

## Cheese tourism in a World Heritage site: Vall de Boí (Catalan Pyrenees)

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### Abstract

Tourism in rural areas does not only mean accommodation in a rural environment, but also a combination of products and services related to the commodification of destinations. The purpose of the paper is to set a theoretical framework in relation to food tourism, in the context of tourism in rural areas. The creation of authentic experiences in rural environments is transferred to food tourism in the current paper through the study of cheese tourism. Applied to the Vall de Boí, which is a municipality located in the Catalan Pyrenees declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, there must be highlighted the seasonally marked foodscapes of this region and the cheese tourism as a case of an emergent tourism typology.

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### Introduction

The well-developed rural societies are those ones able to organize their development strategies around the revaluation of the place, and show a deep knowledge of the universal and global (Hernández et al, 2013). Resources of rural world have always been the basis of the primary sector, but for decades there has been a growing demand in other sectors. In this sense, tourism has overtaken agriculture to become the main activity in most rural communities in Europe (Daugstad, 2008). Therefore, the relationship between tourism and agricultural and livestock production is

increasing sharply. However, this relationship between tourism and agriculture cannot be treated only from the perspective of the impact of tourism in the agricultural sector (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2005), owing to the fact that the agricultural production also benefits tourism in the context of rural tourism.

Nevertheless, there are different agents within the rural tourism framework, livestock on one side and tourism on the other, with different interests but a common concern about the preservation of both cultural and natural landscapes (Daugstad, 2008). Both the picture

(the landscape) and the artist (the farmer) should be appreciated. The fundamental question is whether tourism and agriculture and livestock can work together aiming at reaching sustainable goals (Bowen et al, 1991; Everett and Slocum, 2013). For example, infrastructure improvement does not only make the access to new products easier to potential markets, but it also gives tourists the possibility to visit the countryside while they travel. Tourism promotion can also focus on agricultural products to stimulate their foreign demand. This could be done by carrying out the promotion of such products in order to grow tourism demand in the regional landscape (Bowen et al, 1991). The purpose of the paper is to set a theoretical framework in relation to food tourism, in the context of tourism in rural areas. The creation of authentic experiences in rural environments is transferred to food tourism in the current paper through the study of cheese tourism. Having determined the theoretical proposal from the literature review section, the article discusses cheese tourism and the potential that it has in relation to the case of the Vall de Boi (Catalan Pyrenees) as a gastronomy destination.

The development of communications and the significant improvements in both productivity and production systems have contributed largely to opening rural areas to the outside world (Bessièrè, 1998). In this sense, culinary tourism can be an alternative opportunity for food producers to add value to their products, especially in rural areas (Quan and Wang, 2004) and taking both the physical and human environment into account. Nowadays, globalization and the consequent ease of movement of goods and people across the surface causes a clear trend towards homogenization - especially for food - and even more on those destinations which receive a higher number of tourists.

Fortunately, this standardization has not arrived massively in the form of large multinational fast food companies in rural and mountain destinations such as the Catalan Pyrenees yet. For this reason, so in destinations as the Vall de Boí, it is important to know how to emphasise the promotion of a culinary heritage inherent to its territory, associated to its local

land production. Thus, food heritage is an integral part of the cultural heritage destination, even when food is considered as the result of the relationship between the cultural component and the history and traditions of the local community; as well as a natural component, closely related to the physical environment of each destination. The main example is the Vall de Boí framed in the *Aigüestortes* and *Estany de Sant Maurici* National Park, the only one in all Catalonia.

### **Rural tourism in mountainous areas**

Rural tourism is the tourism activity that takes place in rural areas, structured to offer integrated leisure, and that is the reason why it takes the name of *tourism in rural area*. This kind of tourism has the objective to implement the greatest number of activities in a rural area in order to offer leisure and tourism experiences (Cànoves and Villarino, 2000; Cànoves et al, 2005). This denomination is accepted because of the inclusion of different tourist specialties in rural areas (Crosby and Moreda, 1996; López Palomeque, 2008; Mediano and Vicente, 2002). Although rural tourism was first a complementary activity associated to the traditional agro livestock, practicing rural tourism was more like practicing tourism in rural areas than rural tourism in itself (Jimenez and Prats, 2006). In this sense, there is a clear difference between tourism in rural areas and rural tourism since tourism in rural areas does not necessarily mean practicing rural tourism. However, tourism in rural areas was first associated exclusively to the accommodation sector. Later, the development of tourism results then in a combination of products and services regarding the commercialisation of farming areas (Cànoves and Villarino, 2000). Agritourism resources such as farm stays, major wine or cheese regions, and fruit growing areas have helped the small European farms to fight against the decrease in commodity prices for years (Slee et al, 1997; Grykien, 1999).

