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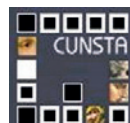
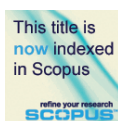
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Food identity and migrations: dynamic processes and local communities

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Abstract

Questo saggio teorico esplora in modo approfondito le diverse dimensioni del cibo come capitale culturale, delineandone le manifestazioni sia materiali che immateriali. Attraverso un'indagine approfondita, il testo si focalizza sull'analisi del cibo quale espressione intrinseca dell'identità individuale e sociale, estendendo il suo sguardo alle dinamiche culturali legate al cibo in contesti migratori. Adottando una prospettiva critica, il documento valuta l'importanza della dimensione locale nel contesto alimentare in relazione alla globalizzazione e ai fenomeni migratori, mettendo in evidenza sia i rischi che le opportunità insite in questo scenario. La conclusione del lavoro propone una definizione del concetto di "identità alimentare", posizionando il cibo al centro come strumento in grado

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di plasmare e riflettere le identità lungo l'intero arco della vita. Ancorata in un presente relazionale, questa prospettiva abbraccia dimensioni materiali, agite e incarnate. Il saggio costituisce un contributo al discorso accademico sulla complessa relazione tra cibo, identità e migrazioni, promuovendo una prospettiva interdisciplinare.

This theoretical essay delves into the various facets of food as a form of cultural capital, encapsulating both tangible and intangible aspects. The paper concentrates on examining food as an inherent representation of individual and societal identities, extending its scope to examine the cultural dynamics of food in the context of migration. Using a critical lens, the essay evaluates the significance of local nuances in food against the backdrop of globalization and migration, shedding light on the potential challenges and benefits in this scenario. The essay concludes by proposing a definition for 'food identity', positioning food as an influential element that molds and mirrors identities throughout a person's lifetime. This perspective, rooted in the present relation between food and identity, encompasses physical, actioned, and embodied dimensions. The essay adds to scholarly discussions surrounding the intricate link between food, identity, and migration, advocating for a multifaceted viewpoint.

1. *Introduction*

In the context of the contemporary world, food emerges as a powerful tool of cultural and identity expression, capable of shaping the interactions between local and global dimensions. The concept of glocalization, as elucidated by Roland Robertson¹, portrays the intricate interplay between global forces and local particularities. It underscores that local cultures are not merely passive in the face of globalization; rather, they are actively engaged in reworking and reinterpreting external influences within their own cultural contexts. This paper aims to conduct a theoretical analysis of the local and global dimensions related to food and food practices, considering them to be key determinants in the construction and definition of cultural and social identities within communities. The article employs an interdisciplinary approach that engages in a dialogue between psychology and geography. It analyzes food as tangible and intangible cultural capital, its function in the construction of individual and social identity, and the cultural dynamics related to migration phenomena. Subsequently, the examination will proceed to investigate the local food dynamics and the challenges posed by globalization. Ultimately, the conclusions will propose a critical reflection, introducing the construct of "food identity" as a synthesis of the interaction between the local and global dimensions. Furthermore, the role of food as a vehicle of historical memory, territorial belonging, and intercultural dialogue will be highlighted.

¹ Robertson 1995.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Food as (in)tangible cultural capital

Food significantly defines a community's cultural identity, serving as both a tangible and intangible asset. This is because it is associated with cultural practices, knowledge, and meanings beyond its physical aspect.

