

En HENRIQUES, CLÁUDIA, MOREIRA, MARIA CRISTINA y CÉSAR BITTENCOURT, PEDRO, *Tourism and History World Heritage - Case Studies of Ibero-American Space*. BRAGA (Portugal): Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences, Unive.

Traditional Mexican Cuisine and Tourism: New Meanings of Heritage Cuisine and Its Sociocultural Implications.

DE JESUS CONTRERAS, DANIEL y THOME-ORTIZ, HUMBERTO.

Cita:

DE JESUS CONTRERAS, DANIEL y THOME-ORTIZ, HUMBERTO (2016). *Traditional Mexican Cuisine and Tourism: New Meanings of Heritage Cuisine and Its Sociocultural Implications*. En HENRIQUES, CLÁUDIA, MOREIRA, MARIA CRISTINA y CÉSAR BITTENCOURT, PEDRO *Tourism and History World Heritage - Case Studies of Ibero-American Space*. BRAGA (Portugal): Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences, Unive.

Dirección estable: <https://www.aacademica.org/humberto.thome.ortiz/34>

ARK: <https://n2t.net/ark:/13683/ptuO/umk>



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TOURISM & HISTORY

WORLD HERITAGE CASE STUDIES OF IBERO-AMERICAN SPACE

Cláudia Henriques, Maria Cristina Moreira, Pedro Bittencourt César

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Book Title

Tourism and History
World Heritage – Case Studies of Ibero-American Space

Citation

Henriques, C., Moreira, M. C., César, P. A. B. (Eds.) (2016), *Tourism and History World Heritage – Case Studies of Ibero-American Space*, Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences – University of Minho (CICS.NOVA.UMinho)

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The chapters included in this book have been submitted to blind peer-review process

Publisher

Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences – University of Minho (CICS.NOVA.UMinho)

With the collaboration of the
Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics (CIEO)
University of Algarve

This book is financed by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation
for Science and Technology through project UID/SOC/04020/2013

Format

E-book, 583 pages

Layout

Marlene Fernandes
Clarice Rodelo Capitão

ISBN

978-989-99768-0-1

December, 2016

Braga, Portugal

Tourism and History

World Heritage

Case Studies of Ibero-American Space

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Traditional Mexican Cuisine and Tourism: New Meanings of Heritage Cuisine and its Sociocultural Implications

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Abstract:

The purpose of this essay is to analyse the relationship between heritage cuisine and tourism, along with its sociocultural implications within the framework of contemporary food consumption. Through an analysis of the language used in tourism advertising platforms and tourism policies, contrasted with ethnographic data, this essay examines the interaction between the actors, products and territories in Mexico's eight gastronomic regions which have become attractions for tourists due to the inclusion of traditional Mexican cuisine in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity List. We conclude that the tourist valuation of cuisine heritage promoted by Mexican institutions reflects a two-fold phenomenon, straddling the divide between economic valuation of agricultural food products and the cultural meaning of regional cuisines.

Keywords: Traditional Mexican Cuisine; Heritage Cuisine; Tourism; Consumption

Resumo:

O objetivo deste ensaio é analisar a relação entre a cozinha tradicional e turismo, juntamente com as suas implicações socioculturais, no âmbito do consumo de alimentos contemporâneo. Através de um conteúdo de plataformas de análise de promoção turística e do discurso das políticas de turismo, contrastando com dados etnográficos, este artigo analisa as interações entre atores, produtos e territórios das oito regiões culinárias do México que se tornaram atrações turísticas, a partir da inclusão de cozinha tradicional mexicana na lista de Património

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Cultural Imaterial da UNESCO. Conclui-se que a valorização turística do património culinário por instituições mexicanas reflete um fenómeno ambivalente que está dividido entre o valor económico dos produtos alimentares e o significado cultural das cozinhas regionais.

Palavras-chave: Cozinha Tradicional Mexicana; Herança Culinária; Consumo; Turismo

Resumen:

El propósito de este estudio es analizar la relación entre patrimonio culinario y turismo, a partir de sus implicaciones socioculturales en el marco del consumo alimentario contemporáneo. A través del análisis de contenido de las plataformas de promoción turística y del discurso de las políticas turísticas, -contrastado con datos etnográficos-, esta investigación examina las interacciones entre actores, productos y territorios de las ocho regiones gastronómicas de México que se han convertido en atractivos turísticos, desde la inclusión de la Cocina Tradicional Mexicana dentro de la lista del Patrimonio Cultural Intangible de la Humanidad de la UNESCO. Se concluye que, la valorización turística del patrimonio culinario, -por parte de las instituciones mexicanas, refleja un fenómeno ambivalente que se debate entre la valorización económica de los productos agroalimentarios y los significados culturales de las cocinas regionales.