In this sense, different forms of agro-tourism - or farm tourism - have gained or regained relevance as a specific genre of rural tourism throughout Europe during the last decades (Nilsson, 2002). Agriculture is vital to rural landscape (Gullino and Larcher, 2013), and it is

perceived as a key to maintain food production, rural landscapes, and environmental protection (Hollander, 2003). Beyond the usual farm activities, agricultural tourism offers important opportunities for agricultural producers to get involved in the tourism industry, which results in increased regional economic benefits and reduced leakage (Berno, 2004; Telfer and Wall, 1996; Torres, 2002). Agritourism offers the chance to sell high-value local foods, rent rooms, create jobs, and maintain the regional service base (Busby and Rendle, 2000; Clemens, 2004; Nilsson, 2002; Pevetz, 1991); because agriculture itself also provides a rich ethnographic heritage based, as highlighted by Díez (2012), on tools and utensils, agricultural machinery, trades and craft workshops, forges, quarries, warehouses, mills, bakeries, and other (Díez, 2012). Thanks to the use of values such as authenticity, cultural identity and ethnicity, conversion and touristic utilization of the territory and rural heritage has become a reality (Cànoves and Villarino, 2000).

The traditional support previously assumed by the agricultural production has now led to a new economy based on rural commodification. It is essential that the process of economic revitalization is carried out accordingly with the value of identity of the landscape and the provision of food products. Survival in times of globalization depends on the maintenance of its identity through agricultural and rural areas (De San Eugenio and Barniol, 2012). In this regard, since agriculture has been relegated from their hegemonic position in the economy of rural areas, other sectors involving agricultural activities have been gaining more relevance, as well as the production of handicrafts, gastronomy and tourism itself. The improvement of the unique features of each area requires the development of activities inherent to the territory. The use of these areas involves the appreciation of the idiosyncrasies of each territory and the rural areas due to their rich culture, diversity of landscapes, cuisine and traditions (Cànoves et al, 2004). However, not only the cultural aspects are considered as relevant. Most of the first national parks occupy mountainous areas, and the landscape is also an effective instrument of heritage (Gomez-Mendoza, 2013): landscape, geography and rural space as resources to project culture

surface. Rural tourism consists of the three P's: heritage, landscape and food production (*patrimones, paysage and production agricole*) as stated by Cànoves et al (2005).

The tourism industry has become a major economic sector worldwide thanks to the emergence and consolidation of new products and new destinations nowadays: this fact makes the Catalan Pyrenees a strong competitor against the Aragon or the French Pyrenees, and even against further mountainous destinations such as the Carpathian Mountains, Scandinavia, Lapland, Argentina, Chile or New Zealand (Fusté, 2012). Budget airlines and new technologies increase competition between destinations and rural and mountainous areas growing globally. Consequently, there is a constant need for companies to expand and diversify tourism products that should meet new market demands (Font 2011). Food, trade, festivals and cultural events, the range of sports activities or enjoyment of nature altogether should lead to an improved rural tourism offer; improving tourism is improving the quality of life; improving the quality of life is improving tourism (Jiménez and Prats, 2006). As Jafari (2014) claims, a nice place to live must be a nice place to visit, and a nice place to visit must be a nice place to live.

Growth at any cost is not what should really matter in the long term, but the sustainable development of landscapes, cultural, social and territorial resources. Rural areas should not be considered anymore the cities' backyard or the space for recreation of weekend' holidaymakers. Instead, their inhabitants are claiming their social and environmental role of land conservation (Cànoves et al, 2005). It is important to consider the identity of the territories, once again its landscape (Nogué 1989; Font, 2011; Gullino and Larcher, 2013), the Pyrenees in general and the Vall de Boí in particular. Therefore, a landscape linked to both the natural area as well as to cultural idiosyncrasies; because an element of uniqueness of a region is the evident and necessary exaltation of local identity in times of globalization (De San Eugenio and Barniol, 2012).

