

TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY ECONOMY: CONSTRUCTING CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH BREAD-MAKING

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Abstract: The trends of healthy nutrition spreading worldwide can be observed on the example of the expanding consumer niche oriented to the demand for hand-made bread baked in small bakeries. Based on a specific example of a group of bread-makers, the owners of small bakeries in Bulgaria, the article discusses the ways of constructing cultural heritage and its particular use as a resource in this economic context. Apart from laying emphasis on the use of maximally high quality products in bread-making, the small entrepreneurs also apply cultural methods in order to construct the image of bread as a cultural value, inherited from the past, and to conceptualise the ways and technologies of its production as social actions marking “a return to traditions”. The research presents the narrative strategies of the bread-makers, whereby bread-making has been structured as cultural heritage. I identified these strategies in the self-presentation of the members of the branch organisation, the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers, during their participation in the Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv between the 23rd and 26th of April 2015.

Keywords: bread, bread-making, cultural heritage, narrative strategies, small entrepreneurs, traditions

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades we have observed an increased interest in cultural heritage and its various forms, presentations, and uses related to the field of economy. Nowadays not only the use of natural resources, but also the reconstruction of the past, as well as the promotion and propagation of cultural heritage, have become an essential part of different economic spheres, and especially of tourism industry (cf. Cohen 1988; Brewer 1994). Local history, natural landmarks, memory, traditions, elevated to the status of “heritage”, are rediscovered, loaded with new meanings, enriched, and have become important resources and a part

of the basic capital of tourism and of other areas of production, trade, and services. A great number of local entrepreneurs are among the important agents in this process (Petrova 2015). Based on a specific example of a group of bread-makers, the owners of small bakeries in Bulgaria, I will discuss in this article the ways of constructing cultural heritage and its particular use as a resource in this economic context. My research is a part of the scientific project “Transformations of local agricultural practices under conditions of Europeanisation and globalisation”¹.

The trends of healthy nutrition spreading worldwide can be observed on the example of the expanding consumer niche, oriented to the demand for bread, made by hand and baked in small bakeries. The small entrepreneurs, owners of such bakeries I investigated in 2015, claim that in the process of their professional work and by its results they have been endeavouring to fit in that niche oriented to healthy and nature-conforming nutrition. Apart from laying emphasis on the use of maximally high quality products in bread-making, they also apply cultural methods in order to construct the image of bread as a cultural value, inherited from the past, and to conceptualise the ways and technologies of its production as social actions marking “a return to traditions”. The entrepreneurs display the production and marketing of a product of a very high symbolic value, exceeding and even incomparable with its market value. In this way small bread-makers practically become part of the generation of cultural heritage. However, this process is accompanied by the desire of the bread-makers to pass on to the contemporaries the knowledge and practices related to the preparation of bread, perceived as heritage and value. This way the producers themselves take also the role of mediators and try to influence the change in attitudes, in relation to the product, in diet, and even in everyday life of the customers. Naturally, the cultural valuation of the hand-made bread produced by bakeries also aims at its economisation. The rise of an economic product to the rank of cultural heritage further enhances its market value and thus heritage becomes a resource, a means of providing income as well as a medium for the successful development of the business enterprise.

In this article I present the narrative strategies of small bread-makers in Bulgaria, whereby bread-making has been structured as cultural heritage. I identified these strategies in the self-presentation of the members of the branch organisation, the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers, (constituted in 2014) during their participation in the Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv between the 23rd and 26th of April 2015. I managed to conduct interviews with three of them as well as with one of their apprentices; I also documented their interaction with the audience to whom they offered to taste, free of charge, the loaves of bread kneaded and baked on the spot (Fig. 1–2).² I supplemented the information I had collected with a review of the internet page of the organisation and the



Figure 1. The Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv in 2015. Master-bakers Georgi and Alexei offering the fair visitors their produce. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.



Figure 2. Master-bakers Georgi and Dimitar intercommunicating with the visitors of the Crafts Fair. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.

pages of its individual member enterprises³ (12 small bakeries from different Bulgarian towns and cities)⁴. In September 2015, I conducted field research in five small enterprises, members of the guild, which are located in Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Haskovo, and Sliven.

THE CRAFTS FAIR IN PLOVDIV

The handicrafts fair was first held in Plovdiv in 2012, on the initiative of the Regional Chamber of Arts and Crafts. Since then, it has been organised on four days twice every year, in the spring and in the autumn. The organisers' objective has been to present and popularise the traditional arts and crafts still existing today in their wealth and diversity, and to help enhance the craftsmen's prestige in society. The spring fair is held in a part of the main street, where in the early 1940s the workshops of leading craftsmen of Plovdiv were located. The autumn fair is held in the old part of the city.

Every time the Crafts Fair begins with a procession of the participants along the main street or in the old part of the city. Most of the craftsmen turn out in traditional costumes or outfits characteristic of their respective craft. An opening ceremony is held by the mayor and the organisers in one of the central city squares. Participants are from different parts of the country; there are also guests from neighbouring countries, for example Serbia and Macedonia. The number of craftsmen presenting their crafts has been growing with every passing year and in 2016 it amounted already to 85, displaying 25 handicrafts.⁵

During the fair, besides selling their produce, the craftsmen also give demonstrations of their production process or part of it. At every fair emphasis



Figure 3. Master-baker Dimitar kneading dough in front of the audience at the Crafts Fair. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.

is laid on some of the crafts and an initiative is launched with the aim of drawing public attention to the work of craftsmen from that sphere; for instance, a ceramics workshop, a wrought iron studio, or a workshop of carpet weaving is organised. Contests are also held among master craftsmen from all over the country, for instance, in pottery making. The Spring Fair of 2015 I studied, the fifth one in succession, focused on bread-making. The organisers were the Plovdiv Municipality, the municipal enterprise “Tourism”, the Regional Ethnographic Museum in Plovdiv, the Regional Chamber of Crafts, and the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers. The main event during the Crafts Fair was declared to be the fair of the bakers, during which the participating master-bakers opened a makeshift bakery in the street where they kneaded dough and baked bread in front of the audience during the four days of the fair (Fig. 3).