The term “tangible cultural property” encompasses all knowledge and practices related to a community's material needs and behaviors, highlighting the visible elements and products of culture². These material cultural goods are physical objects of cultural, historical, artistic, and symbolic importance, forming a crucial part of a society's cultural heritage. Government agencies and institutions work tirelessly to safeguard these items through special laws. Moreover, these material cultural assets have a global connection. They play a role as identifiers amongst various populations and cultures, fostering exchange, diplomacy, and cultural tourism while promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. One such clear example is food and its associated lore. Food, being the byproduct of communities creatively and selectively interacting with their environment, fits this mold³. This pertains to both the ingredients and typical food products of an area, as well as the utensils used to transform them into recipes. But food extends beyond mere nourishment to meet basic survival needs. It has always been instrumental in molding our individual and collective identities. It stands as a testament to our historical memories, lifestyle, authority systems, rituals, beliefs, and technological progressions. In sum, food plays a pivotal role in our lives. The act of consuming food allows us to socialize and connect with others on cultural grounds, making food practices critical to our daily routines⁴. As a direct reflection of culture, history, and region, food can also be classified as an intangible cultural asset⁵. This is legally governed, and as per the Constitutional Court's judgment no. 118/1990, it is an asset the State must protect “*both for their intrinsic cultural value and because they represent a testimony to the history of civilization*”. Intangible cultural assets encompass attributes such as community knowledge, traditions, practices, and expressions. The construct of food undeniably asserts itself as an impactful medium of self-portrayal and cross-cultural dialogue⁶. The community's ownership of food as an intangible cultural asset is evident in numerous ways: traditional preparation techniques highlighting transgenerational knowledge and skills; social and ceremonial food practices like familial meal traditions or

² Cicerchia 2010.

³ Polacchini 2016.

⁴ Cuevas 2021.

⁵ Beer 2016; Csergo 2018; Bortolotto, Ubertaini 2018.

⁶ Montanari 2006.

regular culinary events characterizing routines and rituals⁷; and food-related narratives, myths, and legends contributing to the building of a shared memory and cultural identity tied to food preferences.

Reflecting on food enriches the concept of culture and territorial heritage⁸. Ingredients and culinary practices are indicators of identity construction at both individual and collective levels, and a deeper consideration of these aspects and their interaction in societies promotes the preservation of different cultural food capitals.

2.2 *Food as an expression of self and social identity*

The food we consume not only nourishes us but also reflects our identity. Many social science studies have explored the connection between identity and eating habits, especially in relation to sustainable food choices⁹ and predicting eating behavior¹⁰. Yet, existing research on identity often suffers from inconsistent terminology and lacks a consolidated framework¹¹.

Identity is a fundamental construct in social sciences, leading to diverse theories surrounding it¹². Within food-related literature, the most commonly referenced ones are Identity Theory (IT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT). IT proposes that identities are evolving and multifaceted¹³. For instance, a person can identify as a mother, an omnivore, and an athlete simultaneously, each carrying its own set of motivations, values, and goals. The theory focuses on the interaction between a person's numerous identities and how their significance may shift based on context¹⁴. Conversely, SIT interprets identity as a social construct continually negotiated within social groups¹⁵. It explores how group identification influences behavioral persistence and concerns over negative judgment for inconsistent behavior. The theory also studies motivations for compliance, like fear of stigma and discrimination by those outside the group. Within theories concerning health and eating behavior, there's an increasing focus on incorporating the construct of identity, particularly within the Theory of Planned Behavior, which argues that a person's intentions strongly predict future behavior¹⁶.

⁷ Fiese 2006; Fiese *et al.* 2006; Migliorini *et al.* 2016a; 2016b.

⁸ Almansouri *et al.* 2021.

⁹ Randers *et al.* 2021.

¹⁰ Whitmarsh, O'Neill, 2010.

¹¹ Udall *et al.* 2020.

¹² Elliott 2021.

¹³ Burke, Stets 2009.

¹⁴ Stryker, Burke 2000.

¹⁵ Tajfel, Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981.

¹⁶ Ajzen 1991.