### Authenticity in food tourism: cheese tourism

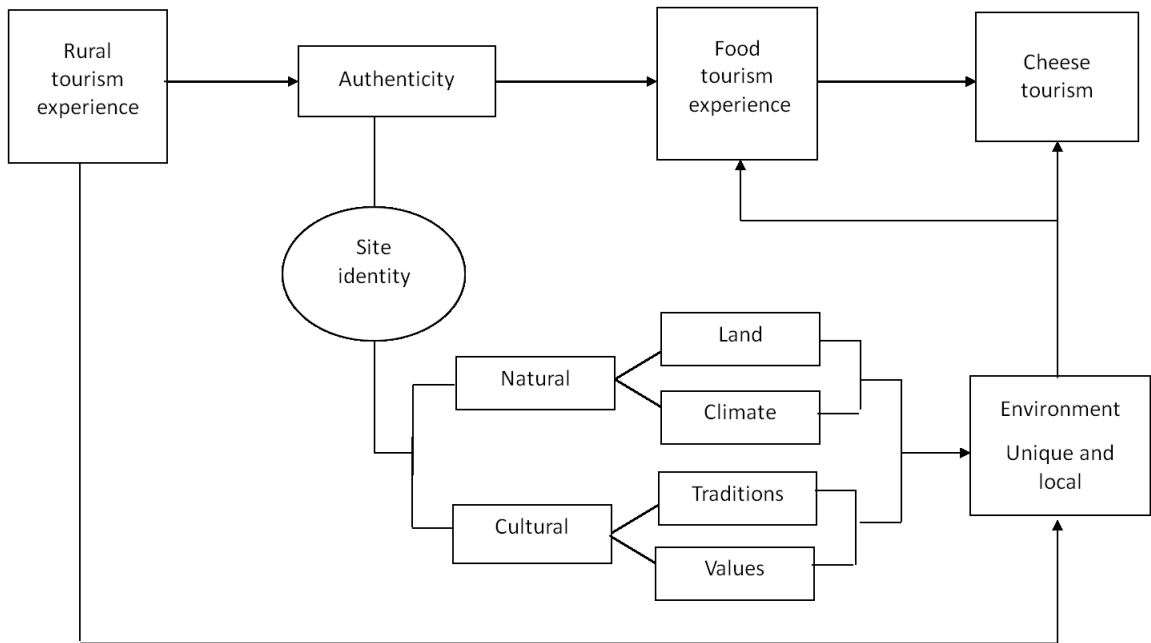
Rural tourism is not solely confined to the concept of accommodation as mentioned previously. It enhances the unique features of each area by developing activities inherent to the territory (Cànoves et al, 2004), for example the local cuisine. Soil cultivation, farm maintenance and building restoration are part of the cultural heritage of rural areas among other issues. In this sense, authenticity serves as an essential ingredient of the inner logic of cultural heritage (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013). Unlike urban, flora and fauna areas, rural areas represent an opportunity to get in contact with local residents and learn about their lifestyle. This is considered the rural tourism experience (Lane, 1994; Kastenholz and Figueiredo, 2014). In rural environments and specifically in mountainous areas, wherever we look we are surrounded by countryside; the cultivated land provides food, and cultural landscapes influenced by agriculture which are of great importance for tourism, cultural heritage and identity, leisure and welfare, and to keep diversity (Daugstad, 2008). The landscape is an essential resource for rural tourism and an example of how farmers perceive what their role is in relation to the symbiosis of agriculture and tourism. Thus, the entire chain of processes involved in the production of milk, vegetables and products *from the ground to the plate* are not necessarily found just in one place (Hjalager, 1996).

In this sense, food heritage is deeply rooted in a particular place and a particular time and space, since the culinary traditions of a specific area reflects the nature of society and the mentality of its members (Bessièrè, 1998:28). The development or enhancement of this culinary heritage encourages individual and collective local initiatives, something which is seen as a process for the development of rural tourism (Bessièrè, 1998). Local initiatives should meet the modern tourists' demands by providing him with first-hand experiences, such as hearing stories about the landscape or tasting its local food (Daugstad, 2008; Kastenholz et al, 2012). Food is indeed one of the most important resources of any tourist destination and its authenticity; each traditional landscape expresses a unique sense or spirit of place (*genius loci*) that defines its identity

(Antrop, 2005). Integrity is a value belonging to both cultural and natural landscapes that facilitates the recognition of identities (Gullino and Larcher, 2013: 5).

By contrast, McNeill (1974) explains the concept of the natural relationship between the land, its climate, and the qualities of the food it produces. It is precisely the geographical diversity which awards a regional distinction of culinary traditions and the evolution of a distinctive cultural heritage. The popularity of the area increases thanks to the use of local and natural products as well as cooking dishes with a touch of country charm (Bessièrè, 1998). Thus, the tourist is not only incorporating the nutritional characteristics of the food when consuming a natural or traditional product, but he/she is also 'tasting' its symbolic features: nature, culture and the identity of the area. Eating fresh farm products, for example, can represent not only a biological quality, but also a short-lived ownership of rural identity (Bessièrè, 1998).

The authenticity of the cuisine inevitably includes both a natural and a cultural component (Figure 1), as seen before: on the one hand, the natural component gives gastronomy an own unique physical environment in each region. On the other, the cultural component offers the values and the culture shared by the members of the local community (Hillel et al, 2013). Both components turn food into a material part of the cultural identity, ensuring its continuity and attesting its historical commitment to the region. The successful gastronomy destinations are, therefore, those that are able to satiate the tourist's appetite thanks to authenticity, offering products and experiences which shows a close faithful relationship between food, land and community (Hillel et al, 2013), as in the case of cheese tourism. It is most likely that the farmers' educative role as ambassadors of farming improve the prospects of the authenticity of their experiences (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013). Therefore, the uniqueness and relevance of some local products (i.e. cheese, bread or wine, among many others) should be understood when such experiences are presented, showing the process of producing and maybe even allowing



**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework of cheese tourism

tourists to participate, conveying authenticity (MacCannell, 1999; Wang, 1999): the search for authenticity should be a central motivation for both tourists and hosts.

Cheese tourism involves visiting areas of cheese making and milk production. This typology is practiced in rural mountainous areas such as the Catalan Pyrenees, with has a long livestock tradition. Although there is no specific literature that deals with cheese tourism, there are many international references regarding cheese as a tourist resource, for example visits to the *Société des caves Roquefort*, Wisconsin (United States) or Canterbury (New Zealand) cheese factories, as well as events like the *Festival Cheese!*, held in Bra (Piedmont, Italy). That is, cheese tourism comes from the concern with the process of developing a product closely linked to a territory, and drift towards a typology that includes not only the tourist visit to the craft workshop, but also a set of synergies from complementary food consumption and leisure (Figure 2). Moreover, there are also many internationally known cheeses such as French Mont d'Or, Camembert or Bri, Italians Parmigiano, Gorgonzola or Mozzarella, Swiss

Emmental and Gruyère, Dutch Edam and Gouda, British Cheddar, Deutsch Münster, Greek Feta or Spanish Cadí, Tetilla, Idiazábal and Cabrales. As Bernstein (2014), it must be noted that some of these emblematic instances are focused on highly specialised commodity production, like the Parmesan cheese producers of Italy.

