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FOOD IS FOOD CULTURE

EU policy brief on food & cultural heritage



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FOOD IS CULTURE: EU policy brief on food & cultural heritage

Europa Nostra & Slow Food

“There is still much to be done to bring the world of food closer to the world of culture. There must be a growing awareness that they are two worlds that are interchangeable and not incompatible. To save our endangered planet we must start again from the earth, and in particular from food. We are eating our planet. We have an important and urgent job to do.”

Piero Sardo, President of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity

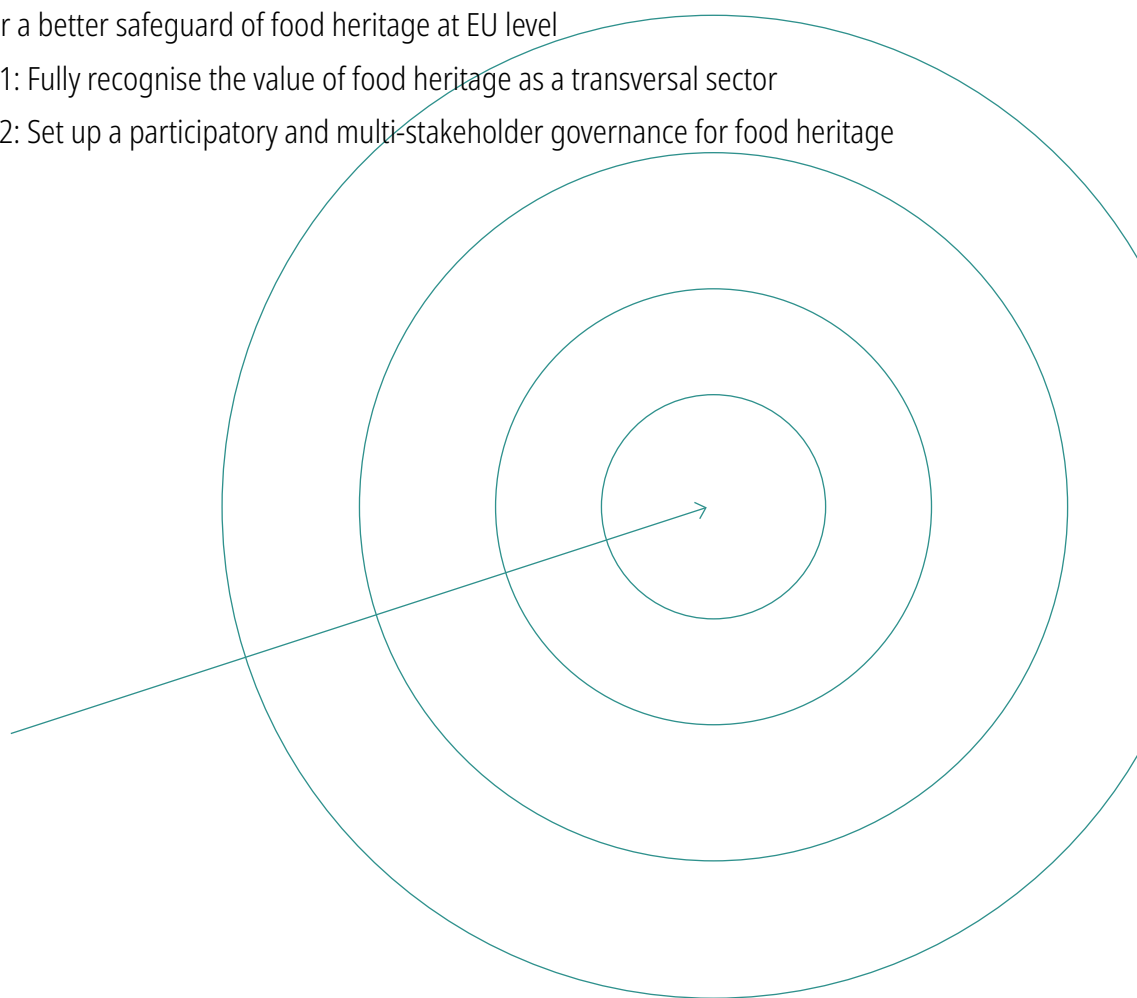
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Introduction

Citizens across Europe are paying increasing attention to their food choices, partly out of concern for their health, but also for ethical or sustainability considerations. This trend has been strongly reinforced as a result of the COVID-19 crisis which disrupted food supply chains, but also reminded Europeans of the contribution of food to their physical and mental well-being. Consequently, EU decision-makers are feeling the pressure to address the way food is being produced and promote sustainable agricultural production. In parallel with these emerging trends, culture remains a paramount underlying factor influencing citizens' food choices, and an important link to traditions and cultural representations.¹ However, in an era where global supply chains are standardising the food most easily accessible to consumers, the link between citizens and their food culture deserves to be better protected. Food heritage can and must play a key role in the shift towards sustainable food production and consumption that is needed to address today's key societal challenges, such as Europe's post-pandemic recovery and the fight against climate change, in line with the Commission's Green Deal commitments. At the same time, food heritage must be part of the discussion on the wide-ranging immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures implemented to contain it, which are taking a considerable toll on the agriculture and heritage worlds.

