

Girona and Its Culinary Events

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Introduction

For some years now Girona province has placed itself as the centre of international prestige in the field of cuisine, with chefs such as Ferran Adrià and the Roca brothers positioning it in the world of haute cuisine. This is no sheer coincidence, but the result of a confluence of many factors (also related to the local people's way of life and understanding of food) that make this region a privileged destination. Catalonia in general and, more specifically Girona, enjoy a long culinary tradition that can be documented back to the Middle Ages (there are clear references to it from many authors and recipes dating from this period). In addition, the province of Girona extends from the sea to the mountains, providing a variety of fresh and seasonal products throughout the year. This gives rise to various quality certifications and many typical local products, while favouring the holding of different events related to local products and cuisine. In 2012, the World Tourism Organisation compiled a global report on food tourism. This report highlights the considerable growth of this tourism sector and its relationship with the territory, culture, authenticity and local products.

The results of this close relationship within the territory are numerous initiatives at the local and national level, which aim to add further value to the industry. In respect of this, for example, we find actions implemented by the Catalan Tourism Agency and the Costa Brava Tourist Board aimed at promoting this type of niche tourism. In the Catalan sphere, moreover, we must not forget other bodies such as the Catalan Academy of Gastronomy (*Acadèmia Catalana de Gastronomia*) and the *Alícia* Foundation. The former has as its objective to research, disseminate and promote Catalan cuisine. The latter, led by Ferran Adrià, promotes improved eating habits, awarding value to food heritage and technological innovation in cuisine. Nor can we fail to mention the new Chair of Gastronomy, Culture and Tourism, established as a joint collaboration between the University of Girona and Calonge Town Council to promote and position the Girona region as a reference in the field.

Culinary tourism through selected events can bring significant benefits to regions where it is introduced, benefiting small farmers and food artisans and recovering (or preventing the loss of) not only

ancient crafts and traditions, but also recipes and products. In this chapter we aim to analyse the fairs, markets and culinary campaigns organised in the province. To this end, we must first briefly conceptualise the area of study, both culinary tourism and event organisation, before moving on to concrete on events held in the province of Girona in relation to food.

Culinary tourism and events

Tourism is both multidisciplinary and changing. Greg Richards, in a study on the profile of cultural tourists in 2002, stated that cultural tourists are changing their profile and increasingly demanding experiences and knowledge of local culture in the places they visit beyond more than just their architectural, monumental and/or museum heritage. Modern-day visitors feel the need to appreciate the atmosphere of a place, enjoy the local food, get to know the customs and participate in a particular event. In line with this greater enjoyment of other senses we find the emergence of wine, olive oil and culinary tourism (López Guzman & Sánchez Cañizares, 2012). Cuisine as a tourism resource is valued for its adaptation to new trends in cultural consumption: it allows the culture to be approached in a more experiential and participative, rather than strictly contemplative, manner (Grande, 2001). Blakey (2011) adds that culinary tourism endows a region with authenticity and distinction, which is increasingly important if we take into account homogenisation, or as she refers to it in the culinary sense, 'McDonaldization'.

We therefore believe that culinary tourism is based on discovering and learning, eating and tasting, as well as enjoying the culinary culture identified with a territory, which comprises a complete sensory experience, as visitors can experience the pleasure of taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing. Through food, tourists experience a greater connection with the environment they are visiting, far from the aforementioned role of spectator.

According to Tresserras, Medina and Matamala (2007), cuisine unites two values sought by modern-day tourists. On the one hand, that 'local' element which is different and even exotic, and on the other, something which is not designed exclusively for tourists and, therefore, provides the added value of authenticity.

Cuisine establishes a synergy with tourism through four different aspects (Tikkanen, 2007, p. 45):

as an attraction, which means that the destination can use this element to promote the location;

as a product component, where the design of culinary routes (like wine routes) have an important role to play;

as experience, the existence of one or more places where food takes on a different level and becomes an attraction in itself, an example of which being the cuisine of grand masters;

and as a cultural phenomenon that is based on the existence of different culinary festivals.