Food, and specifically a certain gastronomic product such as cheese, is used to compete and gain notoriety in competitions; a product whose excellence gives the region a brand labels (Ortiz, 2003). The recovery, or even the discovery of some products is carried out by using certain strategies, among which one of the most important is the protection of authenticity (Contreras, 1999), just like what happened to the Vall de Boi's cheese case. In this sense, "by prioritising agrarian activities, the farmers hinted that they took agriculture more seriously than tourism. Hence, by giving first priority to farming and accentuating farming as their *real* job and/or life, they indicated that tourism was pursued in a somewhat amateurish manner" (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013: 181), despite the great importance of tourism for economic

development. Growing interest in local food helps to the creation of demands for locally produced foods (Coren and Clamp, 2014), including artisan producers. This can allow for the creation of smaller farm's cooperatives, and ventures within tourism sector, as alliances of food producers, distributors, hotels and restaurants, promoting the use of local products in the tourism industry (Telfer, 2000).

However, in the current context of a globalized world "governed by commodities, the fast-food and sanitary barriers, the existence of many small rural agro-industries is threatened because they do not reach the levels of productivity to compete in global markets. Many of these companies could have an outlet if they are able to articulate with the business of rural tourism, through the provision of products and services (Figure 2) to meet the demands of tourists interested in learning aspects of agricultural and agro-industrial culture of a particular region" (Blanco and Riveros, 2004: 1). Examples of pseudo-backstages are cheese cellars and dairies in the Alps, in the Bregenzerwald: places where officially tourists are not permitted to enter due to hygiene regulations (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013). Therefore, "cheese production on alpen is

regarded a rare and even an endangered practice. Alpine dairies and the cheese cellars are places of production for the most valuable and prestigious products of agricultural activities; cheese that is wholly produced on alpen is said to be the best. Hence, cheese cellars and dairies on alpen are special places, which the farmers are usually eminently proud of and which many tourists are eager to view" (Daugstad and Kirchengast, 2013: 185). Because farmers can create intimacy and make tourists feel superior to just ordinary tourists.

This experience can be reinforced and emphasized through the land routes in order to discover the whole environment of production (Figure 2). For example, the case of cheese Turrialba in Costa Rica, around which the building of a food route is proposed as a strategy for local development and improvement of artisanal cheese agribusiness (Blanco and Riveros, 2004). This concept, which has the European gastronomic routes as referents, is an innovative tourism product with great potential for areas with significant agricultural production (Blanco and Riveros, 2004). Barrera (1999) defined these routes as paths that enjoy an organized agricultural

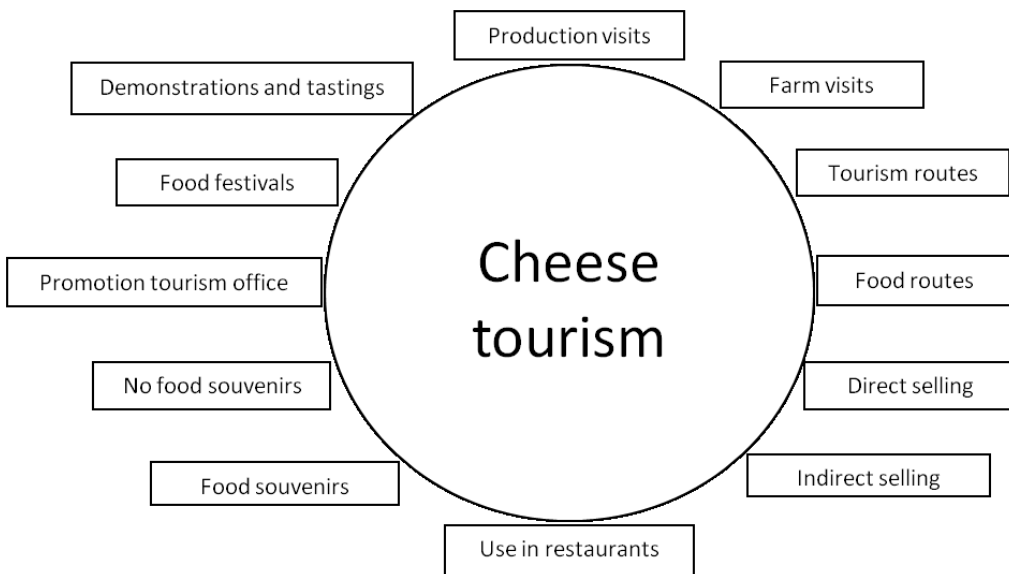


Figure 2. The cheese tourism wheel

industrial production process, tasting regional cuisine and expressions of local culture. These routes are organized around a key product that characterizes them (Blanco and Riveros, 2004); among the European gastronomic routes, the best known are the wine, cheese, ham and olive oil' routes, existing mainly in France, Spain and Italy (Blanco and Riveros, 2004).