The links between food and culture are too often overlooked in policy-making although the production and consumption of food are strongly influenced by our cultural environment. In EU policy terms, this translates into a lack of coherence between food, agricultural and cultural policies. The Food is Culture project relies on the collaboration between the food and the cultural sector, with Slow Food (the global movement for good, clean and fair food, and project leader), Europa Nostra (the European Voice of Civil Society committed to Cultural Heritage), Transpond AB, Nova Iskra and Kinookus (creative sector). The partners intend to draw the EU institutions' attention to the value of food cultural heritage as a social, economic, and environmental asset for Europe's recovery which needs to be further supported through a conducive and coherent policy framework.

This paper first defines "food heritage" as intangible cultural heritage providing examples of such food heritage from across Europe. The paper then describes the relevance of food heritage for protecting biodiversity and fighting climate change, for sustainable local development, for sustainable cultural tourism, and for social cohesion and inclusion. Next, it examines the current EU policy context and gives recommendations for possible policy improvements to achieve greater coherence between cultural, food and agricultural policies.

1 What is food heritage?

Food heritage is a prominent part of Europe's **intangible cultural heritage**, as defined by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, namely “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills (...) that communities (...) recognise as part of their cultural heritage” (UNESCO 2003).²

Internationally, several food customs have since been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, including for instance: the [Gastronomic meal of the French](#)³; the [Mediterranean diet](#)⁴ (Cyprus, Croatia, Spain, Greece, Italy, Morocco and Portugal); [Beer culture in Belgium](#)⁵; and the [Art of Neapolitan ‘Pizzaiuolo’](#).⁶

SPECIAL FEATURE FROM THE “FOOD IS CULTURE” MULTIMEDIA ARTWORK:

[BASQUE PYRÉNÉES MOUNTAIN CHEESES \(FRANCE\)](#)⁷

Cheese production in the mountains of the French Basque Country relies on transhumance, the seasonal migration of livestock. Shepherds here raise local sheep breeds, including the rare Manex Tête Noire, and process the raw milk in mountain huts called cayolars. The cheeses are aged for 80-120 days or more and have a complex, distinctive flavour. The practice of transhumance is at risk because most shepherds do not own their land. The cheese produced in the Ossau-Iraty area⁸ has received the French protection “AOC” (Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée) since 1980 and the European protection “PDO” (Protected Designation of Origin) since 1996. The Gastronomic meal of the French celebrates and safeguards such practices, starting with emphasizing togetherness, the pleasure of taste, and the balance between human beings and the products of nature.

At European level, several outstanding projects linked to food heritage have been awarded with the **European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards**, including:

- [The Subterranean Caves and Wineries of El Coto](#)⁹ (Spain) - the conservation of a cultural landscape, including its tangible and intangible heritage, through the conservation of subterranean caves as well as the revitalisation of traditional crafts through the existing traditional wine-making techniques.
- [A Place at the Royal Table](#)¹⁰ (Poland) - an initiative to share knowledge and experience about the culinary history and traditions of European royal courts through workshops, open-air activities, and academic conferences.
- [Granaries of Memory](#)¹¹ (Italy) - a project by the Slow Food University of Gastronomic Sciences showcasing an oral history of local communities, with a focus on the intangible heritage of food culture in Italy.
- [Restoration of the Exceptional Machines of Wielemans-Ceuppens Brewery](#)¹² (Belgium) - a restoration project of a brewery and its unique production machines in Brussels, which is the only place in the world where a craft beer called ‘Gueuze’ is brewed

SPECIAL FEATURE FROM THE “FOOD IS CULTURE” MULTIMEDIA ARTWORK:

[AÑANA SALT \(SPAIN\)](#)¹³

The origins of the Añana salt valley, in Spain’s Basque region, date back to the Ancient Romans. Salt water, known as “muera”, flows into terraced evaporation pools from which the salt is hand-harvested, cleaned, and sorted into three categories: “flor de sal” (irregular flakes), “sal mineral” (large crystals), and “chuzos” (stalactites of crystallised brine). In the 1960s, the salt pans fell into disuse, but efforts are underway to revitalise production. In 2015, Europa Nostra and the European Commission awarded a Grand Prix in the context of the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage / Europa Nostra Awards to the Salt Valley of Añana for its successful recovery project that includes not only the landscape, but also the architecture, and the salt industry and its tradition.¹⁴ Since its national recognition as historic-artistic heritage, the Salt Valley received many other awards and protection statuses over the years, the most recent of which being the FAO Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System in 2017.¹⁵