A recent thorough review of scholarly articles validates a significant link between eating habits and identity¹⁷ and underscores the need for extended research to apply identity theories to food-centered studies. It further emphasizes the focus on its formation, changes, and progression. Numerous facets of food intersect with identity specificities, comprising the potency of identity, salience, mutual influence, shifts in identity post substantial life events, adoption of healthy diets, intent to modify or persist eating habits over time, and affiliation with a particular group. Psychosocial studies tied to food should contemplate the identity construct to holistically understand its ties with different perspectives of individual and collective identity. In particular, the concept of place identity plays a pivotal role in shaping interactions between individuals and food. It contributes to a more profound comprehension of the cultural dynamics associated with a specific place and the factors that influence food choices. This concept is exemplified by numerous studies, such as those exploring the influence of a region's traditional cuisine on individuals' sense of belonging and cultural identity¹⁸. For example, it is established that in many cultures, family recipes and dishes that are typical of a particular area are linked to personal memories and meanings, thereby creating an enduring link between food and identity¹⁹. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that a region's culinary traditions can exert a profound influence on individuals' sense of belonging and cultural identity. This is due to the fact that such traditions reflect local resources and historical traditions, thereby strengthening the bond between people and their home territory²⁰. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that culinary experiences associated with particular places can influence food preferences and shape cultural perceptions of food²¹. For instance, the consumption of typical dishes during local holidays can reinforce cultural identity and create a sense of continuity between the past and the present. Additionally, accounting for the importance of place identity enhances the interdisciplinary approach of this research as it accentuates the ties between individuals and their environment in forming identity and influencing cultural dynamics about food. Special reference is made to the framework introduced by Proshansky²² that discusses self-dimensions defining personal identity in relation to the physical environment, a concept later adopted by environmental psychology. Elements of place identity shaped by past experiences, present

¹⁷ Gerber, Folta 2022.

¹⁸ Bessière 1998; Reddy, Dam 2020.

¹⁹ Appadurai 1988.

²⁰ Duruz 2005; Źarski 2013; Danielson 2021.

²¹ Taheri, Gannon 2021.

²² Proshansky 1983.

conditions, and future expectations aid in developing a deep tie between individuals and place throughout their lifespan²³.

Place identity captures not just how individuals associate with a specific location but also how experiences in that place shape cultural dynamics and dietary choices. A broader understanding of how food fits into this framework contributes to a more comprehensive, interdisciplinary perspective of the relationships among identity, place, and nutrition. Food choices, preparation, service, and consumption are instrumental in defining identities at various levels, including personal, familial, national, religious, and, in the following section's focus, ethnic-cultural²⁴.

2.3 Cultural dynamics of food in migration phenomena

Italy, as one of the largest immigration countries in the European Union, is characterized by a well-structured migratory phenomenon that involves the national system in addressing various traditions, roles, languages, religions, and foods. These elements are considered valid expressions of different cultural identities²⁵.

Dietary habits, shaped by economic conditions, religious beliefs and ingredient availability, mirror diverse cultural interpretations and historical eras²⁶. Urban migration and market globalization have introduced new foods and international restaurants, enabling various cultures to interact via cuisine. This has sparked exchange and fusion processes. However, many worry that this culinary blending could endanger their cultural identity and traditional cuisine. Considering cuisine as an aspect of culture with strong, traditional, and unchanging identity boundaries is, however, unfounded from a “*historical, pragmatic, and scientific*”²⁷ perspective. Throughout history, people have engaged in exchanges of all kinds, and cuisine is just one result of this continuous circulation of knowledge. Those who hypothesize rigid typicality, exclusivity, and immutability of culinary traditions forget that what can now be defined as a typical Italian dish is often nothing more than a reworking of products and specialties from other cultures, as well as the blending of raw materials from the farthest corners of the world. Instead of being divisive, food often reveals deep connections between people. Asserting this does not deny the presence of uniqueness and established traditions of a territory and a community that,

²³ Migliorini, Venini 2001.

²⁴ Randers *et al.* 2021; Ciliotta-Rubery 2016.

²⁵ Allievi 2019.

²⁶ Arcadu 2023; Arcadu *et al.* 2024; Weisberg-Shapiro, Devine 2015.

²⁷ Kumalè 2007, p. 6.

as already emphasized, must be preserved to avoid losing important cultural assets characteristic of a society and a territory.