Palabras Clave: Cocina Tradicional Mexicana; Patrimonio Alimentario; Consumo; Turismo

1. Introduction

In 2010 traditional Mexican cuisine was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). This event was significant because it presented the opportunity to commercially capitalise on heritage cuisine (Laborde and Medina, 2015), and it served as a mechanism to promote Mexican cuisine on a global level; while at the same time represented the obligation to create policies for its preservation. Within these preservation efforts, tourism has been conceived as an effective tool for the valuation of this cuisine. Traditional Mexican cuisine is seen as a tourist attraction based on the resources and expertise of the country's principal regional cuisines. However, this tourism does not always integrate all the different social actors directly involved with heritage cuisine. On the contrary, the development of an elitist gastronomic tourism may be observed, directed to global or "world-class" markets.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, we address the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage; next we present the role of traditional cuisine within tourism; later we discuss, in three parts, the Mexican case from a regional perspective; and lastly we analyse public policy for culinary tourism implemented by the Mexican government. We conclude that a goal for the use of traditional Mexican cuisine in tourism is to influence the preservation of biocultural heritage, social integration and national economic growth. To achieve this, however, it is essential that tourism policy actions contemplate the social, economic and environmental dimensions by means of efforts directed to the equitable management of the culinary heritage of the Mexican people.

2. The relationship between tourism and cultural heritage

Addressing the concept of cultural heritage involves two basic elements. On one hand, what stands out is the material or tangible nature of cultural heritage, while on the other, the intangible aspects of its cultural goods. In addition to its material footprint, heritage involves traditions, knowledge, systems of meanings, skills, and symbolic forms of expression (Bonfil, 1997), which as a whole constitute the testimonies of the process of civilization and exert a referential function for society (Llull, 2005).

In addition to the economic importance of heritage, its role as a resource for humanity's future wellbeing stands out. Heritage has today become a strategic resource for its guardians insofar that it responds to the consumption needs of contemporary society (Rotman, 2006). Culinary tourism is situated within the what has come to be called heritage tourism (Timothy and Boyd, 2006), understood as travel to sites of historical importance, monuments, agricultural landscapes and ethnic communities. This type of tourism involves the integration of material and non-material cultural aspects that serve as settings for tourist activities and as interpretive perspectives of the travel experience.

Tourism activities can play an important role in the conservation of cultural heritage through its economic revitalization, while also representing a key to open doors to "other" cultures. In this regard, Almirón *et. al.* (2006) show that tourism is positioned as a strategy for the valuation of cultural heritage in the context of globalization (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). Paradoxically, however, tourism's appropriation of heritage can lead to its commercialization and banalization (Prats, 2003).

The use of cultural heritage for recreation is motivated by a desire for distinction, which is a marker of social status for the current patterns of tourist consumption (Timothy and Boyd,

2006). As a result, the analysis of heritage tourism centres on the place occupied by heritage objects as markers of identity in order to give meaning to the travel experience (Álvarez, 2008), since this type of tourism is distinguished by tourists' interest in the cultures of the destinations they visit.

Tourism can be thought of as a tool to legitimise heritage (Pérez, 2013). In the case of food, tourism represents a platform to enhance its value and promote it as a regional marker (Bessière, 1998). The demand for heritage tourism goods converts tourism into a practice that redefines its material and immaterial dimensions, by way of assigning new values in connection with its ability to satisfy contemporary leisure activities (Troncoso and Almirón, 2005).

3. Traditional cuisines in the tourism industry

Heritage cuisine contains a group of elements linked to food production, agriculture and regional collective heritage, including agricultural and livestock products, know-how, local dishes and social norms for consumption (Bessière, 1998; 2013). At the same time, traditional cuisines form part of heritage cuisine and refer to culinary systems that include autochthonous techniques, local systems of production, traditions, beliefs and social practices.