At national level, many more food customs are listed in national inventories as established by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. They include for instance: the [fine distillation of genever and liqueur in the Netherlands](#)¹⁶; the [cultivation of black currant \(Korinthian\) in Western Peloponnese in Greece](#)¹⁷; the [potato sausage preparation in Valgu and Nurtu areas](#) in Estonia¹⁸; the [traditional Scottish dish Haggis](#) in Scotland.¹⁹

SPECIAL FEATURE FROM THE “FOOD IS CULTURE” MULTIMEDIA ARTWORK:

[LESACHTAL BREAD \(AUSTRIA\)](#)²⁰

This naturally leavened bread is made from a mixture of winter rye and “kärntner früher” wheat grown in Austria’s Lesachtal Valley, where grain production only recently recommenced. This landscape characterised by historic water mills was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and renovated as of 2010. Freshly milled flour is combined with a sourdough starter and left to rise for 24 hours. Baked in a 200°C wood-burning oven, the loaves develop a thin crust. Each September, the town of Lesachtal holds a festival to celebrate its namesake bread. In 2010, the tradition of bread-making in Lesachtal Valley was included in the Austrian inventory of intangible cultural heritage published by the Austrian Commission for UNESCO. The tradition of bread production in the Lesachtal, especially in the communities of Maria Luggau and Liesing, includes the cultivation and production of the grain in a mountain farming region, the knowledge needed for the construction of mills and bread baking in the in-house ovens. Related to this is a contribution to cultural landscape management as well as the preservation of typical, subject-specific dialect expressions.²¹

2 Relevance of food heritage

The European intangible cultural heritage of food is an expression of our cultural identity and diversity, and as such, is an **underestimated resource**. Food and gastronomy are largely used to promote tourism but are rarely recognised as an asset that can reinforce both a sense of belonging to a common European space and foster social integration. Food heritage continuously inspires human creativity and innovation, which in turn can drive policy change and tackle key societal questions, such as climate change and social inclusion.

The food heritage of a country, region or city provides communities with a sense of identity and continuity as it is passed on from generation to generation. It is a living heritage that is “evolving and enriching our society and living environment”²² and can be celebrated and enjoyed by everyone. Finally, heritage and traditional knowledge can boost communities’ resilience, thus contributing to a more sustainable future in Europe.

The diversity of food constitutes a unique and precious heritage: genetic diversity, but also cultural, social, and economic. It will be a key asset for Europe’s socio-economic recovery and resilience as it contributes to **protecting biodiversity, sustainable local development, sustainable cultural tourism, social cohesion, and inclusion**.

→ [*Food heritage - key for preserving biodiversity and fighting climate change*](#)

Food and agriculture account for an important part of global environmental challenges including climate change, biodiversity loss, and soil, air, and water pollution. The production of food is the largest cause of global environmental change as agriculture occupies around 40% of land worldwide, and food production is responsible for up to 30% of global greenhouse-gas emissions. The ongoing industrialisation and intensification of farming is also driving the global loss of biodiversity at an alarming rate.^{23,24}

Beyond the farm level, food choices continue to be driven by aggressive food distribution and the advertising of highly processed and refined foods. Industrial agriculture and the standardisation of tastes are wiping out many foods, along with their communities’ history, practices, and culture. Over the last 60 years, thousands of species, breeds, and varieties selected by humans, as well as processed foods - such as breads, cheeses and sweets - and their related know-how, have disappeared, demonstrating that food production is becoming less influenced by local cultural heritage.²⁵

In parallel, mitigating climate change is crucial to safeguarding many heritage sites and avoiding their deterioration or the loss of biodiversity in natural sites. Studies have shown that half of Europe’s alpine glaciers could disappear by the end of the 21st century due to temperature rise, while soil deterioration in southern Europe under warmer and drier conditions will lead to desertification, affecting also archaeological and other heritage sites such as agricultural landscapes for food, the production of which is highly dependent on climatic conditions.

Certain traditional production models have the potential to adapt to, or even help mitigate climate change, for example:

- **Agricultural biodiversity**, also commonly known as crop diversity, on which many traditional farming methods rely, yields important ecosystem services on the farm such as pollination, fertility and nutrient enhancement, insect and disease management, and water retention²⁶;
- **Traditional plants** are not only extremely nutritious but also have the characteristics to adapt to climate change (such as quinoa, chenopods, or sorghum).^{27,28} Over 14,000 edible plant species exist, many of which are sadly under-consumed. The production of many of these traditional crops has been replaced by that of more marketable crops such as rice, maize, and wheat which contribute up to 60% of the calories consumed by humans today.

Food heritage is transversal and offers immense potential to drive climate action, influence consumption patterns and support a just and inclusive transition by communities towards a healthier, greener, and fairer society as well as a climate resilient economy.