It is from this perspective that we can define culinary tourism as a type of cultural tourism in which the cuisine of the visited country is one of the main activities/motivations. The visit includes not only tasting different products but also learning about methods of producing and processing different products. And it is in this context that events can clearly relate to cuisine in the sense that they can also generate attraction and become another component of the product while also clearly being an experience.

Hall and Sharples (2003) understand this type of tourism as a trip based on experiencing a culinary region for leisure or entertainment purposes. This includes visits to primary or secondary producers, food festivals, events, markets, demonstrations, tastings or any activity related to food and cooking. These activities are considered the main reason for going to a destination, or at least one of the main motivations.

In fact, as Hall and Mitchell (2003) pointed out, it is important to first differentiate between those tourists who eat because they are away from their normal place of residence and those whose selection of destination is directly related to cuisine. According to Espeitx (2004, p. 28), food heritage sites capable of integrating culinary tourism can be classified into three categories: interpreted food heritage sites, eaten heritage sites and consumed food heritage sites. Consumed heritage sites include sites and events where food products can be bought: fairs, markets, direct sales from the producer, etc. Consumed food heritage sites also include direct retail sites at the place of production and markets (daily, weekly and occasional), representing the highest expression of the direct relationship between producer and consumer/tourist and allowing immediate evaluation of the product. We must also refer here to the so-called traditional farm shops and food processing industries, where tourists can witness the production process before tasting and purchasing the product.

This last type includes the elements analysed in this case study. As already mentioned, it is worth noting the proliferation in recent years of numerous artisan product fairs, in this case based on foodstuffs, as well as monographic fairs dedicated to one particular product. As Bessière (1998) pointed

out, development opportunities for the producer derive from the possibility of direct sales (offered by fairs and markets) and consumption through restaurants offering specialised menus (as in culinary campaigns).

Richards (2012) believes that events act as catalysts for economic activity, as well as developing the region, tourism, and local identity; we can therefore say that above and beyond the leisure side of events, they provide other benefits for local society. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2012) considers cuisine to be intangible cultural heritage, including any kind of food or drink that has a special meaning for cultural groups or is associated with a geographical area. It notes the fact that many locations have made it onto the tourist map thanks to the popularity of their cuisine, related to products such as wine, cheese or culinary festivals.

From this perspective, we can understand that events related to food are also cultural manifestations. As such, events are considered the most effective tool to carry forward strategies of city regeneration, tourism marketing and destination competitiveness (Quinn, 2005). García Sánchez and Alburquerque García (2003) consider that festival tourism can be complementary to sun and beach tourism, and may in some cases become the main reason for the trip. In addition, festivals improve the experience of the 'new cultural tourists' seeking a holiday with a twist and attracted by the idea of coming into contact with the local population and its festivities. Thus, there is a clear relationship between such events and a region like Girona, where a high percentage of its visitors come for sun and beach holidays.

Culinary tourism in Girona province: events

In Girona, to talk of culinary tourism is to talk of local products and the Catalan cuisine. Catalan cuisine is mentioned as far back as medieval times, not only in Catalonia but also in other parts of Europe, having exerted a great influence in places like Italy, Languedoc and Provence. Catalan cuisine is Mediterranean but with contributions from many different places: it is a 'bridge' cuisine, linking Portugal to Istanbul with features from southern France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and North Africa. In fact, it is the result of centuries of evolution and receiving influences from peoples and cultures that have settled in the region: Iberians, Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans bring the Mediterranean touch; Arabs incorporate spices; to this great cocktail are added products from 15th-century America ... Therefore, behind modern Catalan cuisine is the story of a country, a territory. The cuisine is rich, full, complex and diverse, and has

survived thanks to a double life: on the one hand, domestic or popular, and on the other, cultured or professional.

A characteristic feature of Catalan cuisine is that, unlike other culinary traditions, there is no flagship product, no one dish that stands above the rest, and rather it is a sum of products with very different features and dishes. It is a cuisine based on the diversity of its products (from the orchard and the fields, livestock, fishing), with different cooking techniques (grilled, boiled, casseroled, stewed, sautéed and fried, roasted in a clay pot).