For Mintz (2003), the term "cuisine" is complex and confusing. First of all, because in the collective imagination there is not a sufficiently clear distinction between the acceptance of cuisine as a physical space and a socially-constructed space. Secondly, because what is usually called cuisine refers more to the generic way of designating certain practices related to the preparation and consumption of food, while the cuisine's relationship with the culture and the traditions of the place from which it originates is very tenuous. One problem in characterising and defining cuisines has to do with geographical and sociocultural criteria. The former makes it impossible to talk about a "national cuisine" since this is actually comprised of contributions from different regions that make up a country, which makes it more appropriate to speak of regional cuisines. Therefore, the term "national cuisine" is by definition more broad and is usually associated with emblematic dishes, while "regional cuisine" is a more specific term that allows for more precise appreciation of the diversity of the biological and cultural factors that make up the cuisine's representative dishes. For these reasons, food and cuisine are not from a country; they are from a place.

Appadurai (1988) maintains that national cuisines came about thanks to the creation of cookbooks and recipes, in which the rules and practices that are essential for the continuity of a nation's food culture are systematically shaped. Their value lies in that, upon being documented

with certain historical weight, their contents were gradually transmitted intergenerationally and hence legitimised, thus constituting the correct protocols on how to prepare and consume food. In this way, recipe books reveal a rhetoric about the construction of a national cuisine, which seeks to be a country's marker of distinction, revealing its personalised selection of the elements which act as identifying references (Laborde and Medina, 2015). Conversely, Mintz (2003) maintains that recipe books do not make cuisines, rather cuisines are made by common social roots, or in other words, "the food of a community". From the foregoing it may be asserted that cuisines are based on a foundation of numerous sources: some cuisines base their culinary model on autochthonous legacies, others are based on an emblematic dish prepared with local products, and others give specific importance to their preparation techniques (Juárez, 2008). Cuisine can be more precisely defined as "the ongoing foodways of a region within which active discourse about food sustains both common understandings and reliable production of the foods in question" (Mintz, 2003: 143). Currently, the diversity of national, regional and local cuisine is being used commercially in various economically productive sectors, including tourism.

The use of traditional cuisine in tourism illustrates the new ways that culinary heritage is being employed. Espeitx (2004) and Álvarez (2008) maintain that gastronomy's incursion into tourism is part of a broader development strategy based on the conversion of local products into interchangeable capital as a function of local, regional and international political agendas. One of the most significant trends in heritage tourism is the inclusion of traditional cuisine as a central element of the tourist experience, one example being the way in which heritage cuisine is used as a tool to promote a region (Espeitx, 2008).

In the past decades, a variety of concepts have emerged illustrating diverse facets of the same phenomenon: *gastronomic tourism*, *food tourism*, *gourmet tourism*, *culinary tourism*, *taste tourism* and *cuisine tourism*. Beyond the particularities of each area of focus, the common denominator in all of these is the role of food heritage as an element for tourism. Research in this subject has grouped into the following themes: i) studies of the motivations for tourist activity related to traditional food (Quan and Wang, 2004; Kivela and Crotts, 2006); ii) gastronomy's contribution to the formation of the image of tourist destinations (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; de la Barre and Brouder, 2013); iii) the use of local gastronomy in marketing strategies (Boyne *et al.*, 2003; Du Rand *et al.*, 2003); iv) heritage cuisine in local development (Bessiére, 1998; Giampiccoli and Hayward, 2012); v) the use of local gastronomy for tourism (Teixeira and Ribeiro, 2013; Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2009); and vi) the relationship between the markers of quality and rural tourism (Armesto and Gómez, 2004).

In a comparative study of the gastronomy of France, Italy and Thailand, Ab Karim and Chi (2010) show that the different national cuisines constitute actual tourist attractions. A similar result was found by Okumus *et al.* (2007) in the case of Hong Kong and Turkey, in which they highlight the influence of regions' local gastronomy as an element to promote tourism. Other authors have suggested that some initiatives to promote gastronomy for tourism fail since they focus on dishes that represent national culture, while the regional specialties are given little attention (Okumus *et al.*, 2007). Failure is also seen when highly stylised versions of cuisine are presented that do not correspond with the original culinary expressions (Hillel *et al.*, 2013), which was observed by Avieli (2013) in a province in Vietnam.

According to Richards (2002), the success of traditional cuisines within tourism is related to the phenomenon of food standardisation in a global world, an aspect that creates a desire to find authentic food at their places of origin. The urban consumption of emblematic dishes, meanwhile, represents a type of symbolic appropriation of food (Bessi re and Tibere, 2013). Gastronomy is a highly valued element for tourists, as it enables tourists to experience sensations that are different from those found in everyday life (Quan and Wang, 2004). Likewise, traditional cuisine is important for tourism since food consumption is a basic component in the basket of tourism goods and food is an element for intercultural dialogue between hosts and visitors ( lvarez and Sammartino, 2009).