SPECIAL FEATURE: SLOW FOOD ARK OF TASTE PROJECT²⁹

"HOW TO BUILD THE WORLD'S LARGEST CATALOGUE OF FLAVOURS: A HERITAGE TO DISCOVER AND TO SAVE"

The Ark of Taste is an online catalogue of foods at risk of disappearing that are a part of the cultures and traditions of the entire world. Over 5,000 products from 160 countries around the world are listed. Plant and animal species are to be found aboard the Ark, but also processed products, because, together with plant and animal biodiversity, cheeses, cured meats, breads and sweets, the expression of farmers' and artisans' knowledge, is also disappearing. This knowledge does not exist in written recipes, but as complex and valuable skills and practices passed down through generations. The Ark of Taste was created to point out the existence of these products, draw attention to the risk of their extinction and invite everyone to take action to help protect them by seeking them out, buying and tasting them, telling their story, supporting their producers and, in some cases (such as for wild species at risk of extinction) promoting their conservation and reproduction. The overall objective is not to create a seed bank, a collection of genetic material or museum to exhibit traditional knowledge, but to rediscover and give value to these resources to support local economies.

→ Food heritage - key for sustainable local development

Cultural heritage constitutes the soul and spirit of a territory. It is of inherent value for local communities and is present in all aspects of life: traditions, ethics, social behaviour, monuments, sites, crafts, art, inventions, etc. Hence, tangible, and intangible cultural heritage are a key component and contributor to the attractiveness of Europe's regions, cities, towns, and rural areas³⁰ in terms of:

- Quality of life, providing character, ambience and making them attractive places to visit, live, and work in.
- Private sector inward investment, developing cultural creative quarters, attracting talents and businesses - thereby enhancing regional competitiveness both in Europe and globally.
- Economic and sustainable development of rural areas and cultural landscapes which may suffer from depopulation and lack of investment.

The valorisation of food heritage can help create and maintain sustainable jobs, skills as well as farmers' livelihoods at a time when farms are disappearing at an alarming rate. Between 2003 and 2013, more than 1 in 4 farms disappeared from the European landscape.³¹ This is particularly relevant today as many communities have suffered dramatic economic losses from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and could greatly benefit from efforts to better protect food heritage and move towards a greener and more sustainable post-crisis Europe. Indeed, many small and medium-sized farms were heavily impacted by the disruptions caused by the pandemic, including the labour shortages due to the suspension of the free movement of seasonal workers on whom they rely heavily, price volatility, and for many, the loss of major clients with the closure of the tourism sector.³² The pandemic crisis has also put more than 7 million cultural and creative jobs at risk in Europe, these sectors being particularly vulnerable due to the prevalence of small and medium-sized enterprises and non-profits.³³

SPECIAL FEATURE: SLOW FOOD PRESIDIA PROJECT³⁴

The Slow Food Presidia bring together communities of producers who are willing to collaborate and jointly establish production rules and ways of promoting their product. The objective is to save native breeds, vegetable varieties and artisanal products at risk of disappearing. Presidia strengthen producer organisations, promote the local area, preserve traditional methods and knowledge, and support sustainable practices. Slow Food assists the producers (by organising training and exchanges), promotes products through communicating their stories (of producers, knowledge, local areas and production methods) and can use the Slow Food network to link producers with consumers (by means of events, the involvement of chefs and support for forms of direct sale such as farmers' markets and purchasing groups). There are now over 400 Presidia in 50 countries around the world. Slow Food's efforts to protect these types of products are linked to its desire to oppose the growing globalisation of consumption and production, a cultural standardisation which is inevitably leading to reduced biodiversity. Biodiversity is considered not only in terms of genetic heritage but diversity of geographical areas, traditional cultures, food products, knowledge of food, and the nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic properties associated with the multitude of different animal and plant species. The Presidia protect good products, i.e. with distinctive sensory qualities whose roots lie in local culture; clean products, i.e. produced using sustainable methods that respect the local environment and traditions; and fair products, i.e. produced in a way that respects peoples' rights and culture, while assuring them a reasonable financial return. Over the years, the Presidia project has become a flagship tool for sustaining local development, both in the EU and globally, by sustaining farmers' livelihoods, protecting the land, and promoting and marketing quality food products.

