

# EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



**Food as Heritage**  
January 2019

This policy brief warns against the risks involved in food nationalism that recurrently 'others' interlocutors' foodscapes - representing them as different, inferior or even abnormal. It also warns against the risks involved in food heritage practices, which can fuel food wars. It focuses on the importance of raising awareness about shared food heritage as a way to encourage integration. This policy brief addresses issues of integration and cohesion, education and training, heritage and museum practice.

This Policy Brief is relevant for:

<b>EUROPEAN COMMISSION DIRECTORATE GENERAL EAC Education, Youth, Sport and Culture</b>	Because	<p>It offers suggestions to help counter the aggressive use of food nationalism, which is instrumental for discrimination, racism and exclusion. It promotes actions for healthier food habits.</p> <p>It provides more accurate information on food heritage, showing that food nationalism is often based on wrong assumptions not supported by sound historical evidence.</p>
<b>POLICY MAKERS</b>	because	Food labelling programmes should suggest that most dishes and

		products do not belong to one single nation or state but are a shared heritage of broader communities.
<b>LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS</b>	Because	<p>When possible, they should submit multiple and transnational applications for UNESCO intangible heritage status, thus focusing on shared food heritage.</p> <p>They should encourage and promote actions of integration based on food related topics (cooking together, getting to know the others' cuisine and eating habits)</p>
<b>HERITAGE SECTOR</b>	because	<p>When discussing heritage, it is important to develop awareness that dishes and cuisines often belong to various places at once. Food heritage should be presented as shared heritage across borders, and the result of entangled histories, and not of purely national ones.</p>
<b>MUSEUM SECTOR</b>	because	<p>Museums should be aware of the political role of food as heritage and of its implications and potentials. They should present food as a tool to promote integration and discourage nationalistic approaches.</p>

## Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1** – Policy makers at local, national and European level should make room for food historians in agencies devoted to place-related quality labelling or inclusion in UNESCO intangible heritage lists. Historians can work comparatively and attend to the entangled histories of food, deconstructing nationalistic assumptions often based on erroneous evidence. Food heritage does not reflect national borders. Defining food in purely national terms has often fuelled food wars among the countries where who share the same food heritage.
- **Recommendation 2** – Policy makers at local, national and European levels should encourage awareness of shared food heritage across borders. Countries should be encouraged to promote – where possible – joint applications for UNESCO intangible heritage status, thus reducing the possibility of national rivalries and eventually preventing food wars.
- **Recommendation 3** – Policy makers should counter nationalist, xenophobic and mixophobic political propaganda often based on food.
- **Recommendation 4** – When possible, museums dealing with food heritage in permanent or temporary exhibition (open air museums; migration museums, history museums) should avoid ‘nationalistic’ aristocratic and nostalgic representation of food. They should discourage food nationalism. Instead, museums should present food history as one of encounters and exchanges, focusing on the way various dishes and foodstuffs travelled and were adopted in different countries, highlighting similarities and overlaps, pointing out different diets and eating habits of the various social classes, milieus and genders. Interviews, maps and images helping comparison are useful for this purpose.
- **Recommendation 5** - Following best practices already trialled in Scandinavia and Canada, museums could involve migrants or citizens from different demographics to present their food culture, not as a marker of diversity or inferiority but rather to enrich gastronomic experiences. This soft policy instrument would be in line with the European Commission’s agenda on migration.
- **Recommendation 6** – Textbooks should present traditional cuisines not as isolated national traditions rooted in ethnic nationalism, but as resulting from entanglements and exchanges. Deconstructing and actively fighting national – as well as ethnic and racist – stereotypes would be a way to improve integration and intergroup dialogue.
- **Recommendation 7** – When presenting ‘traditional’ dishes and cuisines schoolbooks should not encourage unhealthy eating habits.
- **Recommendation 8** – It is still necessary to breakdown gender stereotyping of food and cooking. Museums and textbooks should encourage men as well as women to engage in cooking and to be aware of their cuisine. They could also promote local oral history research on family history, and on the transmission of recipes between different generations and groups.

**CoHERE: Critical Heritages – performing and representing identities in Europe**, seeks to explore and analyse productions and meanings of the European past in the present. Heritage is made in the myriad practices and cultural forms where the past is valorised for the present, from folk traditions to museums and memorials, the management of historic sites and traditions, and everyday matters such as education, political discourse, home life, food consumption and people's relations with place. Likewise, contemporary connections with events, cultures and sites from prehistory to the very recent past may all be important for the construction of identities, values and futures.