Although the tourism potential of traditional cuisine has been considered a tool for economic development, in some cases this potential has not been seized upon. Such is the situation of traditional Mexican cuisine, which despite its distinction as a heritage site conferred by UNESCO, has not been taken advantage of to contribute to the diversification of national tourism and to the creation of wealth and wellbeing of its people.

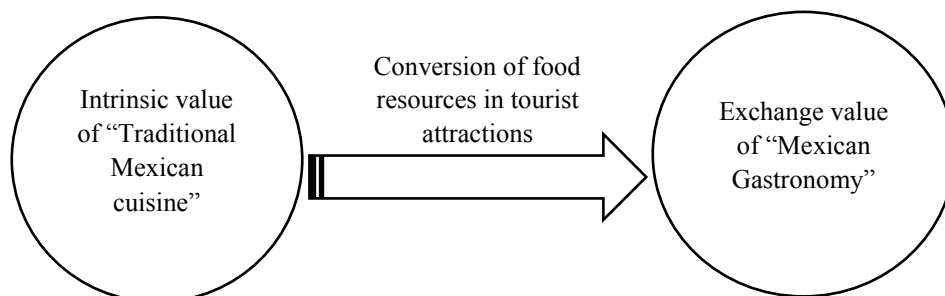


Figure 1. Valorization of culinary heritage in tourism

Source: Author

4. Traditional Mexican cuisine and tourism

Mexican gastronomy is composed of diverse ingredients, tools, knowledge, practices, beliefs, meanings and identities, which considered as a whole, create an ample repertoire of food preparation distributed throughout geographic regions. Since the pre-Hispanic era, Mexico has had its own cuisine made of three basic crops: corn (*Zea mays*), beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) and chili peppers (*Capsicum annum*). This triad of goods, along with other plant species such as squash (*Cucurbita maxima*), amaranth (*Amaranthus spp.*), tomatillo (*Physalis ixocarpa*), tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) and nopal cactus (*Opuntia ficus-indica*), and some species of animals, birds, fish, batrachians, insects and reptiles, formed part of the diet of the ancient Mexicans (Vargas, 2007).

The supply of many of these food items was possible thanks to the development of agriculture and domestication, together with the preservation of practices such as hunting, fishing and gathering (Sugiura, 1998). The invention of cooking methods such as nixtamalization,¹⁷² the creation of devices such as the molcajete and metate¹⁷³ (Long, 2010), and even the development of ways of commercial exchange such as bartering¹⁷⁴ (Rovira, 2009), all played a decisive role in building the foundation of modern traditional Mexican cuisine.

The arrival of the Spanish initiated a process of culinary fusion between indigenous and European cultures, a process that was also influenced by cultures from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. During the 16th century, commercial exchange between Mexico and the rest of the world began, which was made possible due to the establishment of ports in places such as Veracruz and Acapulco (Ranero, 2015). A significant variety of food resources were introduced during this exchange: different types of domesticated livestock and poultry; a huge variety of spices, legumes and grains; fruits and vegetables; a large variety of cured meats and milk products, among others. Likewise, the cultural-gastronomic teachings imparted by Catholic evangelists were essential to the development of the different regional cuisines (Romero *et al.*, 2010).

This cultural mix resulted in the gastronomic wealth of traditional Mexican cuisine that can be seen in the variety of nationally and internationally renowned dishes, drinks and products.

¹⁷² Nixtamalization is the process in which corn is cooked in alkaline water, which removes a thick membrane that covers the seed and eases digestion of the seed (Long, 2010). The resulting cooked corn is known as nixtamal.

¹⁷³ A *molcajete* is a mortar made from volcanic rock that is used to grind numerous ingredients. A *metate*, also carved from rock, is a long, tilted device with three short legs (Long, 2010) used in some rural areas of Mexico to grind the nixtamal or other ingredients used for preparing salsas.

¹⁷⁴ Barter refers to the exchange of one good for another of an equivalent value, without the exchange of currency (Rovira, 2009).