Previous research (Hall and Mitchell, 2000) indicated that food is an important reason for travelling as well as an essential source of tourist satisfaction. Several authors then consider the benefits of food tourism as an anchor for regional development (Bèssière, 1998; Hall, Sharples, Mitchell et al, 2003; Hjalager and Richards, 2002; López-Guzmán et al, 2014; Sidali et al, 2013). The key to success is to integrate the natural, the local and the traditional (MacDonald, 2013), in a clear reference to the wishes of the consumer who appreciates a consumption of food products associated with identity of a landscape. Food plays different roles for tourists: it is functional for sustaining life; it is entertaining; it is a way of experiencing new cultures; and it is part of a travel experience. In any circumstance, a destination needs to capitalize on appealing foods to be able to create an essential component of its own cultural capital (Lan et al, 2012). In this sense, food tourism is defined as a desire to experience a particular type of cuisine in a specific region (Hall and Sharples, 2003), where tourists are those that are set to take an intentional exploration in the food habits of others (Long, 1998). And this food tourism can be experienced from two different sectors: agriculture and tourism (Everett and Slocum, 2013), production and consumption, and hosts and guests.

As Lan et al (2012) point out, "food tourism can be regarded as a travel to a destination for cultural purposes with experiences of unique and affective foods at the destination. Travellers normally have the desire for new tastes, knowledge and concepts at the destination. Although most travellers may not choose their destination only for food reasons, they can end up remembering their travel on the food they experienced at the destination"

(Lan et al, 2012: 609). Thus, the importance of food in tourist activity is as clear as all tourists have to eat during the trip, because food is a compulsory activity when travelling (Richards, 2002). They actually have food as one of the main expenses when they move: more than a third of the total (Belisle 1983, Hall and Sharples, 2003; Telfer and Wall, 1996; 2000). And the food budget of tourists does not only include consumption but also the acquisition of local food products like souvenirs (Henderson, 2009); buying rural products in situ is part of tourists' experience in participating in the authenticity of another lifestyle they are looking for, and it is, therefore, one of the main reasons of the journey (Ortiz, 2003: 79).

Food is a unique practice in tourism, which gratifies all the senses (Daugstad, 2008; Kivela and Crofts, 2006): who eats becomes part of a culture (Bessière, 1998). Thus, in order to increase the positive impact of tourism, the amount of local food consumed in tourism industry should also be increased (Telfer and Wall, 1996). The more interconnections between the farm and the restaurant table there are, the more sales and promotion of local products a destination gets (Veeck et al, 2006). Fortunately, diversification is not only aimed at tourists, so residents are also important and potential consumers of food products: many restaurants and regional events depend on local support (Kayat, 2008), which helps alleviate the adverse consequences of a seasonal arrival of tourists (Henderson, 2009).

### **The case of study: Vall de Boí**

#### *Tourism at the Vall de Boí*

Vall de Boí is the largest municipality of Alta Ribagorça in the northwest of Catalonia, at an altitude of 1,111 meters, with 21,753 acres and 1,052 inhabitants spread among the eight towns that comprise: Barruera, Boí, Cardet, Còll, Durro, Erill la Vall, Sarais and Taüll. Briefly, the first tourists arrived in the Vall de Boí looking for wellbeing resorts (Moyes, 2010), and hiking. Traditionally, the main tourist attractions in the Vall de Boí had been the thermal baths of Caldes de Boí (Molina, 2008) and the excellence quality of its natural valleys that form their environment, which has the appeal of the only National Park in Catalonia,

*Aigüestortes* and *Estany de Sant Maurici*. These hot springs, the World Heritage Romanesque Art and the beauty of the landscape, were the only tourist attractions of this valley for years, undergoing a major transformation with the advent of snow tourism (Gili, 1999).

According to Font (2011), three phases in the historical development of tourism in the Pyrenees can be distinguished: the first one took place during the second half of the nineteenth century when bourgeois tourism first emerged based on thermal stations and summer relaxation (i.e.: Caldes de Boí). Also, the Catalan region and specifically the mountainous areas were discovered by hikers, practitioners of a Catalan variety of hiking born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Jimenez and Prats, 2006). Hiking, like travelling for entertainment or leisure, also incorporates the imaginary area which will have a great importance in shaping tourism in Catalonia later on: the Pyrenees. Not until the first decades of the twentieth century, Catalan Pyrenees were an unknown land, a too wild mountain to appeal to the civilized people of the cities (Jimenez and Prats, 2006). Among the walkers, the Catalan poet Jacint Verdaguer and the well-known Antoni Gaudi also made stays in the Catalan Pyrenees that helped them to get as an inspiration for their work.