## Overview

WP6 has focused on food as a fundamental element of heritage with a critical role in in times of crisis and increasing nationalisms. Grounded in historical studies and focused on the role of food for identities, we undertook historical research across heritage and commercial practices, reaching back to the historical roots of culinary traditions as intangible heritage.



Our research has highlighted that (often national) stereotypes of food have usually been created in spite of multiple contacts and deep hybridizations which in fact mark almost every cuisine. It has showcased the significant role food heritage has played in supporting banal nationalism.

Adopting a historical perspective, as suggested by the REFLECTIVE 2 Call, it has highlighted the *geteilte Geschichte* (a history both shared and divided) of European cuisine, as well as the role played by food in shifting over borders or between dimensions, i.e. local, national and European. It has highlighted the intensity of exchanges and encounters connected to food and how such contacts have gone far beyond the political borders of the EU or the geographical borders of Europe.

Brussels House of European History: 'Many elements of the European cuisine originated outside Europe. (...They) reflect a long history of trading and exchanges'

It has also used gender as a useful category of analysis. The transmission of recipes and traditions is strongly embedded in local, regional and national identities that are often entangled and overlapping.

Its relevance for the self-perception of communities is deeply rooted in gender relationships. Food heritage offers possibilities for a focus on women, but this risks compartmentalising and limiting women's history and exacerbating gender stereotypes. Moreover, food histories are varied and cooking in the private space of the family has by no means been the sole preserve of women across European settings.

Food heritage is nevertheless an opportunity to engage with and think through historical gender relations. For example, traditionally women were devoted to the transmission of recipes as well as to the preparation of food at home, less so in restaurants and in the gourmet scene. Since professional cooking has acquired social and economic value, men have increasingly occupied this arena. The recent media turn to culinary practices is also deeply gendered. Recent campaigns, such as the 2018 European Year for Cultural Heritage, help promoting a more gender-balanced image while also presenting the cooperation of men and women of different generations.

This approach should be encouraged and expanded, showing older and newer citizens, emigrants and immigrants joining forces to cook together for a more creative and cohesive Europe. Moreover, it is important to engage both male and female students to approach the issue of the transmission of recipes and family traditions without gender and ethnicity biases.

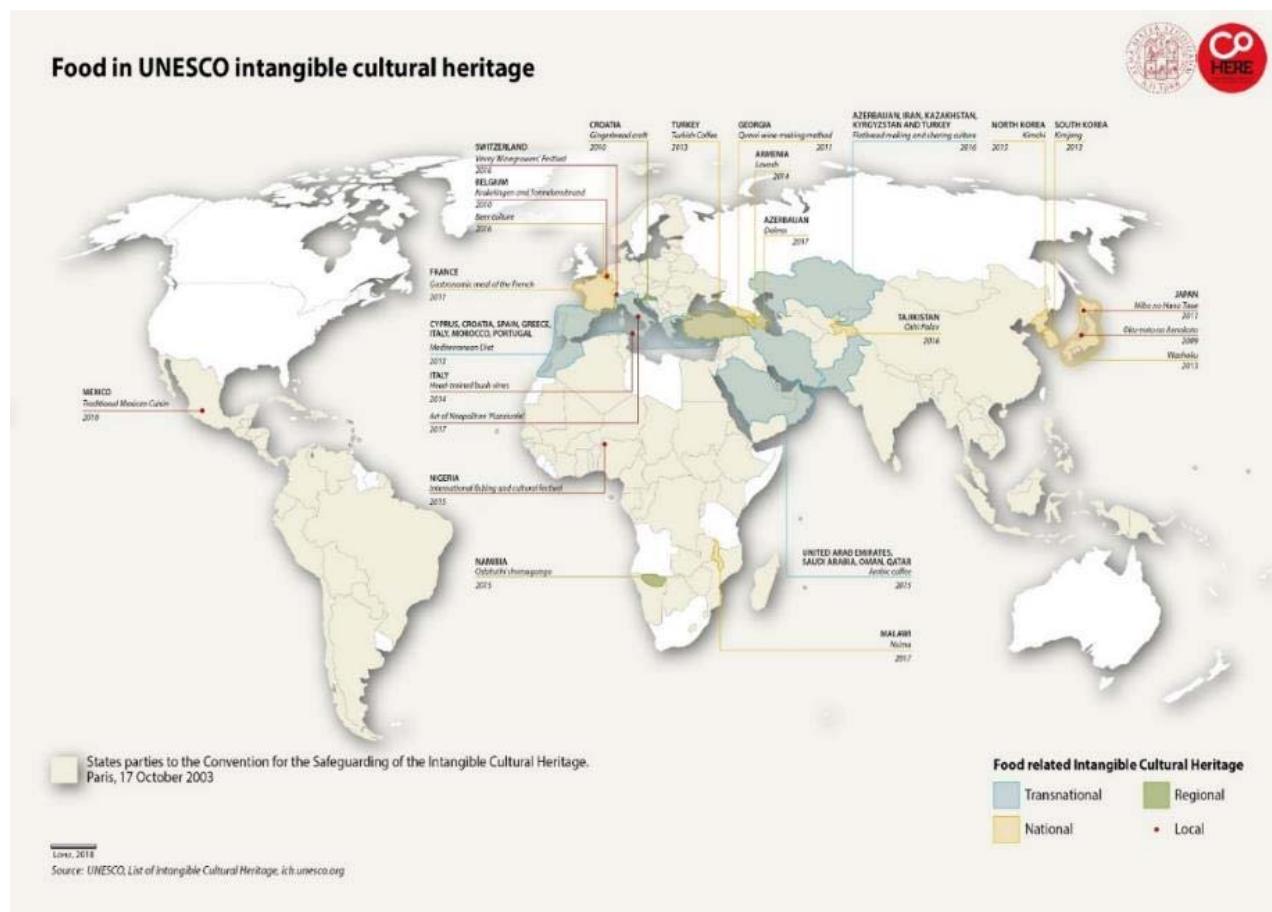
WP6 has also dealt with the stereotypes present in school education, focusing on projections of food as heritage in school books and curricula in UK, France, Germany and Greece. Finally, it has asked which healthy eating styles are presented and how they are articulated in relation to cultural elements, economy, climate, landscape.