→ Food heritage - key for sustainable cultural tourism

Cultural heritage, especially in its intangible form, is a living concept that "provides European countries and regions with a unique identity, creating compelling narratives as the basis for effective marketing strategies aimed at developing cultural tourism and attracting investment."³⁵

Cultural tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing tourism segments worldwide and accounts for 40% of all European tourism. However, tourism destinations in Europe are increasingly challenged to find the right balance between the preservation of cultural heritage, the demands of tourists and the needs of residents (e.g. loss of authenticity of local customs). Due to lockdowns, border closures and other restrictive measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19, the tourism sector, including in rural areas, has been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic crisis, putting some 13 million European jobs at risk.³⁶

Yet, tourism and culture contribute greatly to our economies and societies and have the potential to be key assets for Europe's recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic. This crisis constitutes an opportunity to promote more sustainable, local and innovative forms of tourism, to discover hidden cultural landscapes and taste their locally produced foods, thereby creating social, environmental, and economic benefits for public and private stakeholders as well as the communities that surround them. Sustainable cultural tourism in this way provides multiple added values to intangible cultural heritage by:

- Raising awareness of its uniqueness, richness, and importance, balancing properly its promotion and safeguarding³⁷;
- Enhancing the sense of place by making it alive, enjoyable, and developing first-hand experiences by and for visitors and residents alike.³⁸

SPECIAL FEATURE: SLOW FOOD TRAVEL³⁹

Behind every place lie stories, gastronomic traditions, artisanal flavours, and time-honoured practices, preserved by women and men whose identities and cultures have been constructed over centuries.

Slow Food Travel offers a new model for tourism made up of meetings and exchanges with farmers, cheesemakers, herders, butchers, bakers and winegrowers who, along with the chefs who cook their products, will be the narrators of their local areas and unique guides to the local traditions. The aim is to bring travellers closer to the preservation of food biodiversity and to develop an understanding of local cultures, identities, and gastronomies. Journeys will often include visits to Slow Food Presidia, encounters with Ark of Taste products and stays with Terra Madre food communities. Hospitality will be offered directly by the producers or by hoteliers and chefs who use local good, clean, and fair ingredients in their kitchens.

→ Food heritage - key for social cohesion and inclusion

Intangible cultural heritage, such as food heritage, reflects our shared history, memory, and multiple identities, not only local, regional, and national, but also European. Passed on across generations and communities, it reinforces a sense of belonging to a larger European family and shared cultural identity by:

- Bringing us together, regardless of our cultural, religious, or ethnic background, across national and linguistic boundaries, thus facilitating a mutual understanding and creating a respectful dialogue between people;
- Providing us with a greater understanding of centuries of intercultural exchanges across Europe, thus adding value to the sense of place.

The COVID-19 outbreak has been particularly detrimental to the most vulnerable citizens, especially in rural areas. Many rituals and festivities with a great cultural value have been cancelled preventing communities from gathering and putting the transmission of knowledge, values as well as intergenerational and intercultural dialogue at risk. Isolation is having a negative impact on people's well-being and mental health, which shows the importance of the interaction among people and with places and elements of significance. On the other hand, the disruptions the pandemic caused to the food and agricultural sector led to outbursts of solidarity, including between actors of local food systems all across Europe, working together to help small and medium-sized producers who found themselves without clients, and to salvage food that would otherwise go wasted.

Food heritage can be a cohesive force for the future of Europe and its citizens by helping to enhance social cohesion in communities, providing a framework for participation and engagement as well as fostering solidarity and integration of new inhabitants in Europe.

SPECIAL FEATURE: FOOD TALES FROM MIGRANTS

Based on the worldwide-recognised method of the Human Library and on the experience of the Slow Food Terra Madre migrant communities in Italy, "Food tales" initiatives with migrants' communities have been organised in the context of the Food is Culture project involving around 30 migrants in Sweden and Italy. The growing number of refugees and immigrants in European countries makes it necessary to foster a greater understanding of diversity in cultures, identities, histories, and traditions. Talking about food entails sharing stories of the thousands of relations that food generates. What better way to deepen these relationships than through living libraries in which the books are living men and women, ready to recount their experiences? Sitting face to face, migrants and the public have the chance to talk about their culinary traditions and life experiences without barriers.

[Video: Migrant Stories⁴⁰](#)

3 Food heritage: current EU policy framework

Cultural heritage is unique and irreplaceable, but often vulnerable or even endangered. This also concerns intangible cultural heritage like food heritage.⁴¹ Over the last years, cultural heritage has gained importance at EU policy level, paving the way for 2018 to become the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Most recently, the link between food, culture, heritage and tourism was recognised in the European Commission's **Communication on tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond**⁴² presented in May 2020 by Commissioner Thierry Breton, proposing technological and financial solutions to support the revival of the sectors. When considering some of these key policy developments, it becomes evident that there is a framework for the promotion and safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage. Yet the question remains whether this framework is sufficiently adapted to the dual nature of food heritage - which is of cultural heritage intrinsically linked to agricultural, food, and rural development policies.

→ Key elements of the EU policy framework for cultural heritage

The European Council most recently recognised the importance of culture and cultural heritage - both tangible and intangible - by including it among the EU's priorities in the **New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024** which states "*We will invest in culture and our cultural heritage, which are at the heart of our European identity*".⁴³ This is an unprecedented recognition of cultural heritage as a priority for EU action.