Beyond the stereotypes of tequila and spicy food, Mexican gastronomy is a complex labyrinth represented by its types of regional and local cuisine, which boast unique identifying dishes. The history of traditional Mexican cuisine has been the history of a nation searching for its definition and place in the world, and in order to be consolidated as one of the best in the planet, has to overcome a series of political, economic, social, cultural and ecological fluctuations, surviving thanks to its roots in the identity of Mexicans (Pilcher, 2001).

Due to the inclusion of traditional Mexican cuisine to UNESCO's representative list, this culinary wealth is being considered as a tool for tourism. However, since the beginning of the 1960s, the Mexican Government, through its then-called Department of Tourism, organised the *First Congress, Competition and Exhibition for Mexican Cuisine*, which had three fundamental goals: i) conserving the classic dishes of Mexican cuisine, ii) promoting its consumption among domestic, but above all, foreign, tourists, and iii) encouraging eating-out at high-end restaurants as a means to discover Mexican cuisine. The government's intention was for traditional Mexican cuisine to gain international recognition and for it to act as a mechanism to convert the country into an elite tourist destination, a goal demonstrated by the aggressive marketing campaigns launched since 1966 (Juárez, 2008).

In the years that followed, Mexican gastronomy began to be increasingly considered as a bastion of Mexican folklore. Surprisingly however, it was not until the 1980s that gastronomy began to appear in tourist brochures, and which was picked up again later with the publication of *The National Directory of Gastronomy*, which served as a guide on the culinary diversity of Mexico's different regions (Juárez, 2008).

Currently, as has been the case for many years, marketing Mexican food in the tourism industry has been based on haute cuisine, which adapts the most emblematic dishes to the aesthetic and functional needs of differentiated niche markets. Numerous initiatives by the Ministry of Tourism (SECTUR, acronym as given in Spanish), such as the campaign *Live it to Believe it*, display gastronomy in connection with hotels and restaurants. What stood out about another campaign named *Come to Eat*³⁷⁵, which marketed Mexico as a food destination, is the image of a foodie paradise. Unlike the earlier campaign, *Come to Eat* promoted the culinary richness of regional cuisine and the region's different products. However, a deeper analysis shows that in reality the same type of haute cuisine was being marketed: returning to the most emblematic agricultural food products, but eliminating the image of those who produce and transform them.

³⁷⁵ More information available at: <http://venacomer.com.mx/>

Other locally-oriented initiatives highlighted the wealth of regional cuisines, for example: the state of Morelos implemented a tour of Franciscan, Augustine and Dominican convents, which highlights a visit to the convents' kitchens, with an emphasis on the influence of Mexico's vice-regal period in creating the state's heritage cuisine.¹⁷⁶ In the state of Puebla, tours have been created that include a visit to restaurants for tastings of typical dishes. Likewise, the so-called Magical Gastronomic Tour was created, which includes food from rural areas and focuses on indigenous cuisine and exotic local products.¹⁷⁷

Some emblematic products from different regions of the country have been marketed through the creation of food tours. The most representative of these are the wine tours in the states of Querétaro and Baja California (Thomé *et. al.*, 2015), the cocoa tour in Tabasco, the vanilla tour in Veracruz, the coffee tour in Chiapas and the tequila tour in Jalisco.¹⁷⁸ The common denominator for these tours is that they are linked to large agro-industrial conglomerates that are not uncommonly financed by capital from transnational companies.

5. Methodology

This work is a case study based on qualitative data (Stake, 2000; Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) with the purpose of understanding the sociocultural impact of tourism on traditional Mexican cuisine. The following research question was used to carry this out: are culinary tourism policies favourable tools for the development of the communities that possess the regional expressions of traditional Mexican cuisine?

To answer this question, the work was divided into four phases. First, we performed a documentary investigation on the relationship between traditional cuisine and tourism which looked at some of the most relevant works from the latter part of the 20th century to the present day. Second, we selected our case by means of theoretical sampling by seeking a phenomenon that specifically illustrates the challenges and opportunities of traditional cuisine as tourism resources. In the third phase, we performed a deductive investigation, by obtaining empirical data from official websites that market culinary tourism in Mexico. These were compared with the results from qualitative research done between 2010 and 2015 that studied

¹⁷⁶ More information available at: <http://www.visitmexico.com/es/historica-ruta-del-convento-cuernavaca-morelos>

¹⁷⁷ More information available at: <http://www.puebla.travel/es/experiencias/sierra-magica/item/ruta-magica-de-la-gastronomia>

