

Food as Cultural Heritage: Rediscovering the Link between People, Place, and Plate

When we talk about food production and consumption, especially in the countries of the Global North, we are faced with an increasingly obvious phenomenon: the growing distance between producers and consumers. On the one hand, food supply chains are becoming longer and more complex; on the other, we know less and less who produces the food we eat and where it comes from. This standardization of supply chains has made products more homogenous, but impoverishes the social, economic and environmental link between food and community, creating uniform and anonymous agricultural landscapes.

To counteract a food system that risks being unsustainable, nutritionally poor and socially unjust, initiatives have sprung up to promote more sustainable food, both at the individual, local and supra-local level. Thus we speak of *relocalisation*, *reconnection* and *re-territorialisation*, with the idea of creating 'alternative geographies of food', where proximity is not only physical but also cultural and identity: bringing food and people closer together becomes a value in itself.



These initiatives are helping to reduce the knowledge gap between those who consume and those who produce food, creating new bridges between producers and consumers. Each actor in the food chain contributes his or her own experiences and values, so it is essential that there is dialogue and collaboration between them. This approach strengthens the link between food and local communities and enhances production at a territorial level.

Today we rediscover the importance of local food systems that are not rigid but constantly redefining, where the boundary between global and local and between production and consumption becomes more fluid. In this way, food is transformed into cultural heritage: a set of tastes, stories and characteristics linked to who produces it and the territories where it is born

A concrete example of this approach is the *New Wellness Education* association, active in



Bergolo, a small village in northern Italy. For several years, it has been promoting European mobility projects to foster exchanges and dialogues on food systems, creating a link between food and territory through the participation of people from different cultures and backgrounds. The interaction between these diversities enriches and transforms the link between product and place, integrating local characteristics into a broader dimension. By involving

international organisations, the different levels of which food is a part are explored, from local systems to global urban and rural networks, offering a more comprehensive and multicultural view.

Among the initiatives implemented is an educational vegetable garden in Bergolo, where the principles of permaculture and regenerative agriculture guide the cultivation and management of water resources, with a system of agroforestry and rainwater recovery. The garden is also a place for meetings and activities, such as guided tours, workshops and community dinners, where the food produced is shared.

Sensualising the community on food issues, involving young people from different countries and cultures through youth exchanges enhances local skills and puts them in dialogue with those of mobile participants. This interaction creates a mutual learning environment, allowing for innovative territorial valorisation and building a generation more aware of the role of food in our lives.