It was not until the 1980s when a series of problems appeared: the crisis of agriculture; an incipient depletion of *sun and sand* model; the emergence of new forms of tourism (cultural tourism), and the loss of the rural roots from urban inhabitants after the boom in rural tourism (Cànoves et al, 2005). The current tourist is bored with the sun and sea cliché and has become interested in a greater variety of products. There is a strong interest towards the culture, nature and traditional lifestyle of the places visited, which are highly important features (Boissevain, 1996). However, the tourism product in rural areas represents a commodification of the local history, the culture and the natural environment (Gullino and Larcher, 2013; Panyik et al, 2012; Santana-Jiménez, Hernández and Suárez-Vega, 2013), so the inland areas tend to be repositories of ancient forms of life and cultures which

respond to the postmodern research of an antidote to urban life (Urry, 2002). However, the mass tourism was also moving gradually to mountainous areas and ski resorts (Font, 2011; López Palomeque, 1994). As Cànoves et al state (2005), the growing concern for environmental protection have contributed to the growth of rural tourism, given the experience of the negative effects that mass tourism has produced. It is very important for the development of heritage protection: on the one hand, the natural, and on the other, the cultural.

Concerning the historical and cultural heritage, the first list of the cultural heritage of the Vall de Boí came up in 1931 with the declaration of the churches of *Sant Climent* and *Santa Maria de Taüll* as Historic Artistic Monuments. Later, in 1962, *Sant Joan de Boí* and *Santa Eulàlia d'Erill la Vall* churches (located near Vall de Boí Romanesque Information Center) joined the heritage group. Even though in 1955, *Aigüestortes* and *Estany de Sant Maurici* National Park was declared as a natural heritage protection, Gili (1999:5) states that the protection of these four churches of the Vall de Boí is timely and affects the buildings exclusively, but leaving the environment totally unprotected. Later, the government declared the Historic Site of the Vall de Boí in 1991 and UNESCO recognized the whole Romanesque churches of the Vall de Boí a World Heritage Site on November 30<sup>th</sup> 2000. It is demonstrated that UNESCO highly values the following parameters: historical features, traditional crops and local products, land-use and agricultural practice permanence, and the presence of architecture related to agricultural activity (Gullino and Larcher, 2013). As reported above, the importance in the relationship between culture and nature that characterizes the integrity of a rural area is a value attached to both cultural and natural landscapes. This allows the recognition of a site identity (Figure 1).

#### *Foodscapes of the Vall de Boí*

The gastronomy or, in other words, the culinary heritage of the Vall de Boí in the Catalan Pyrenees varies depending on the season and the changes in the landscape and territory. Thus, a destination's foodscape, is the one that



is rooted in the land and identifies the authenticity of both natural and traditional culture of a gastroregion, a gastronomy destination. As stated by Moyes (2010), it is essential to associate the changing landscape of Vall de Boí with the foods and products of each season, observing the indissoluble bond of gastronomy with the natural cycle of the earth, the climate and the landscape.

Regarding the food from the region of Alta Ribagorça, the *Patronat Comarcal de Turisme de l'Alta Ribagorça* (Alta Ribagorça County Tourist Board, 2007) highlights, for example, *Les Jornades Gastronòmiques del Bolet* (Gastronomic Mushroom Festival), which is organized every weekend during the month of October and has different itineraries, as well as natural and mycological exhibitions and craft fairs. This Food Festival is backed up by the regional restaurants, offering special menus which include mushrooms and bottled water from Caldes de Boí and *Ratafia dels Raiers* (local liqueur) (Palau, 2015). Besides, *Girella* Fair is held on the third Sunday of October in *El Pont de Suert*. This fair receives its name *Girella* from one of the most traditional lamb sausages in the region; originally, this meal was reserved for special occasions during the fifteen century. Finally, the *Cep* Festival is held on the first Sunday of November in Vilaller and offers activities concerning this type of mushroom, and also contests, exhibitions, and the taste of traditional products of the autumn.

Moyes (2010) carried out a study about the traditional recipes from the Vall de Boí in which more than forty hotels and restaurants of the region participated. Among the most significant products of the cuisine of the Vall de Boí, studied by Fusté (2014) meats and sausages show are the most popular products in the foodscape of the Vall de Boí. These products, which are mainly elaborated using pork, lamb or beef, account for more than a quarter of the total samples analysed (27%). This is due to the great tradition of farming in the region since it has a lot of presence in the cuisine of the valley. Then, the group of vegetables (tomatoes and *xicoia* - a type of lettuce -) receives an 11% as well as the group of tubercles', where truffle is one of the most typical products and they both represent the

importance of the agro sector. Dairy products such as eggs and milk (from cow, sheep or goat) and its derivatives (cheese) represent a 10% of the total food present in Moyes' recipe book.

Furthermore, the presence of fish and mushrooms in the area is also important to consider. The first of these products is characterized by traditional trout fishing, whereas the second (mushrooms such as *carreretes*, *rovellons* or *ceps*) is a typical mountain product in the whole context of the Catalan Pyrenees. Other products such as thyme and bay leaf are also abundant in the forests of the Pyrenees. Considering the production of all these commodities mentioned above, the Vall de Boí can be considered a sort of big gourmet set in the Pyrenees. The combination between the agro livestock activity and tourism has great value in the area. Therefore, food tourists could incorporate a sustainable small part of the landscape of the valley, i.e. through cheese, a product which has been used for years in the regional cuisine and has been enhanced during the last lustrum because of the establishment of the two local producers described in the next section. Anyway the whole area is also under continuous development thanks to the benefits from both agriculture and livestock.