The current expansion of Catalan cuisine is a second golden age after the one it already experienced between the 14th and 15th centuries, when Catalan gastronomy was a reference point for the Italian courts of Naples and Rome.

A turning point was Ferran Adrià being proclaimed the world's best chef in 1999. At this point we could say that Catalan cuisine became the focus of attention in the specialised press and began its current moment of splendour and international acclaim. Its high concentration of Michelin stars makes Catalonia, in terms of demographics, the second most awarded country in the world after France, with stars scattered throughout almost the entire region: in large cities and rural areas, in coastal areas, inland and in the mountains. Alongside the culinary vanguard, however, we still find traditional cuisine, related to local products and proximity, market cooking closely related to the traditional holiday calendar, another of the country's great tourism resources. While at one time it seemed this was confined to rural areas, the great chefs have proved to be fans of these dishes and it seems that in recent years there has been a revival of this type of cuisine, reinterpreted with new techniques and a more modern design. This phenomenon, together with the current trends in slow food, sustainable and responsible consumption, etc., has lent local products increasingly more weight.

Girona city and the province in general are also immersed in this awarding of value to gastronomic heritage. According to Fàbrega (1990), there are two reasons that support Girona cuisine becoming a great product available to all. One is that the cuisine of the Girona region is synthesised due to its climate, location and history, with a range of exceptional products. The second reason is that eating well is traditionally an art practiced throughout the region. Studying the specific case of Girona can be done via the themed culinary events that take place in the region, grouped into two types: fairs and markets, and culinary campaigns.

Methods

The study presented in this chapter made an inventory of all the events taking place in this region after searching local sources (county and regional). In total, 45 fairs and markets and 65 gastronomic campaigns were analysed. The collected data provided information on the main organisers or promoters of the event, its theme, when and where it was held and for how long. We began by analysing the results obtained from fairs and markets, followed by those obtained from the gastronomic campaigns. Firstly, in relation to the main promoter or organiser, different types of organiser were identified, although, as we see in Figure 15.1, 70 per cent of these events are organised by local authorities, that is, town or city councils. With regard to the associations that organise these events, these tend to be neighbourhood associations, festival committees or associations formed specifically to this end. Analysis revealed that there is a small volume of events organised by bodies directly related to the production or quality control of food products, in this case designations of origin. It should be noted, however, that most organisers also receive support from other institutions (especially local ones), both public and private. There may be more collaborating bodies if the size of the event (the number of activities) and its funding requirements warrant it. One element that has been observed in some events is that, beyond the scope of the event itself, some local restaurants take the opportunity to create special menus that are usually offered for a period of time extending beyond the event.

Figure 15.1 Event organisers (%)

In relation to event themes, these were classified according to the type of product the event is dedicated to. We have established five categories: Elaborated products, Farm products, Forest products, Fish and Seafood and Generic Fairs.

When we refer to elaborated products, we mean those food products that have undergone a process of transformation once they have been gathered from the field or forest; this includes products from wine or other distilled products (like *Ratafia* – a herb liqueur) to products such as cakes, fritters, oil, etc. As we can see, this is the predominant type. In Figure 15.2 we observe three themes with the same weight. First, there is the farm produce cuisine or fairs devoted to products from the fields such as onions, cherries, *calçots*, etc. A second group comprises products that we have labelled ‘from the forest’ and which are those that are not grown but make up an important part of the culinary tradition of the region, such as snails, mushrooms or game. Finally, when referring to ‘generic’ themed events we mean those events where there is a diversity of products or fairs where the above product types are combined. We see

that the least represented group of products in this area is 'fish and seafood'; this may be due to it being a foodstuff highly sensitive to travel and which requires certain storage conditions, preventing it from being the theme of events and fairs. Another aspect analysed here is whether events focus on a single product or include more than one. What we have found is that a little over half of the events (58 per cent) are devoted to a single product, reinforcing the idea that they are events that often focus on very specific themes.