¹⁷⁸ More information available at: <http://www.rutadeltequila.org.mx/>;
<http://www.descubrebajacalifornia.com/index.php/destinos/descubre-la-ruta-del-vino>;
<http://www.turismochiapas.gob.mx/sector/ruta-del-caf>.

agricultural food tourism and its social and economic impacts on rural communities (Renard and Thomé, 2010; Thomé et. al, 2014; Thomé et. al, 2015; Thomé, 2015; De Jesús *et al.*, 2016). In the fourth phase we analysed the data using the process of category analysis which included three fundamental aspects: i) the sources and products and ii) the social inequality in culinary tourism

The data was analysed using content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), centred on an interpretive focus of the ways in which Mexican cuisine is promoted as a tourism resource in the discourse found in tourism marketing platforms. We compared this with the empirical experience of the social actors who preserve and reproduce Mexican heritage cuisine. This paper is part of a larger trend within tourism studies associated with the analysis of mechanisms of appropriation of gastronomy in policy actions, programmes and the media (V. Boyne *et al.*, 2003; Du Rand *et al.*, 2003; Frochot, 2003; Kim *et al.*, 2009). The disciplines used with the interpretive perspectives were rural sociology and the anthropology of food.

6. Mexico's gastronomic regions from their traditional cuisines

For several years there have been efforts to divide Mexico's traditional cuisines into regions, however no consensus has been reached regarding its boundaries, due to the difficulty in unifying similarities with regards to the food's geographical, social, cultural, political and governmental aspects. At the end of the 1980s, the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH, acronym as given in Spanish) published a collection of Cultural Atlases, which included a special edition for Mexican gastronomy (Ávila *et al.*, 1998).

The atlas grouped Mexico's principal gastronomic resources into 12 regions. Each regional group contains a short description of the principal ingredients, dishes, drinks, products, tools and knowledge that comprise its traditional cuisine. In 2000, the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA, acronym as given in Spanish) edited a map of Mexico's regional cuisines illustrating the locations of the principal dishes. But the map was limited to a graphic representation and did not address the cultural division of the regional cuisines. Later, the special edition number 12 of the magazine *Arqueología Mexicana (Mexican Archaeology)* focused on pre-Hispanic cuisine, and classified gastronomy into eight regions: Northeast, Northwest, West, Centre, Altiplano, Oaxaca, Gulf and Southeast. In the end, this classification would turn out to be one of the most accepted ways of dividing Mexico's gastronomy. This classification was used in the first and second applications submitted to the UNESCO to claim traditional Mexican cuisine's place as Heritage of Humanity. For purposes of this essay, we will use this

classification, since it is considered to be the most precise assembly of the culinary diversity of Mexico's regional cuisines.

7. Mexico's gastronomic regions as tourism capital

Heritage tourism starts with the existence of natural and cultural resources that act as a base for the development of new experiences. In the case of culinary tourism, its success depends on an eventual synergy between culinary resources and other attractions that generate recreational options. Mexico's biological and cultural diversity have produced a gastronomic richness concentrated in eight culinary regions (CONACULTA, 2004), enumerated below:

- Northeast

Includes the states of Coahuila, Nuevo León, Zacatecas, Durango, San Luis Potosí and part of Tamaulipas. As with the rest of Mexican cuisines, it is strongly influenced by ingredients such as corn, beans and chili pepper, with its main ingredient being beef. The principal actors of the Northeast are the farmers and ranchers of the region.

- Northwest

Includes the states of Baja California, Sonora and Chihuahua. Its culinary system shows a variety of very diverse ingredients such as fish, seafood, beans, corn, cactus and meats. The region is recognised for its blends of wines. The fundamental actors of the agricultural food system are the farmers, fishermen, winemakers and professional cooks. Recently, it has gained an international reputation as a destination for wine and gourmet cuisine, especially based in its seafood.

- West

Includes the states of Jalisco, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Michoacán, Guerrero and Colima. The region has elements from the land and sea, along with emblematic products such as tequila and mezcal. This region has the traditional Michoacán cuisine which was the reference that made up the application for UNESCO to allow traditional Mexican cuisine to be considered Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The region's central actors are the farmers, fishermen, traditional cooks and distillers.

- Centre

Includes the states of Aguascalientes, Hidalgo, Guanajuato and Querétaro. This is a semi-arid region whose cuisine includes the use of cactus and insects in different traditional dishes. The

region produces wines and cheeses, which is its main tourist attraction. Its central actors are farmers, ranchers, harvesters and gatherers, traditional cooks and winemakers.