**Not only a healthy diet, but also the deconstruction of national and gender stereotypes and ultimately a more open, non-nationalistic attitude start in the kitchen**



## Introduction

Worldwide as well as across social classes and different milieus, food conveys feelings of community and inclusion. If we are what we eat, food reminds us of the protective intimacy of the private home and the national home at once. Food cultures can also be one of the means through which 'othering' and disgust towards others is articulated. The emotional connection between food and national belonging is used and misused by politicians of various countries in order to mobilize the masses and/or to discourage integration and mutual respect. In many European countries 'gastronationalism' (food nationalism) is increasingly present in political discourse. It raises barriers between 'us' and the 'others', and nurtures xenophobic, mixophobic, divisive and racist feelings. It strengthens the erroneous perception of essentialised identities and supports nationalist positions that threaten the shared feeling of a shared democratic European home. Gastronationalism in its diverse forms discourages or opposes social and interethnic cohesion. However, food has a huge potential for integration, by acting as a factor of inclusion.



## Research findings

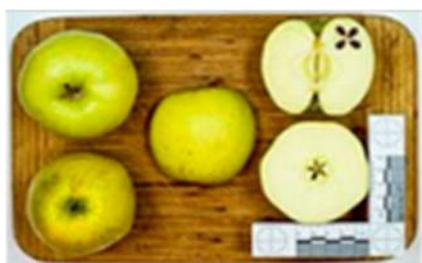
On the basis of existing literature (now organised in an online bibliography<sup>1</sup>) and our own original research, workshop discussions and dissemination activities we can confirm that categories such as *terroir* and even 'designation of origin' or UNESCO ICH have often resulted in the construction of rigid and often deterministic links between food and a specific place. As a consequence, some of the labelling procedures overshadow the historical connections, exchanges and many hybridizations which have a long history and have contributed to the foods considered typical of a region. In fact, recipes, cuisines and foodways are very often – if not always – the product of transfers and encounters. They are open to innovation and subject to changes overtime (Porciani 2019).

Policy makers, national agencies such as the French Ministry of Agriculture, and other public and private institution (e.g. national institutes of denomination of origins, the Istituto Nazionale di Sociologia Rurale or the Slow Food movement for Italy) have shown increasing interest in authentic products connected with the *terroir*.



A better understanding of the products of different regions should not imply freezing identity or hardening borders. On the contrary, as some virtuous examples have shown (e.g. in the Alpine area in 2018), shared actions connecting communities across borders through food can have positive results both in terms of image and commercialisation, while not creating divisions and contests over ownership.

