urban food security and are in the best position to identify, on the one hand, the problems that beset informal food operators and, on the other, the problems that they themselves present.

Policies and programs should be put in place to create appropriate conditions for the activities of this informal sector to be undertaken efficiently by minimizing risks to society.

The main need is to adopt a rational urban plan that is inclusive of street vendors.

This requires some skills and efforts aimed primarily at promoting meaningful dialogue with street food representatives, who should be invited to participate in the formulation of the action programs that concern them.

This could allow their better integration in the planning of the city territory (for example through the supply of informal markets also in the peripheral urban areas) and a better management of conflicts of interest that oppose different actors or groups of actors in the food sector (for example land disputes related to the expansion of urban and peri-urban production).

The location or relocation of street food vendors serves to officially recognize them, but cannot be viewed as a panacea for solving the problems of street food, especially with regard to sanitation.

For this reason, it would be necessary to adopt educational programs to support efforts to facilita-

<sup>(35)</sup> S. Samapundo – R. Climat – R. Xhaferi – F. Devlieghere, *Food safety knowledge and microbial hazards awareness of consumers of ready-to-eat street-vended food*, in *Food control*, 2016, 422-429.



te the projects and/or activities of street food entrepreneurs, providing them with information and training on the hygiene, safety and nutritional quality of food.

However, street-vended foods and their preparation and handling vary enormously among countries, reflecting the unique characteristics of the societies, and even within countries the variations in street-vended foods are often considerable.

Consequently, training and education programs should be based on the food safety hazards presented by the local street food situation.

Considering that it is the consumer who chooses what to consume and from whom to buy it, it would be necessary to involve him in efforts to improve the safety of food sold on the street.

To encourage consumer selection based on food safety, consumers must first be aware of the benefits of street food, their association with food-borne illnesses and safe and unsafe food handling practices.

To achieve this, health authorities could use a variety of educational approaches including mass media, national seminars and community health education.

Furthermore, national and local institutions should critically review existing rules and regulations, with a special focus on their relevance, complexity, intelligibility, enforcement and monitoring review, also making street vending more aware of existing regulations through institutional channels and information campaigns.

## ABSTRACT

*Talking about culture today necessarily means using the term in a much broader meaning, that is, as the complex of resources inherited from the past, belonging to a given social group and, therefore, as a reflection and expression of beliefs, knowledge and traditions that assert themselves*

*and pass on in time and space. Within this dynamic definition of culture it does not seem difficult to insert food and food practices in general: all foods are the result of the selection and creative manipulation operated on nature by a community, which is generally the one established in the territory inside of which those foods are produced.*

*Therefore, not only the food raw materials, but also the practices of their treatment and culinary transformation become the object of such a process of symbolic intensification that they come to interpenetrate with the sphere of ethnic belonging. Street-vended food is one of these culinary practices that represents a significant part of urban food consumption for millions of low- and middle-income consumers in urban areas on a daily basis.*

*The aim of this study is to reflect on street food practice as a tool to promote and enhance food heritage (that are still poorly understood), analysing both the advantages and the shortfalls connected to it.*

*Despite changing social and environmental conditions street food continues to be a typical tool of knowledge, vitality and intergenerational transmission of the cultural identities of the communities of reference, reproducing local and regional food cultures.*

*Shaped by cultural, territorial and ethnic phenomena, street food has also a positive impact on local economy: businesses are usually owned and operated by individuals or families, but benefits from their trade influence the economic development of many towns, playing an implicit and growing role in sales of the “locally sourced foods” and in the tourism activities.*

*In contrast to these potential benefits, street foods are perceived to be a major public risk. As an “informal” sector of food business street-vended foods escape, often, formal inspections and controls. This can therefore both be the source of food safety problems and contribute to the deterioration of environmental hygiene.*