



FOOD IS
FOOD CULTURE



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EU policy brief on food & cultural heritage



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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. In parallel, culture remains a paramount underlying factor influencing citizens' food choices, and an important link to traditions and cultural representations. However, in an era where global supply chains are standardising the food most easily accessible to consumers, the link between citizens and their food heritage 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 culture 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. Through this paper, the Food is Culture project partners intend to draw the EU institutions' attention to the value of food cultural heritage as a social, economic and environmental asset, with a special focus on the vast potential of the cultural and creative sector that needs to be further supported through a conducive and coherent policy framework encompassing culture, growth, environment and intercultural dialogue.

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".

Examples of recognized intangible food heritage:

At international level: 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](#) or [Beer culture in Belgium](#)

At European level: the [Subterranean Caves and Wineries of El Cotarro](#) (Spain) was awarded the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards

At national level: the [cultivation of black currant \(Korinthian\) in Western Peloponnese](#) is inscribed in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Greece.

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. 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 resilience and socio-economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

→ 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. Over the last 60 years, due to ongoing industrialization of farming, thousands of species, breeds, and varieties selected by humans have disappeared, demonstrating that food production is becoming less influenced by local cultural heritage. In parallel, mitigating climate change is crucial to safeguarding many heritage sites and avoiding their deterioration or the loss of biodiversity in natural sites.

Food heritage 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.

→ Food heritage - key for sustainable local development

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage is a key component and contributor to the attractiveness of Europe's regions, cities, towns, and rural areas in terms of:

- Quality of life, providing character, ambience and making them attractive places to live, work, and visit;
- 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 lack of investments and depopulation.

The valorization of food heritage can help create and maintain sustainable jobs and livelihoods for farmers, in 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. This is particularly relevant today as many communities have suffered dramatic economic losses from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, both in the agricultural, and cultural and creative sectors, and could greatly benefit from efforts to better protect food heritage and move towards a greener and more sustainable post-crisis Europe.

→ Food heritage - key for sustainable cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is the fastest growing sector of European tourism. A sustainable approach to cultural tourism based on the integrated management of cultural heritage and tourism activities, and involving the local community, creates social, environmental, and economic benefits for all stakeholders. Sustainable cultural tourism in this way provides multiple added values to cultural heritage by:

- Raising awareness of its uniqueness and importance, balancing properly its promotion and protection while contributing to its safeguarding;
- Enhancing the sense of place and heritage interpretation by making it alive, enjoyable, and developing first-hand experiences by and for visitors and residents alike.

→ Food heritage - key for social cohesion and inclusion

At a time when the European project and values are faced with so many challenges, intangible cultural heritage including food heritage, can reinforce 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.

3 Food heritage: current EU policy framework

Cultural heritage, including food heritage, is unique and irreplaceable, but often vulnerable or even endangered. Over the last years, cultural heritage has gained importance at EU policy level. 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](#). On the other hand, EU agricultural and food policies have been perpetuating an increasing industrialisation of our food systems which have become ill-equipped to protect food heritage. Standardisation of food chains has led to the loss of small farms, rural employment, and regional processing facilities. 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.

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

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

Action 1: We recommend to the European Commission to enshrine the **“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 Common Agricultural Policy and consumer protection policy.

Action 2: We recommend to the EU Council Presidency held by Germany 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, and ensure that resources available for the food heritage sector are 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, to also include the cultural and social sustainability of food. 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.

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

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. Such a method should be applied within the newly 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 projects must involve farmers and reach out to the public, creating intercultural and intergenerational exchanges around food heritage, and contributing to social inclusion, cohesion and to creative economic growth.

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.

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 led by Europa Nostra.

About Slow Food:

[Slow Food](#) is an international, non-profit organization 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 and campaigns to save Europe's most endangered monuments, sites and landscapes, above all through the [7Most Endangered programme](#).

References: available in the full policy brief available [here](#)

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