#### *The case of cheese tourism*

Regarding the Spanish case, there are many events which are dedicated to cheeses that are produced locally, such as the *afuega'l pitu* cheese contest which is held in January in Morcín (Asturias, Spain), the *cebreiro* cheese fair in As Nogas (Lugo, Spain) or the cheese festival held in Santa María de Guías (Gran Canaria, Spain), which was created in 1978 to promote flower cheeses (made with sheep and cow milk, then set with thistle flowers) typical of the region of Montaña Alta (Sánchez, 1998), in Canary Islands. In the case of the Vall de Boí, cheese tourism is structured around two producers: Cade Túnica and Ca de Moleny.

Cade Tunica is located in Barruera, and its production began in 2010. It has no own livestock, and therefore, the milk is obtained from a farmer in the region. They produce twice a week; each time purchasing 250 gallons of

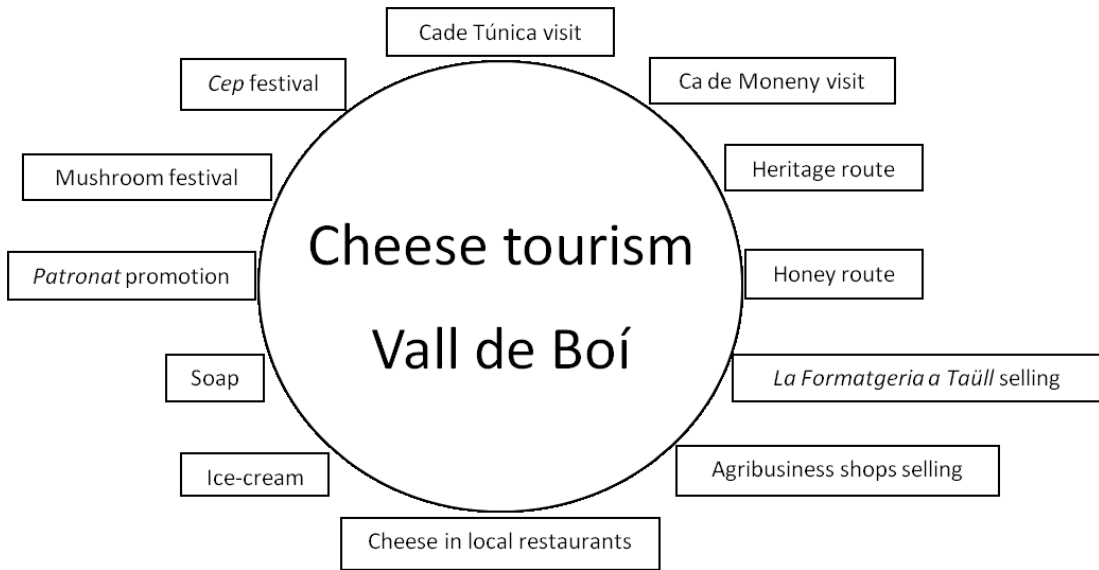
raw sheep's milk in Concorrui. This is a farm located in the county which disposes of more than 1,000 heads of sheep and is able to produce 150 pieces of cheeses per week. The type of cheese produced in Cade Tunica is curd cheese from raw sheep's milk with a maturity of between two and three months and jelled with animal rennet. The workshop covers an area of 38 square meters, but there are no signs to indicate the location and visits are not organized yet. "If I wanted to, I would have many visits, but I don't want to" (Farré, 2014), despite in recent months, some visits have been made to individuals who must request it through the *Alta Ribagorça* County Tourist Board, always according to the schedule that the producer sets. First, distribution is done in the own point-of-sale in Barruera and also in ten agribusiness' shops in the region; in addition, there is a distributor in Barcelona, as well as the participation in gastronomic fairs. The product is marketed as cheese *Serrat de Gelada de Cade Tunica*.

On the other hand, Ca de Moneeny is a farm located in the outskirts of the internationally well-known town of Taüll. They began producing cheese in 2012, and producing sheep milk cheeses from Concorrui's milk, but they soon had an own flock, and producing alpine goat's milk. He currently has 120 heads with the objective to increase them to 250 and to produce exclusively cheese from goat milk itself. Two hundred-fifty heads is the maximum number of heads they can have to produce ecological according its area extension (an area of 400 square meters), taking the density per square meter per animal into account. In tourist terms, visits from last Easter are been carried out, "and being a success" (Farelo, 2014). Additionally, a visit to the workshop along with a beekeeper and honey and cheese tasting combo is done. There are three types of cheese: the star cheese, the *Craba* cheese, a skin washed curd mixed cheese with a minimum maturity period of three weeks. Then the *Craba Serrat*, which is the ripened cheese with maturation time of between two months and two years, producing pieces even around 10 kg. The production of Ca de Moneeny is 600 kg of cheese per month, 450 of them from goat's milk and 150 from sheep's milk (for the elaboration of the *Panical* cheese). Considering

the 450 kg of cheese from goat's milk, two thirds are used to prepare the *Craba*, and the other third for the ripened. As for distribution, direct selling is done at the shop situated in Taüll and stores in the county, and distributed also in Barcelona. Apart from offering direct sales in their store - located in front of the church of *Santa Maria de Taüll* - , a new product has been launched this summer in addition to all the cheeses they produce: goat milk ice cream, made with creamy goat cheese, county walnuts and *Durro* honey, as a 0 km product. Their trade name is *La Formatgeria a Taüll* ("the Cheese producer in Taüll").