In today's unpredictable society²⁸, there's a growing need to identify with a collective identity that clearly separates 'us' from 'them'. A primary medium for this shared identity is cuisine²⁹, as many political strategies show. The 19th-century Italian identity, for instance, was partly shaped by Pellegrino Artusi's book, *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiare bene*³⁰, whose interpretation by Italian migrants in the Americas contributed, between the 19th and 20th centuries, to the construction of a food-related sense of national and regional belonging³¹. Traces of this connection across the Atlantic Ocean are still evident today in various regions of North, Central and South America³².

This group identity not only provides a framework for self-recognition but also defines a distinct counterpart. Furthermore, proximity heightens our awareness of being a tight-knit group different from others, even in our diet³³. Maintaining different eating habits can reinforce social boundaries and symbolic differences. This concept, termed reactive identity³⁴, can be applied to food: "*reacting against something that is characteristic of someone else, often reasserting imaginary or dormant identities*"³⁵. We revitalize our culinary traditions in response to encountering different tastes, flavors, and smells offered by others. Migration provides an excellent lens for examining reactive culinary identities. This process occurs in a twofold manner: the rediscovery and reaffirmation of traditional and local food principles rooted in one's culture and the exploration of diverse food elements resulting from different influences sharing the same territory. Examining the interaction between these food influences offers a unique opportunity to explore how food dynamics shift in response to migration and influence identities.

In conclusion, the reinterpretation of culinary traditions in light of such influences leads to a careful consideration of risks and opportunities and the emergence of renewed identities that blend the past and present, local and global³⁶.

²⁸ Beck 2000; Bauman 1999.

²⁹ Parasecoli 2022.

³⁰ Artusi 1891 (tr.: "Science in the kitchen and the art of eating well").

³¹ Grandi 2018.

³² Chiaricati 2022; see also the special issue of the journal «Confluenze. Rivista di studi iberoamericani» titled *Cibo e Migrazioni*, XI, 1, 2019.

³³ Arcadu *et al.* 2024b.

³⁴ Allievi 2018.

³⁵ Ivi p. 111.

³⁶ Jia 2021.

3. *The food and the need of the “local”*

The intensification of urbanization extends beyond physical city expansion. It reflects the diffusion of urban perspectives, practices, and expectations throughout diverse territories. This city-influenced transformation portrays the city as a multifaceted and dynamic player, with a chorus of actors contributing to its evolution³⁷. In this context, place is not a fixed and bounded entity (*topos*) but an open-ended, relationally connected space (*chôra*)³⁸. Furthermore, place is intrinsically a lived space but “*is also generative, since living bodies are constituted by, as well as constitutive of places*”³⁹. For this reason, authors such as Barron *et al.*⁴⁰ suggest that the concept of place should be seen as the result of a process of emplacement, which connects the local community within its lived space and achieves the goals of sustainability.

These observations prompt reflection on food’s significance within globalization⁴¹, particularly as a creator of identity links between individuals, communities, and regions⁴². An effective exploratory approach includes two levels: firstly, potential agronomic innovations that shift agricultural practices from agribusiness dominance toward ecological purposes at the local scale, and secondly, the emerging societal appreciation of food as a cultural asset and varying interpretations of its heritage significance. Emerging agricultural approaches around the world, typified by polyculture and enhanced biodiversity within farmed ecosystems, stand in opposition to typical chemical use. These methods, prioritizing ecological processes within crops, aim to preserve or restore the organic soil component and the nutritional wealth of crops. Accordingly, diverse farming systems have emerged over the years, known by various names such as organic, biodynamic, synergetic, regenerative farming, and so on. Each has unique features with a focus on specific elements, a detailed analysis of which is beyond the scope of this text. Their commonality lies in the shared goal of agricultural innovation, aimed at liberating it from agribusiness-oriented global processes and reinstating its production and ecological roles on a local scale.

This text discusses the evolving dynamics of identity linked to the principles of repeasantization⁴³ and agroecology⁴⁴. These derive from the ability of a new generation of farmers to transcend both traditional and industrial-

³⁷ Amin, Thrift 2002.

³⁸ Berque 2019.

³⁹ Barron *et al.* 2020, p. 449.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Fumey 2010.