Figure 15.2 Event themes (%)

One aspect we felt important to analyse was the origin of the products, that is, whether the products displayed or used during the event were local or not. This factor allows us to determine the importance of local producers and their role. The result is that at 60 per cent of the events studied the most common origin of products is local. In the 40 per cent of events that involve products of global origin it is not that local products do not have a place, but that they are tasted alongside products from other areas. Some examples are found in generic product sampling or wine tasting.

Another issue analysed was the location of the event. The first consideration was whether the event venue is located on the coast or not. This also allows us to understand why few markets and fairs are dedicated to the theme of 'fish and seafood' and provides a glimpse of the weight of producers in promoting these events. Thus, of the total number of events analysed, the majority of fairs and markets – 78 per cent – are held inland, while 22 per cent are found on the coast. However, another element we have taken into account is the specific county where the event is held. Girona province is divided into 8 counties, stretching from the coast to the Pyrenees through valleys and croplands. This varied landscape also explains such product diversity.

If we analyse it in these terms rather than considering the local level, as shown in Figure 15.3, we see that most of the events are concentrated in three coastal counties. From this perspective there is an undisputed dominance of areas closer to the coast in the organisation of events related to gastronomy.

Figure 15.3 Events by location (%)

Figure 15.4 Events according to month (%)

The last aspect to be taken into account was event duration. As shown in Figure 15.5, most of the events take place on one day, followed by those that take place over two days; we can therefore speak in general terms of short events. Activities themselves have not been analysed in depth but in most cases the event

consists of a product fair/exhibition, which may be accompanied by tasting and sampling. Often this is complemented by other activities such as workshops and talks, along with other fun activities and entertainment. In some cases there are also competitions (the freshest product, the most innovative product, the best product, etc.). It is also relatively common for some programmed activities to be aimed at children.

Figure 15.5 Event duration (%)

The second group of events we studied was gastronomic campaigns, which usually tend to extend over longer periods than fairs and markets. However, activities tend to be smaller and often based on set menus in restaurants, accompanied by talks or courses. We analysed a total of 65 gastronomic campaigns, addressing the same elements as with fairs and markets, except for product origin. In this case, product origin is more difficult to determine, although it must be said that gastronomic campaigns are usually aimed at promoting local products (Palamos prawns, Pals rice, Escala anchovies, etc.), and we can therefore conclude that these products clearly predominate over those of external origin.

In this case, as shown in Figure 15.6, we have found two profiles of organiser, on the one hand town or city councils (or local authorities), and on the other associations. As with fairs and markets, the main weight of organisation still lies with municipal bodies. Those associations that tend to be behind gastronomic campaigns are usually either restaurateurs' associations or organisations related to gastronomy. However, unlike fairs and markets, regardless of who is in charge of organising gastronomic campaigns, the weight of the restaurant industry, its involvement and collaboration are all essential in ensuring the success of the event.

Figure 15.6 Organisation of gastronomic campaigns (%)

In relation to the theme of the event, we have established a slightly different classification to that of fairs. Six types have been established, retaining Farm products, Forest products, Fish and Seafood and the Generic theme, and introducing Livestock cuisine and Historical and Traditional campaigns. As we can see in Figure 15.7, the predominant themes are 'Fish and seafood' and 'Historical and traditional'. 'Fish and seafood' represent about one-third of all gastronomic campaigns organised, marking a clear difference from fairs and markets, where this type had the least weight. The involvement of restaurants allows this type to have more weight in this group. The second most important type is historical and traditional gastronomic campaigns. This type is not included in the case of fairs and markets because it is

a phenomenon that has proliferated particularly in recent years, but in the sphere of gastronomic campaigns many of these events have been found to be old and part of the traditional calendar of many of the towns where they are held.

Livestock cuisine (based on livestock products), farm cuisine (based on agricultural products) and forestry cuisine all have a similar weight. It is worth noting the difference with regard to fairs and markets, where these elements had more presence. It should also be noted that 'processed products' disappears in gastronomic campaigns, whereas it was predominant in fairs and markets.