- Altiplano

Comprised of the states of Puebla, Mexico City, Tlaxcala, Morelos and Mexico State. It is structured around the crops of corn, beans, chili peppers, squash and amaranth, along with lacustrine food products, which together form part of Mesoamerican gastronomy. Its main actors are the farmers, harvesters and gatherers and traditional cooks.

- Oaxaca

Due to its culinary richness, this state makes up its own gastronomic region. Oaxacan cuisine consists of a wide range of ingredients, dishes and knowledge that have been protected by the traditional cooks from different regions within the state.

- Gulf

Includes the states of Veracruz and part of Tamaulipas. Its name comes from these states' proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, which has influenced its cuisine with a significant amount of fish and seafood in its traditional dishes. Its principal actors are the fishermen and traditional cooks.

- Southeast

Consists of the states of Chiapas, Yucatán, Tabasco, Campeche and Quintana Roo. The region has the most biodiversity in the country, therefore its gastronomy has a variety of food resources that, combined with the cultural diversity of the native ethnic groups, result in a complex and distinctive cuisine. The region's principal actors are the farmers, fishermen and traditional cooks.

As seen above, the Mexico's gastronomic wealth is a bio-cultural construction that expresses historical coevolutionary processes between cultural groups and specific ecosystems. One of the aspects observed in Mexico's culinary tourism policies is its strong emphasis on gastronomy. This runs the risk of ignoring the resources and actors linked to traditional cuisines, which is why a tourism policy is needed that is oriented towards the development of the communities which have maintained the biotic and cultural resources that sustain this patrimony.

8. Tourist activities in Mexico's gastronomic regions

Following the recognition of traditional Mexican cuisine as Heritage of Humanity, Mexico's federal government implemented a series of actions to promote Mexico's cuisine by means of

tourism. The first application submitted to UNESCO acknowledges that “in Mexico, for the farmer, the vendor, the artisan, the industrialist, the restaurant and hotel owner, for these people popular gastronomy is a powerful economic resource that drives other cultural industries such as tourism” (CONACULTA, 2004). Because of this, SECTUR carried out numerous actions based on ten thematic core concepts, where the principal good was heritage cuisine, but where the existence of attractions, infrastructure and services was also essential to attract tourism.

The proposal was based on the following thematic areas:

- 1) Wine regions
- 2) Ethnic cuisine
- 3) Traditional gastronomy of markets
- 4) Corn gastronomy
- 5) Tequila culture
- 6) Seafood cuisine
- 7) Ancestral Mayan gastronomy
- 8) Mestizo cuisine
- 9) Mexican haute cuisine
- 10) Contemporary Mexican cuisine



Figure 2. The Gastronomic Routes of Mexico

Source: <http://rutasgastronomicas.sectur.gob.mx/>

Thus the interaction between tourism and traditional cuisine had dual purposes: to position the nation’s culinary diversity and stimulate competition in tourist destinations. However, the thematic areas shown above reveal a tourism policy that emphasises the role of food resources as an asset for economic growth, while overlooking its social and historical aspects and its

symbolic value for the producing communities. In this way, tourism becomes an elitist mechanism for the appropriation of heritage, as those whom benefit have the best conditions to provide for the need of tourists. This has made the gastronomic tourism industry a disputed field among very heterogeneous actors (Álvarez and Sammartino, 2009).

The tourism valuation of heritage food tends to promote haute cuisine, even though heritage cuisine is sustained by autochthonous ingredients and techniques. In the *Come to Eat* campaign, “traditional Mexican cuisine” was marketed using dishes such as *pork belly tacos* or *carrot soup with partridge*, dishes with names, presentations and prices which create exclusion of the true producers and ingredients of traditional Mexican cuisine. In that regard, Espeitx (2011) and Jordana (2000) propose that in order for a dish to be considered “traditional”, it should have historical roots, be tied to a region and form part of a community’s identity, criteria which the abovementioned dishes in the *Come to Eat* campaign do not satisfy.

The transformation of cuisine into a tourism resource should occur with an appropriate balance between tradition and innovation, between local knowledge associated with the cultural heritage of specific regions (Amaya and Aguilar, 2012) and the current uses of this heritage. According to Espeitx (2008), the use of gastronomy in tourism must renovate and reinterpret the values of the past by means of actions that promote its recovery and conservation.