⁴² Dansero *et al.* 2014.

⁴³ van der Ploeg 2008.

⁴⁴ Altieri *et al.* 2015.

ly imposed farming models. The aim is to create agricultural practices that make optimal use of space and capitalize on the unique ecological processes of each locale⁴⁵. This understanding is generating an awareness of the need for food production that harmoniously integrates with existing ecological dynamics and regenerative processes. These processes are naturally tied to the unique characteristics of each locale, emphasizing the critical relationship between agriculture and the places where food is produced. This awareness is tied to a secondary process, the social construction of food's cultural value. There has been a societal rejection of industrial agriculture, which is seen as leading to the homogenization of consumption and a decline in the nutritional value of food. This has, in turn, sparked a burgeoning demand among consumers to re-establish a connection with food production processes⁴⁶. Often, this leads to individuals identifying with food as a marker of their role within society⁴⁷. An outcome of these dynamics is a growing recognition of the market value of the relationship between food and its environmental context. This can lead to risks, such as the commodification of the environment⁴⁸, but it also strengthens the connection between place and food, assigning a cultural value to the latter⁴⁹. The push for access to good, clean and fair food⁵⁰ has seeped into society. These demands have spurred actions that promote local products, uphold and rejuvenate regional agricultural and culinary traditions, and emphasize the innate connection between food cultivation and its cultural value.

Another strategy for promoting local products at a multi-scalar level is food certification such as, in EU Protected Designation of Origins (PDO), Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) or Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (STG). The purpose of these certifications, based on specific guidelines, is to support the production and marketing of goods linked to specific geographical regions, to guarantee a fair remuneration for the quality of the products and to make them competitive on the global market⁵¹. However, their function is not merely technical, nor is it limited to defining a set of rules that producers must respect in order to be able to boast of certification. Indeed, they have a strong narrative capacity⁵², as they construct socially shared meanings concerning not only the commercial but also the cultural value of food, which often leads to a process of heritagisation that can generate economic and political processes

⁴⁵ Bevilacqua 2022.

⁴⁶ Winter 2005.

⁴⁷ Bell, Valentine 1997.

⁴⁸ Parrott *et al.* 2002.

⁴⁹ Feagan 2007.

⁵⁰ Petrini 2005.

⁵¹ Olivieri 2020.

⁵² Pollice *et al.* 2022.

aimed at enhancing the value of typical food in order to promote the development of the territory. The result, of course, is a multitude of other processes of identification between communities, foods and places.

The importance of a healthy diet as a factor underpinning the physical and psychological health of individuals and the communities to which they belong is being emphasized with increasing insistence, stressing the link between food quality and the enhancement of local systems that produce it. In this perspective, food is configured as a key element of the local milieu, understood as a territorial link between local and supra-local networks in view of a shared project⁵³. Food can, therefore, be considered to go beyond its objective dimension, also considering its nature as a subject that participates in territorial dynamics based on the relations that individuals establish with it. Food is, therefore, configured as a signifier that generates meaning attributed to a place in which the community self-identifies, identifying in it a factor of cohesion. The result is a local development based on the strengthening of the relationship between community and place, which strengthens per se but also in its dimension as a node within the global network⁵⁴.

Food, according to this viewpoint, plays a pivotal role in identity formation. It both accentuates local uniqueness and propels it onto the global stage, resulting in cultural relevance and subsequent economic competitiveness. This presents clear advantages to local communities. It mitigates the inherent risk of marginalization found in localism and provides a platform for these communities to participate in globalization without losing their cultural distinctiveness. The process just described allows us to propose that food be considered as an element capable of stimulating the formation of a territorial identity⁵⁵, intrinsically linked to the place but by no means localist, as it emerges from a shared territorial project⁵⁶. It is an identity that derives from the self-perception by the residents of space as inhabitants of a territory of which they share the project and choose to be an active part, thus placing themselves within a constructive relationship based on existential values of responsibility and care⁵⁷. In light of all this, we can affirm that food not only participates in the formation of a territorial identity but also contributes to the global competitiveness of the place, characterizing the territory and guiding the shared objectives of local communities in the medium and long term⁵⁸.