Figure 15.7 Gastronomic campaigns according to their theme (%)

In relation to the location of gastronomic campaigns, we see another difference with regard to fairs and markets: more than half are held in coastal towns. This is clearly related to the predominance of campaigns dedicated to 'fish and seafood' above other products. If we analyse gastronomic campaigns by county, beyond the town level, as we see in Figure 15.8 there are some differences with fairs and markets. While the coastal counties continue to be where most campaigns are concentrated, the percentage decreases slightly, with an increase in campaigns held in mountain areas.

Figure 15.8 Gastronomic campaigns according to their location (%)

Figure 15.9 shows the months of the year in which events take place and we see here that there are no large differences with fairs and markets, as there is still a predominance of events organised during the spring (38 per cent) and autumn (25 per cent) months, over those organised during the summer (18 per cent) and winter (19 per cent) months.

Figure 15.9 Gastronomic campaigns according to the month in which they are held (%)

Where there is a marked difference, as already noted, is in the duration of the event. By definition, gastronomic campaigns last longer than fairs and markets, as we can see in Figure 15.10. Nearly two-thirds of events have a duration of between one and two months, although it is true that there are some campaigns of shorter duration (one and two weeks). As mentioned above, this difference stems from the fact that campaigns usually consist of menus and dishes offered by restaurants for a certain period of time. Duration is also usually related to when products can be found on the market, as gastronomic campaigns are based on seasonal products.

Figure 15.10 Gastronomic campaigns according to their duration (%)

Conclusions

As we have seen, Girona has a rich and diverse culinary heritage. The Costa Brava and Girona Pyrenees Tourist Board specifically establishes among the objectives in its 2011–2015 Strategic Plan (among others) the promotion of culinary tourism and the creation of a specific product team in order to work specially on the promotion of this area. However, it remains hard to find cuisine as the main reason for travel, with the exception of visiting some renowned restaurants, and the perception and creation of an image in the tourist imaginary of potential visitors is key to promoting the region.

Analysing the fairs and markets and gastronomic campaigns organised in the province of Girona, we can conclude that in both cases local authorities play a fundamental role in organising these acts, as in many cases they are the main promoter. However, we must also say that without the help of other agents such events would not be possible, and a clear difference can be noticed here, as in the case of fairs and markets it is the involvement of local producers that is vital, whereas in the case of gastronomic campaigns it is restaurateurs. Another element that clearly differentiates fairs and markets from gastronomic campaigns is the duration of the event: while the former is of shorter duration (one or two days), the latter may extend up to one or two months. This is due to the format adopted in their organisation. Fairs and markets usually consist of product exhibitions and tasting, which may be complemented by other recreational activities such as competitions, workshops, games, etc. In the case of gastronomic campaigns, the main objective is to offer a particular product or dish in restaurants within the town, while specific events such as workshops or talks may be organised in parallel.

Despite the differences, in both cases the aim is to promote seasonal, fresh and local products, which is why we find events organised in different places throughout Girona province and at different times of the year. In this respect, we can conclude that the gastronomic events held in the province of Girona fit the general trend of positioning Girona as a culinary tourism destination, together with the desire to diversify the tourist geography of the region (many of the places where these events are held are not the main tourist centres) and ‘deseasonalise’ tourism demand, which is usually concentrated in the summer months. In this regard, the trend that has spread so widely throughout the region of revaluing the local product has been key, from Escala anchovies to Girona apples or beef, Pals rice, etc. The list of products that have been awarded ‘added value through quality’ certifications has led to these products not only being tasted and consumed in the region but also exported.

If planned appropriately, culinary tourism can bring significant benefits to the regions where it is implemented, benefiting small farmers and food artisans, with ancient crafts and traditions, recipes and products recovered (or their loss avoided) all of which benefits the local supply chain and its sustainability. For a better understanding of the impact of these events, future research should be carried out on their economic impact on the population, the profile of participants (to determine the importance of the tourism industry in this area) and the involvement of travel agents (whether in their organisation or promotion).

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