## NO FREEZING OF IDENTITY OR HARDENING OF BORDERS

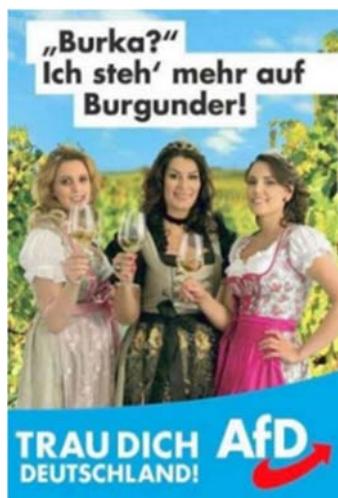


The notion of identity and belongings is crucial in the process of creating heritage, also in connection with food. Food heritage has often been constructed in national terms. The study

of processes of heritagization managed by international institutions (UNESCO and to some extent the EU) shows how this result emerges partly from the organization of labelling procedures. A greater attention to comparison, connections and exchanges could help involve more than one nation state in those heritagization policies or to engage communities across borders rather than nation states.

<sup>1</sup> <http://storicamente.org/sites/default/images/articles/media/2016/di-fiore-bibliography-food-as-heritage-cohere.pdf>

Stronger participation of food historians in the labelling procedures at all its levels is needed in order to introduce a deeper historical focus and awareness of hybridities and to deconstruct food-related nationalistic discourses. This could help avoid the risks of essentialization that are usually included in the heritagization of food and recipes and that, in turn, contribute to create categories often generating rigid identities, xenophobia, and mixophobia.



**AlpFoodway**

A cross-disciplinary, transnational and participative approach to Alpine food cultural heritage

In Belgium and France 'soupes identitaires' were organised in order to oppose immigration. The French Front National used incorrect information about the presence of halal meat in France, thus supporting anti-Islamic feelings (Shield; 2014; Taguieff 2015; Saillard 2012). In Italy, the Lega Nord made large use of xenophobic images presenting couscous as a non-Italian food and opposing it to polenta as the symbol of northern-Italian cuisine. Ironically, couscous was included as a national dish already in the first national cookbook (Pellegrino Artusi, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (1891) – (*Science in the kitchen and the art of eating well*)). The AfD in Germany used food images to mobilize anti-Islamic feelings.

*Xenophobic use of food stereotypes used by right wing party propaganda in Germany's Alternative Für Deutschland Posters and in Italy*

<http://www.iitaly.org/magazine/dining-in-out/articles-reviews/article/polenta-vs-cous-cous-legally-banning-ethnic-food>



A more intense participation of historians in those procedures would be productive for three different reasons:

1. It would help take into account the crucial processes of hybridisation and exchange that have been at the basis of the construction and implementation of various national, as well as local and regional, cuisines.
2. A deeper, long-term historical focus would also foster awareness of the historic presence and interaction of diverse communities, marked by differences and stratifications rooted in gender, age groups, and social roles of the social actors. This would guard against the idea of monolithic communities that find no basis in the historical record.
3. It would encourage multiple candidatures to heritage procedures which would be less divisive and prevent food wars for the 'property' of dishes.

## FOOD STEREOTYPES

Recent as well as previous processes of heritagization of food have tended to crystallize the culinary heritage of different places and people, and to consign them to an often mythical and sometimes almost ahistorical past. This approach risks essentializing identities. Moreover *terroir* and even 'designation of origin' have often resulted in the construction of rigid and often deterministic links between food and a specific place – even a nation. Consequently, these procedures overshadow the long history of historical connections, exchanges and many hybridizations which have contributed to the foods considered typical of a region. In fact, as Massimo Montanari has proven for Europe and for Italy, recipes, cuisines and foodways are very often – if not always – the product of transfers and encounters.

Our research concerning food in museums and schoolbooks has pointed out the risks of using cuisine in order to fix a rigid – often national – identity, sometimes based on stereotypes. Yet food could have a huge potential in deconstructing rigid identity stereotypes. Putting on display the intense connections, hybridizations and exchanges at the basis of almost each and every cuisine could be done both in schoolbooks and in museums, particularly museums dealing with issues such as migration and multi-ethnic contexts.