The following milestones also acknowledged the important benefits of cultural heritage and the need to ensure EU action for its protection and promotion:

- The **Council conclusions on risk management in the area of cultural heritage** of May 2020 recalling that "*cultural heritage in all its diversity (whether tangible - including sites and landscapes, artefacts and monuments - or intangible, encompassing knowledge, skills and practices, oral traditions and performing arts) represents an important source of identity, innovation and creativity for individuals and society and, apart from its inestimable intrinsic value for the development and well-being of European society, it also makes an important contribution to economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development*".⁴⁴
- The **Council conclusions on the need to bring cultural heritage to the fore across policies in the EU** of May 2018 stated "*Cultural heritage in all its diversity and forms (...) is (...) a strategic resource for the sustainable future of Europe, helping to respond to social, economic and environmental challenges at different levels (...)*".⁴⁵
- Cultural heritage features as a transversal theme in the European Commission's **New European Agenda for Culture** (May 2018), which outlines how the EC will support EU Member States in tapping into culture's potential to foster innovation, economic growth and jobs as well as fostering ties between communities and strengthening Europe's external relations. Cultural heritage is a cross-cutting element in reaching these three objectives: namely the protection and promotion of "*Europe's cultural heritage as a shared resource, raising awareness of our common history and values and reinforcing a sense of common European identity*", but also the important need to "*promote the skills needed by cultural and creative sectors, including digital, entrepreneurial, traditional and specialised skills*".⁴⁶
- The Council **Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022** lists "sustainability in cultural heritage" as a priority and field of joint action. One focus is on the adaptation of the historical environment to climate change with the "design and transformation of the cultural landscape". However, there is no direct reference to the positive contribution of food heritage.⁴⁷

→ Key elements of the EU policy framework for food and agriculture

EU agricultural and food policies have been perpetuating an increasing industrialisation of our food systems, which is unsustainable from socio-cultural, economic, and environmental points of view. The industrial food system is ill-equipped to protect food heritage as it is based on the standardisation of food chains and has led to the loss of small farms, rural employment, and regional processing facilities. So far, EU policies are failing to properly address the severe and interconnected challenges of our food system. Indeed, food policy is fragmented and lacks an overarching framework, both at global and European level.^{48,49}

Therefore, attempts to protect food heritage in one policy domain are undermined by policies that continue to support the industrialisation of agriculture, at the expense of small-scale producers who are the key actors in protecting food heritage. For example:

- The **Common Agricultural Policy** direct payments scheme, which delivers subsidies per hectare, inherently favours large farms and increases the price of land, which is at odds with the need to support small-scale traditional farming, and with the Commission's objective of supporting young farmers through additional income support. It also fails to include ambitious environmental goals.⁵⁰
- The **EU Food Safety and Hygiene policy** has helped achieve a high level of protection of human health by setting high standards and harmonising control procedures. However it has done so at the expense of small-farmers and businesses who are penalised under the legislation, often unable to comply with the regulations that are designed and built for industrial facilities and production despite certain existing exemptions.^{51,52}
- **EU Quality Schemes:** Geographical Indication (Protected Designation of Origin/Protected Geographical Indication). According to the European commission, "*safeguarding traditions and know-how is a key aspect of geographical indications*",⁵³ which present real potential to protect food cultural heritage. EU quality schemes represent a sales value of €74.76 billion,⁵⁴ but several limitations exist. The production protocols are not always strictly established, leading to the endorsement of distorted ideas of tradition and quality, and to the industrialisation of productive processes. PDOs can cover too large areas and even industrial producers. The results are sometimes that the certified products do not have a true historical identity.⁵⁵ Additionally, the certification process of GIs is often too expensive for small-scale farmers. Finally, geography-based certifications do not include environmental nor social dimensions further than as a product valorisation.⁵⁶ The ongoing revision of the GI schemes will represent an important opportunity to bring the focus back onto protecting cultural heritage whilst pursuing the EU's environmental ambitions.

EXAMPLE: STILTON CHEESE⁵⁷

In 1996 Stilton obtained PDO status from the EU, whose legislation anticipated the obligatory use of pasteurised milk during production. This clashed with the traditional production method of using raw milk. To date, only one producer of Stilton cheese using raw milk remains, who does not qualify for the PDO certification and must name their cheese "Stichelton" instead.