A counteracting factor may exist alongside the one previously described, in which the process of appraising food as a cultural asset can result in the

⁵³ Dematteis, Governa 2005.

⁵⁴ Olivieri and Cavallo 2022.

⁵⁵ Banini 2013.

⁵⁶ Lazzeroni *et al.* 2023.

⁵⁷ Jonas 2009.

⁵⁸ Banini, Pollice 2015.

neglect of its ability to rejuvenate territorial projects. The risk lies in triggering a form of heritage creation, viewed as the solidification of a specific moment in local history, chosen as the root of a tradition. This tradition is tied to a value of authenticity that is perceived in absolute terms. Neglecting the debate between the authenticity and inauthenticity of places⁵⁹, heritage capitalization is not inherently negative. It can be utilized as a valuable resource for initiating territorial projects⁶⁰. However, this is not always the case. Instances of fabricated traditions⁶¹ are not unusual, around which nostalgic, egotistic, and occasionally chauvinist rhetoric⁶² is crafted based on the glorification of localism.

In terms of food, this involves separating a commodity – primarily viewed as food – from its evolving labor practices and the human societies producing them. The consequent identity mechanism conflicts with the previously mentioned territorial one, as it favors promoting the food and its origin for tourism overstimulating local development⁶³. Though it may yield short-term income, this approach risks impoverishing the entire territorial system in the medium to long run. This is due to the potential cessation of land-use renewal practices, risking a diminished sense of place and identity. Consequently, residents may start to perceive their living space not as a home, enriching their existential ties⁶⁴, but as an exploitable venue.

4. Food globalization and migrations: a critical perspective on risks and opportunities

In today's globalized era, food significantly influences migration trends and cultural interactions, highlighting the connection between global exchanges of both material and symbolic commodities. The widespread diffusion of ethnic cuisines, particularly in dense urban spaces, introduces new food types and culinary techniques to our daily lives. For instance, cosmopolitan cities like New York, London, and Toronto boast an impressive culinary landscape, offering dishes from across the globe. This diversification is further encouraged by the migrant communities' desire to uphold their traditions. They actively retain their heritage by practicing rituals and dietary habits that reflect their cultural identity, be it through the celebration of various festivals or the

⁵⁹ Lovell, Bull 2018.

⁶⁰ Pettenati 2019.

⁶¹ Hobsbawm, Ranger 1992.

⁶² Remotti 1996.

⁶³ Privitera, Graziano 2022.

⁶⁴ Berque 2021.

preparation of traditional foods⁶⁵. These everyday practices, often taken for granted, play a vital role in safeguarding cultural roots and reshaping identity post-migration⁶⁶.

The interconnectedness between international migration flows and global food globalization is complex and warrants detailed analysis. Risks and opportunities associated with it need to be examined closely. One risk is the negative social impact on intercultural coexistence. This issue arises when food is used to propagate a political agenda of rejecting immigrants and emphasizing differences instead of promoting intercultural understanding and dialogue. This can lead to an unwarranted stereotyping of foreigners, where people cling solely to their own culinary traditions. Another risk is the potential loss of local culinary traditions due to the mass production of food and a trend toward homogenization. The risk of taste homogenization is increased due to the global availability of food products, cultural and commercial influences, food standardization, and changing dietary habits, which may result in the loss of some traditional dishes. The third risk is the influence of assimilationist tendencies. This typically happens when a dominant culture imposes its dietary styles and preferences on minority cultures, causing them to neglect their culinary traditions. An example of this is the standardization of fast-food menus worldwide.