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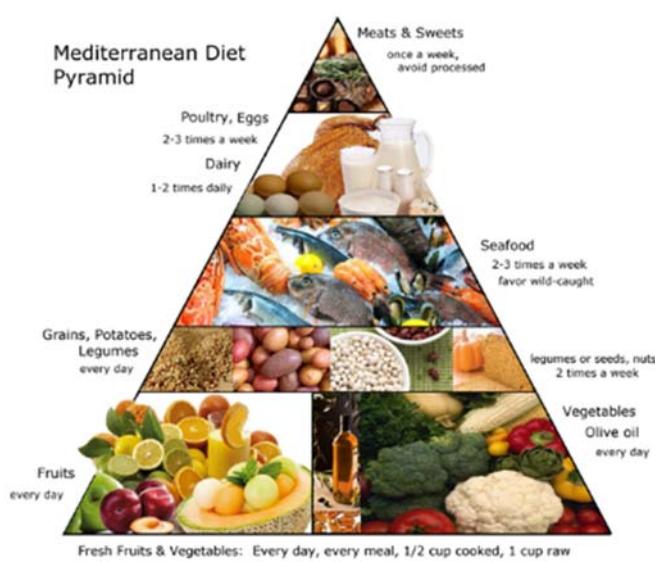
*"Food has a huge and unexplored potential for integration, by acting as a factor of inclusion"*  
<https://www.barillacfn.com/m/publications/food-and-migration.pdf>

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Museums are the right place to reflect on food. They can organise food-related events involving multicultural communities, thus promoting integration and presenting immigration in a soft and attractive way. The House of European History in Brussels, as well as

museums such as the MUCEM in Marseille, the Galata Museo del Mare in Genoa or the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin are ideal places for such actions. Local, regional and city museums are also often very active in relation to multicultural and multi-ethnic issues, including food.

Schools are also an ideal place to disseminate correct information on food heritage and to exploit food's potential for inclusion. In school canteens, especially in multicultural and intense immigration areas, images of different food heritages and menus offered to students or museum visitors could suggest the hybridisation of cuisines and the richness of various traditions. The model of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington where the restaurant rooms are decorated with pictures focused on dishes and cuisines provides useful suggestions.



School and university syllabuses should encourage future teachers to recognize and deconstruct food stereotypes. Future teachers should learn to recognize and highlight the stories behind "national dishes" and link them, when possible, to wider pictures of exchanges and mixing. Teachers should encourage students to interview their families about the transmission of food recipes, especially in cases of emigration – immigration or deep changes in the family history (geographical displacement; economic innovation; new family structures;

contacts with non-nationals etc.). They should also make sure not to transmit and disseminate conventional, gender-biased representations. School textbooks should be revised. When representing a 'national dish', they should take into account WHO health recommendations, as they may be promoting unhealthy habits.

## Summary statement

1. The heritagization of food is based on cultural constructions creating or confirming identity markers, mainly in national terms. This is often the result of procedures such as the inclusion in the ICH list managed by international institutions (UNESCO) but in fact tending to focus on nation-state culture. This heritage discourse and practice privileges some actors while disengaging others from the active use of heritage. Often,

it fuels conflicts among nation states or ethnic groups for the ‘property’ of specific dishes which are in fact often shared across national borders.

2. Food reminds us simultaneously of the protective intimacy of the private home and the national home. It has been widely used and misused in national political discourses, to voice cohesion within the national borders but also and ‘disgust’ towards people perceived as ‘others’.
3. Food heritage, if correctly interpreted, has the potential to support cohesion, integration and multiculturalism.

## **Policy recommendations**

1. Increase the participation of food historians in bodies and agencies involved in labelling procedures
2. Encourage European parties to promote multiple UNESCO ICH candidatures and reduce national ones.
3. When presenting food heritage, school books and education guidelines at EU and national level should follow WHO health recommendations when presenting traditional cuisines and dishes, so as not to promote unhealthy habits.
4. Education guidelines at EU as well as national level should encourage teachers, schoolbooks and students to deconstruct food-rooted national stereotypes
5. Education guidelines at EU as well as national level should a) encourage understandings of traditional dishes as the result of often entangled histories rather than related to ethnic identity, and b) highlight their change overtime.
6. School authorities should encourage students to gather information about the eating habits of their family, avoiding gender-biased representations.

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<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme 2014-2020, "Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", REFLECTIVE 2 (Emergence and transmission of European cultural heritage and Europeanisation)
<b>DURATION</b>	March 2016 – March 2019 (36 months)
<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: €2,499,651.75
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	CoHERE has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 693289
<b>ONLINE PRESENCE</b>	<p>Website: <a href="https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohore/">https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohore/</a></p> <p>Twitter: <a href="https://twitter.com/cohore_eu">@cohore_eu</a></p> <p>Facebook: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/cohore.eu/">https://www.facebook.com/cohore.eu/</a></p>