Whilst these examples highlight the inconsistencies of certain conflicting policies, there has been recent acknowledgement that more integrated policy is needed to address the challenges faced by the European food system. The European Commission's **Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food** shows a welcome change in narrative by proposing a more holistic approach and emphasising the collaboration between departments on policies pertaining to food.⁵⁸ These recent developments were preceded by the following milestones calling for greater coherence in food-related policies:

- The European Council **New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024** includes a "climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe" among its four main priorities, confirming a willingness to "improve the environment in our cities and our countryside", "promote sustainable agriculture" and "fight the loss of biodiversity and preserve environmental systems, including oceans".⁵⁹
- The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)'s opinion calls for a **Comprehensive European food policy** that "should improve coherence across food-related policy areas, restore the value of food and promote a long-term shift from food productivism and consumerism to food citizenship". The EESC also stresses the need to maintain a culture that values the nutritional and cultural importance of food on top of its social and environmental impacts.⁶⁰
- The Science Advice for Policy by European Academies (SAPEA)'s report for **A Sustainable Food System for the EU** highlights the "need for food policies to be better integrated across domains (environment, health, trade etc.) if they are to be effective in delivering greater justice and sustainability."⁶¹

Unfortunately, whilst a big step has been taken towards integrated food policy, the Commission has missed the opportunity to adequately recognise the cultural importance of food in its new Farm to Fork Strategy.

→ Food heritage in the EU's financial recovery instruments

On 21 July 2020, EU leaders reached a historic [agreement](#)⁶² on a €1 824.3 billion package for Europe's recovery and revival, with increased support for Europe's social cohesion and resilience through a green and digital transition. This package combines the "Next Generation EU" Recovery Fund and the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027.

The new MFF includes a slight increase of the Creative Europe programme budget (2021-2027), which amounts to €1,64 billion compared to €1,46 billion for the period 2014-2020. Whilst no budget cuts were made to this vital programme supporting the cultural and creative sectors, including cultural heritage, other priority areas such as innovation, research or education have unfortunately seen their budgets decrease. The European Parliament is [strongly advocating](#)⁶³ for the elimination of these budget cuts for these programmes which are considered as vital investment in Europe's future talents and young generation.

The "Next Generation EU" recovery package amounts to €750 billion. This unprecedented programme has potential relevance for the food heritage sector with a special emphasis on the Recovery and Resilience Facility (with an overall budget of €672.5 billion to support investments and reforms with a lasting impact on the productivity and resilience of Member States' economies) as well as the ReactEU instrument (an additional €55 billion to the ongoing cohesion policy programmes). During the European Parliament Plenary Sitting on 17 September 2020, MEPs adopted a resolution on the "Cultural Recovery of Europe" calling on the European Commission and EU countries to earmark at least 2% of the Recovery and Resilience Facility for targeted support to the cultural sector.

4 Recommendations for a better safeguard of food heritage at EU level

→ Recommendation 1: Fully recognise the value of food heritage as a transversal sector

- The value and beneficial impacts of food heritage on Europe's culture, economy, society and environment shall be fully recognised, as it is closely linked and interrelated to, among others, agriculture and sustainable development, health and wellbeing, economic growth and micro-economy dynamism, urban and rural planning, sustainable tourism, research and digital innovation, education and lifelong learning. The preservation of food heritage is therefore crucial to Europe's sustainable socio-economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, it ought to be specifically integrated into the text of the European Green Deal.
- This recognition should be translated into stronger financial support from the EU for safeguarding, as well as enhancing the green and digital transition of the food heritage sector in a post-crisis world. The EU's short and long-term recovery instruments should ensure appropriate support measures for food heritage in the frame of, among others, the Creative Europe programme (cultural and creative sector), Interreg (territorial cooperation), Horizon Europe (research and innovation), Erasmus + (learning and mobility), Health programme (well-being), LIFE programme (environment and climate action) and the Common Agricultural Policy.
- The relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage should be better integrated into policies and programmes of the European Union (e.g. the European Capitals of Culture). This could be developed into a deeper collaboration with the Council of Europe (e.g. Cultural Routes programmes, European Heritage Days) as well as UNESCO (e.g. List of Intangible Cultural Heritage).

Action 1: We recommend to the European Commission to enshrine the so-called "**Integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe**", which considers that the resources allocated to gastronomic heritage can be optimised through interaction with other EU policies, such as the European Green Deal, Common Agricultural Policy and consumer protection policy.⁶⁴ This recognition should be enlarged to include all the sectors mentioned above and applied to the integrated approach developed with the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (which is only a "Staff Working Document" covering the limited period 2019-2020).⁶⁵

Action 2: We recommend to the EU Council Presidency held by Germany (until December 2020) under the motto "**Together for Europe's Recovery**", to play a key role in negotiating the final recovery instruments with the European Parliament and

the European Commission, as well as the following Presidencies to ensure their long-lasting beneficial impacts. The resources available for the food heritage sector as part of the Next Generation EU recovery instrument and the MFF (2021-2027) should be appropriate to support the much-needed recovery and resilience of the sector and its communities.

Action 3: We recommend to the European Commission to go further in developing a **Common Food Policy** based on a fully integrated approach to food policy, including the production, processing, distribution and consumption, but also the cultural and social sustainability of food.⁶⁶ There is a need to move from an agriculture-focused policy, to a food system-focused policy. The Commission should ensure that the Farm to Fork strategy better addresses the protection of gastronomic cultural heritage at every step of the food chain, and ensure integration with the post-2020 CAP which will be a key tool in reaching the Strategy's environmental, social and cultural ambition.