However, this issue is intricate, as even within a “McDonaldized” world, as conceptualized by George Ritzer⁶⁷, there has been a need to adapt to varying local tastes. For example, in Israel, McDonald’s menus are cheese-free to follow kosher rules; in Canada, they offer lobster rolls, a local favorite; and in Chile, burgers are served with guacamole, aligning with South American tastes. The question remains: Is this merely food homogenization leading to the abolishment of local culinary identities, or is it a dynamic interplay between standardization and local adaptation? This illustrates the resilience of culinary identities and their vital role in people’s lives. In fact, this scenario has been described as “glocalization”, highlighting how global chains must balance operational efficiency with local culinary adaptations to satisfy consumer preferences. Despite the growth of the food industry and globalization, gastronomic traditions remain strong and ethnic cuisine is thriving⁶⁸. Therefore, it is crucial to refrain from viewing mass culinary multiculturalism as something that warrants the suppression of all ethnic influences. Instead, it is a fusion and reinvention of various ethnic traditions.

Food globalization serves as a metaphor for deeper human interactions, enabling us to experience the rich array of social and cultural encounters that emerge in a progressively interconnected world. From several perspectives, it

⁶⁵ Lin *et al.* 2020; Crenn 2020; Janowski 2012.

⁶⁶ Elshahat *et al.* 2023; Ranta, Nancheva 2019; Rabikowska 2010; Frez-Muñoz *et al.* 2021.

⁶⁷ Ritzer 1993.

⁶⁸ Belasco, Scranton 2002.

presents valuable prospects. Economically, the introduction of ethnic restaurants and the marketing of food products from various cultures can produce significant profits in the global marketplace. This benefits both immigrant communities and host societies, as well as producers who gain access to bigger markets and consumers who can enjoy superior products otherwise not available locally. On a cultural level, it facilitates the exploration and appreciation of culinary customs from multiple cultures, fostering exchange and mutual understanding. The process also promotes innovative culinary mingling through mutual influence. This blending of cuisines serves as a palpable metaphor for wider cultural assimilation processes and can result in unique dishes that mix elements from several cuisines. For instance, Tex-Mex cuisine in the U.S. emerged as a distinctive and well-recognized fusion of Mexican and Texan culinary customs. Culinary fusion can enhance local food scenes and often triggers innovative opportunities for positive intercultural relationships.

In conclusion, modern cuisine effectively illustrates the interplay of globalization and localization. Future challenges and opportunities will necessitate meticulous examination to pinpoint relevant solutions for effective management.

5. *Conclusions*

This paper aims to examine the link between food, identity, place, and migration, stressing the significant role food practices play in the cultural development of individuals and groups in both tangible and intangible forms. Our discussion shows that food is more than just sustenance; it is a powerful representation of personal and communal identity. The application of identity theories sheds light on how individuals and groups' identities are tied to their dietary choices. In terms of migration, we highlighted the possible tension between local traditions and global influences. By introducing the concept of reactive identity⁶⁹, we deepened our understanding of how strong local food traditions can be reinforced in response to other cultural influences. We also assessed global and local forces impacting food culture, identifying potential risks and opportunities along these paths.

The intricate interplay between nutrition and migration necessitates a detailed, multifaceted approach to research and intervention within our increasingly connected world. Approaching modern food studies means consistently addressing and overcoming social theoretical dichotomies such as material versus symbolic, production versus consumption, object versus subject, and

⁶⁹ Allievi, 2018.

local versus global. It also demands an understanding of the robust link between food and culture, contemplating the dialogue between rural and urban environments, globalization and localism, and the processes of migration and identity formation. Food can encapsulate elements of a community's cultural practices⁷⁰, like knowledge, traditions, and forms of expression. It serves as an effective medium for self-representation and dialogue among various cultures. Over recent years, with the majority of the global population living in cities, we have seen a drastic shift in human lifestyles. These changes provide a cognitive framework through which cities can uncover their cultural and gastronomic heritages, as well as those of others. Collecting cultural data rooted in orality can offer valuable insights into knowledge, memory, identity, and heritage⁷¹.