9. The policy actions of gastronomic valuation

The inclusion of traditional Mexican cuisine in the representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was a significant event that obligated the Mexican government to protect this bastion for humanity. That was the starting point for the *Plan to Safeguard the Gastronomic Heritage*, with the purpose of protecting and revitalizing traditional cuisine. The plan focussed on three regions in Mexico: the Purépecha Plateau in Michoacán, the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, and the Sierra Norte Mountain range of Puebla. Investments and training programmes were carried out in these three regions, for the purpose of preserving gastronomic heritage (CONACULTA, 2005).

In the case of Michoacán,¹⁷⁹ models were supported for learning exchange programmes between traditional cooks, for the cooks to acquire knowledge for domestic and commercial uses (CONACULTA, 2005). Our attention is drawn to the fact that these efforts centre on

¹⁷⁹ This case refers to the Gathering of Traditional Cooks of Michoacán, an annual event since 2002 (<http://www.visitmichoacan.com.mx/cocineras2015/index.html>).

traditional cooks, which appears to be a positive aspect. However, not all the cooks have benefitted from tourism, rather, those who most benefit are linked to the ruling political class and economic elites, who receive more media attention and are included in the marketed tourism events that are financed with public resources. The same phenomena occurred with cooks in the state of Oaxaca and other regions in Mexico.

From a critical perspective, the role of traditional cooks is two-fold. As in the case mentioned above, their role is not entirely inclusive and it responds to the necessity of a social class that constructs references of exoticism and otherness for an affluent and cosmopolitan urban segment. On the other hand, it is undeniable that heritage gastronomy must be showcased as the only way to pursue its commercial and symbolic reproduction. Both of these aspects bring us to believe that traditional cuisine is a dual-faceted space which creates asymmetrical power relationships.

Following the government's safeguarding policy action, the *Policy to Promote National Gastronomy* was implemented. This policy's goal was to recover, stimulate, safeguard and promote Mexican gastronomy by means of protecting the bearers of heritage, the transfer and stimulation of knowledge, training, certification in service standards, adapting educational plans, innovation and research (SECTUR-SHCP, 2015).

This policy sought to integrate the actors involved in the regional cuisines' chain of production. But that "integration" was done without considering the asymmetries in cultural and economic capital among a very heterogeneous group of actors. The unequal integration of actors results in the hegemony of one group over the others, which creates new social asymmetries. For example, the rural producers can integrate themselves into the tourism industry through a false participation that only converts them into suppliers of labour or raw materials.

Instead of the cultural valuation of heritage food, it helps with a simple economic valuation that pushes aside the sociocultural importance in the interest of a supposed development. The coupling of tourism and gastronomy certainly can stimulate local development (Bessi re, 1998), the integration of diverse social sectors (Espeitx, 2008) and the preservation of heritage food (Teixeira and Ribeiro, 2013). However, this does not always occur since local actors do not take ownership of the tourism projects and traditional cuisine risks becoming a commodity (Baldacchino, 2015), which has happened in other countries in Latin America (V.  lvarez and Sammartino, 2009).

10. Conclusions

The declaration of traditional Mexican cuisine as cultural heritage has led to the challenge of finding new meanings for culinary heritage within the context of globalization. Its valuation by means of tourism has revealed unprecedented mechanisms of the construction, appropriation and consumption of food that is not always compatible with the practices and values associated with traditional cuisine. In this way, many efforts to showcase traditional Mexican cuisine in fact involves adapting the cuisine in order to satisfy the demand from cosmopolitan consumers. While it is true that many autochthonous elements of regional cuisines are recovered, this adaptation implies an excessive aestheticisation and alteration of the cuisine, to the detriment of its attributes of authenticity and tradition. This phenomenon creates an obvious exclusion of the social actors with less possibilities of “adapting” to the changes required for involvement in the tourist industry. Thus the goals of development, equality and social well-being, implicit in this strategy, are not reached.

The policy actions for tourism that we have addressed have a dual character that falls in between economic (gastronomic tourism) and cultural (heritage gastronomy) logic (López, 2014). There is an opportunity to showcase traditional cuisine via tourism (Espeitx, 2008), but this must be analysed within the framework of the social, political and economic structures which become involved in the tourism projects. The farmers, ethnic groups and small businesses are coincidentally always excluded from the primary benefits of tourism. Future research needs to consistently address the sociocultural impacts of tourism on the different gastronomic regions of Mexico.

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