→ Recommendation 2: Set up a participatory and multi-stakeholder governance for food heritage

- To be consistent with the integrated approach to EU food heritage policies, a multi-stakeholder governance system based on the principles of participatory governance and shared responsibility should be put in place to ensure genuine cooperation across all policy frameworks and actors involved. Such a group or platform shall be linked to existing EU initiatives to maximise the exchange of available expertise, and allow (cross-sectoral) cooperation both horizontally (between local, regional and national authorities and the European Commission) and vertically (including all actors involved in the ecosystem such as civil society organisation, international organisations and businesses).
- To fully deploy the inclusive and cohesive power of food heritage it is essential to further involve local communities to foster civil society engagement, as well as a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and well-being. Creative and innovative approaches promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue to reach out to locals, farmers, and migrants, especially young and in rural areas, should be integrated in all EU initiatives and projects.
- The revival and safeguard of food traditions in a sustainable way should be participatory and community-led to accompany the increased return to domestic food production/farming and interest in reconnecting with food, nature, identity, and heritage in consumption. Such initiatives could take the form of collaborative and participatory platforms to support the identification and dissemination of good practices of crisis management and preparedness of the food heritage sector, while adapting to contemporary society and interacting with other cultures.
- The transmission of traditional knowledge, skills and customs related to food heritage should be enhanced within education and lifelong learning policies while involving the local and new communities through intergenerational and intercultural dialogue. It should generate job, mobility opportunities, risk management skills, and support digital skills with the aim to foster innovation, strengthen participation, understanding and access to food heritage by digital means.

Action 4: We recommend to the European Commission to build on the success of the inter-service consultation on cultural heritage set up during the EYCH 2018, which brought together representatives from 19 Directorate-Generals of the European Commission. It contributed to developing unprecedented synergies across EU programmes, policies and initiatives shaping the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage. Such a method should be applied within the established **Commission Expert Group on Cultural Heritage** to maintain the spirit of cooperation and policy dialogue achieved during the EYCH 2018.

Action 5: We recommend to the European Commission to strengthen its policies to **encourage community projects at local level**, supporting urban and rural sustainable development and community resilience. Such transformative policies and projects must put the cultural value of communities at their heart, involve farmers and reach out to the public, with emphasis on young people, creating intercultural and intergenerational exchanges around food heritage, but also contributing to social inclusion, cohesion and to creative economic growth. Community gardening, local markets, micro-breweries, or traditional bakeries are good examples of community projects raising awareness of food heritage sites and traditions.

Action 6: We recommend to the European Commission to **tackle the incoherencies between EU policies pertaining to food and farming**, and therefore to food heritage, strengthening the measures in place to protect the small-scale farmers on which gastronomic food heritage depends to a great extent. This should be done by challenging hectare-based payments schemes, encouraging and investing in the development of short food supply chains across the EU, and drastically increasing the support to young farmers and sustainable practices.

About the project

Food is Culture is a cooperation project funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union (in the frame of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018), with the contribution of the Fondazione CRC di Cuneo, led by Slow Food with its partners Europa Nostra, Kinookus, Nova Iskra Creative Hub, and Transpond AB. It aims to make European citizens aware that food heritage is a means for expressing their belonging to Europe and for better understanding the wealth and uniqueness of Europe's cultural diversity. The project entails several activities, such as a travelling [multimedia artwork exhibition](#) featuring endangered products from Slow Food's Ark of Taste, the Food Tales from migrants, school educational activities and cookery contests with chefs, as well as this present EU policy brief, a component of the project which is led by Europa Nostra.

Acknowledgement

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission through the Creative Europe program. This publication reflects the views only of the authors - Europa Nostra and Slow Food - and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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Published: October 2020

About Slow Food

[Slow Food](#) is an international, non-profit organisation that pursues cultural, environmental, and social goals around the central role of food. Since its beginnings in 1989, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people in over 160 countries, working to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us. Slow Food works through three levels of action: active participation in policy dialogue at international, national, and local levels; consumer education and awareness-raising campaigns; grassroots projects to support producers defending local food biodiversity.

About Europa Nostra

[Europa Nostra](#) is the leading pan-European federation of heritage NGOs active for more than 50 years in over 40 countries. Supported by a wide network of public bodies, private companies, and individuals, Europa Nostra is recognised as the most representative heritage network in Europe and THE voice of civil society committed to safeguarding and promoting Europe's cultural heritage. Europa Nostra contributes to the development of heritage-related policies and strategies in Europe, celebrates excellence and promote best practices through the [European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards](#)⁶⁷ and campaigns to save Europe's most endangered monuments, sites and landscapes, above all through the [7 Most Endangered](#)⁶⁸ programme.

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