These two are the cheese producers established in the Vall de Boí and sets out the link between agro production and tourism. In this sense, the use of cheese can adopt different forms (Figure 2) which can help holistically the local development through the tourism practice. Having a look at Figure 3, the main manifestations found in the study area include visits to farms, production and processing centers, tourist and gastronomic routes where cheese is a complement, direct sales or through the municipality agro stores groceries selling souvenirs - food as ice-creams or inedible as soaps made from goat or sheep milk - . Also, the use of cheese in culinary dishes in local restaurants. It is as well important and remarkable the promotion through the local tourist board and the presence through demonstrations and tastings at fairs, as locals Gastronomic Mushroom or *Cep* Festivals. Not being cheese themed, they represent a door for the promotion of the product studied in relation to the fairs' parallel activities conducted for the global benefit of the local culinary industry. Thanks to the elaboration of cheese as a local product, and its linkage to the hospitality and tourism sector, it has emerged as part of food tourism, as a new trend also for future research.

As seen previously, local food from different destinations is one of the last areas of authenticity (Reynolds, 1994), and what the food does is to provide a real bite of the territory (Hillel et al, 2013) because it is a powerful builder of cultural identity (Fischler 1980; 1988). This identity has improved and it also has given possibilities to tourist



**Figure 3.** *The cheese tourism wheel applied to the Vall de Boí*

destinations for economic growth (López-Guzmán et al, 2014). Cuisine and culture are the main resources that tourists mostly value and desire. The tourists want to be exposed to an authentic culinary experience; making them feel involved in the construction of a cultural identity in a unique natural environment.

To sum up, one of the motivations of tourists is food tasting, including not only culinary routes, but also food festivals, wine tourism, and other food-related events - Figure 2 and Figure 3 - (Everett and Slocum, 2013; Hall and Sharples, 2008). Eating and drinking seems to be an attraction of an area, and food becomes a tourist attraction which is not less important than any other attractions, like a landscape or a theme park (Quan and Wang, 2004). "Tourism is extremely competitive and this extends to food tourism with rivalry amongst destinations to entice visitors on the basis of related traits. National and local uniqueness must therefore be identified and emphasised, utilising food as a means of positioning and differentiation in advertising" (Henderson, 2009: 322). In this regard, the development of rural areas focuses on the tourism offer based on local products and culinary tradition (Bessièrè, 1998). Food is an attractive resource that represents the sum of all elements in the overall landscape of a

region shared by both hosts and guests in a sustainable manner.

### Conclusion

Nowadays, Pyrenean tourism is characterized by stagnation of traditional mountain tourism, yet associated to and dependent on skiing and winter sports. Tourism in rural areas and, more specifically, tourism in mountainous areas such as the Vall de Boí, are more based on weekend trips or short stays, thanks to the relative proximity to large urban centres such as Barcelona, the main outbound focus in Catalonia. The promotion or enhancement of the food heritage should encourage local initiatives, individual and collective, and it is perceived as a process of rural tourism development in a current context where people are facing a strong tourism demand for *McDonaldisation* holidays; so a close link between food, land and community is required.

In this respect, food tourism represents an authentic experience for tourists in the context of rural tourism; each territory shows specific features - natural and cultural - those characterizing and defining their identity and appeal. In the case presented, cheese tourism has a high potential and varied uses as a resource for tourist attraction which is

represented by visits, tours or souvenirs. Through the Vall de Boí as a case study, current research demonstrates the potential of food tourism in general and cheese tourism in particular; remaining a challenge for both public administration and the private sector in carrying it out always for the benefit of development of the local community.

As the Catalan writer Josep Pla stated, *la cuina és el paisatge posat a la cassola* (the cuisine is the landscape added to the pot). This is what happens in the case of the Vall de Boí; an offer of a gastronomic tradition justified not because of fashion but because of the tradition of a cuisine coming from an old and strongly grown root in the *terroir* (Moyes, 2010). In this sense, cheese tourism reflects an integration of natural, local, and traditional aspects. In other words, cheese tourism shows the link between food, land and community. Tourists want to see how a farm works and experience this cycle of life. As Barham (2003) revealed, *terroir* represents the composite value that a crafted and cultivated artisan food product constitutes for both the producer and the consumer. Attributes such as artisanal production, historical and cultural value, and a stunning protected landscape environment, gives to this valley a cheese production which provides an appealing food tourism offer as part of its landscape, so that this rural region develops in an economically and sustainable way by fostering agro livestock activity.

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