In the realm of migrations, food is a unique cultural exchange domain wherein food habits play a pivotal role in transmitting cultural identity and establishing social bonds. This area radiates a multifaceted dynamic as people balance their traditional diets with the influences of the new culture they encounter. The layer of complexity thickens when taking into account an individual's life stages. As people traverse life, the significance of food practices can fluctuate significantly. For instance, childhood food practices are often interconnected with family traditions. Meanwhile, during adolescence, peer pressure can strongly sway the adoption of food practices unique to the host country. In later stages, the family may reclaim importance, emphasizing food acculturation's ever-changing nature. Therefore, closely considering the food domain as a distinct acculturation area demands an in-depth, fluid evaluation. This analysis should take into account individuals' life stages and trajectories and the prominence food can have in forming identity.

In summary, the theoretical reflection presented aims to establish "food identity" as a distinct and independent concept. Food, with its diverse implications, provides a rich medium for exploring psychological, social, historical, geographical, and political factors in everyday life. Food identity, at the heart of intercultural contact, lies on a spectrum between individual and societal identities⁷². It is central to intercultural interactions and represents a fundamental aspect of both collective and community identities. Food identity can be defined as an evolving, hypothetical construct comprising a complex, interconnected system of food-related self-representations. Rather than representing a fixed category or permanent individual characteristics, this dynamic construct is influenced by its contextual interactions and it play a role in terms of acculturative style. It involves cognitive, emotional, and social

⁷⁰ Wenger 1998.

⁷¹ Grimaldi *et al.* 2019

⁷² Wise 2011.

processes that shape an individual's unique, continuous, and coherent narrative concerning food in their life. It is a hypothetical construct because it does not refer to any factual category or immutable characteristics of individuals. Instead of being merely an aggregate of disjointed food properties internal to an individual, this construct considers the context as a modulating entity wherein the construct manifests. Over a person's lifetime, their food identity can change in response to different interactional contexts, thereby reinforcing its fluid and negotiable nature. It serves as a medium for dialogical interaction, varying both within individuals (identity roles) and between different individuals and groups depending on changing contextual factors. Food identity mediates sense of belonging according to life stages and reference groups. It also provides insights into the dynamic micro-transitions that occur during human interactions, particularly during migration. The food identity framework is a comprehensive theoretical model that integrates psychological processes at both the individual and group levels. The framework provides a means of understanding the influence of psychological factors, including motivation, emotional connections, and cognitive perceptions, on food choices. For instance, personal experiences and memories associated with food can influence food preferences and serve to reinforce identity. Cognitive processes, including how individuals perceive and interpret food-related information, also play a pivotal role in the formation of food choices. Furthermore, the framework considers social interactions and relationships as determinants, reflecting the influence of social norms and family traditions. This multidimensional approach demonstrates how food identity develops dynamically in response to personal and social psychological factors, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of food in the formation of self and group identity. It acknowledges the physical, practical, and experiential aspects of the encounter with food, situating individuals within the context of food identity. With its multifaceted, multidimensional nature, food identity continually evolves in a relational present while embracing diverse culinary experiences. While it maintains a zealous attachment to the local milieu, it simultaneously encourages exploration and discovery.

The theoretical analysis emphasizes the necessity of applying identity theories in food studies and urges for more research on food identity's role in multicultural relations. This is particularly useful in places like Italy, where traditional cuisines merge with new migrant influences. Future research should investigate the role of food identity in changing urban environments, taking into account the effects of globalization and urbanization on food habits and cultural variety. The modification of cooking traditions in modern cities, with food identity playing a pivotal role in identity conservation, presents a significant research topic. Simultaneously, studying how new technologies and social media impact food dynamics provides valuable insights. A deeper understanding of how these platforms influence food identity and acculturation will shed

light on the contemporary mechanisms of these multifaceted phenomena. An additional research pathway entails studying the intersection of food and gender identities or other social groups. An in-depth analysis of these dynamics will enhance our understanding of the relationships among food, culture, location, and identity, resulting in a broader perspective on migration dynamics and food habits. Lastly, an essential area of study involves a critical evaluation of public policies and social inclusion within the food context, focusing on how states and communities can support food identities and promote positive intercultural dialogue.

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