HISTORY OF BREAD-MAKING IN BULGARIA

The preparation of bread has been one of the oldest human activities, and bread itself is one of the earliest products in history. It occupies a central place in the history of agrarian societies. To this day bread is one of the staple foods. For Bulgarians bread was a staple food up to the middle of the twentieth century (Vakarelski 1974: 212). In traditional Bulgarian culture, characteristic of the pre-industrial society and surviving in the village environment up to the middle of the twentieth century, bread for daily consumption and for holiday feasting was kneaded and baked by women in the peasant families (Yaneva 2010: 203). Bread-making for everyday use was considered to be one of the hardest house-keeping obligations and was done once a week (Markova 2011: 80). Researchers have noted that in traditional culture bread-making was the woman’s basic socially differentiated activity, related, above all, to her reproduction abilities (Yaneva 2010: 211–212). Bread for daily use was usually made of mixed flour (wheat, barley, and maize), while ritual bread – most often of wheat flour (Markova 2011: 81).

During the Middle Ages, bread-making developed as a craft in Bulgarian towns to meet the needs of the urban population. Along with other crafts it went beyond the circle of household production, becoming part of the process of reaffirmation of the crafts as a third sector, apart from agriculture and stock-breeding (Primovski 1981: 111). During the period of the Ottoman rule of the Bulgarian lands (1396–1878), crafts, including bread-making, were encouraged and developed successfully. The concentration of a great number of people and administration in towns, as well as the expansion of the Ottoman army, resulted in a tangible strengthening of the crafts, related to supplying food to the people.

Data can be found in sources regarding the development of bread-making and the other crafts turning out food (Stoianov 1999).

After the liberation in 1878 and as far as the establishment of socialism in 1944, bread-making remained one of the crafts unaffected by industrialisation and foreign competition. It survived as it was among the staples in the Bulgarian livelihoods, meeting daily needs and turning out goods of fast circulation for the local market alone. Bread-making and trading in bread in towns was done at one and the same place – in the craftsman's bakery, where the baker was working with a few helpers and apprentices. A bakery was operating in almost every town district, meeting the daily needs of the neighbourhood population of bread and pastry. Women in the villages continued to make bread for daily use at home. In either case the production was hand-made; the technologies used were familiar and mastered: kneading with yeast, long fermentation, and baking in special stone or earthenware ovens.

Under socialism (1944–1989) bread-making became industrial, and bread-making factories started to be built in every town back in the 1950s. State-owned bread bakeries were established in the villages to secure meeting the everyday needs of the peasant families, since women had been enlisted in everyday work on the cooperative farms and very little time was left for housework. Bread-making was separated from the trade, which was done in specialised bakeries. Up-to-date machines for dough kneading and electric furnaces for baking were used in the bread factories. Factory manufactured yeast was extensively used, which radically curtailed the time for bread leavening. In these enterprises manual labour was greatly restricted, while the work of the master bakers in the craftsmen's bakeries, which had survived after the nationalisation of 1947, was made much harder, because of the restrictive state policy towards private entrepreneurs. Gradually, most of these craftsmen's bakeries were closed down. The remaining bakeries turned into enterprises offering and supplying the service of baking home-made dishes and Easter cakes, since an oven was not available to every household in town. In the 1970s these ovens also gradually finished working, and were substituted by the combined cookers installed en masse in urban and rural households. Mostly three types of bread were on offer under socialism, made of wheat flour of different quality. Hand-made bread was offered comparatively rarely in the villages and some town shops at a higher price; it had been made in the bread factories or village ovens out of high quality wheat flour, the only difference being that it had been hand-kneaded.

After the changes of 1989 in Bulgaria, privately owned bakeries began to emerge, while the major state bread-making enterprises were closed down or privatised. By the end of 2015, bread-manufacturing enterprises in the country numbered 353, among them both large private bread-making plants and small

family-owned bakeries.⁶ The range of the kinds of bread has been most varied, and flour from different cereals has been used.

SMALL BAKERIES AS RESEARCH OBJECTS

All the enterprises I have studied are family bakeries: they have been jointly established by spouses and are relatively new, set up during the past 7–8 years (Fig. 4). The entrepreneurs are between 30 and 50 years of age. As a rule, the husband is in charge of the selection and delivery of materials, kneading and baking of the bread, while the wife helps in the production process and makes cookies. The selling of bread and pastries is usually done by both; the same refers to managing the documentation. The bakeries have two parts: the premises where the ingredients are kept and baking takes place, and the trading premises located directly in front. Some bakeries are in the city centre, others in urban districts. They usually occupy ground floors of new buildings; only one is in an old former bakery, built in the 1930s, and yet another in the entrance hall of a big supermarket store.



Figure 4. Master-baker Delcho and his wife Maria in their family bakery in Haskovo. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, September 2015.

Some of the studied enterprises also employ – besides the spouses – other men and women, whereas men are in charge of activities requiring physical force, while women usually make snacks and sell the produce. When the employees are very young and know nothing about the production process, the owners declare them to be their apprentices. The largest enterprise in terms of employment (nine) is the *Bakery Art* of master Dimitar. In their interrelations with customers and employees the entrepreneurs are referred to as masters – an address typical for craftsmen both in the past and today.

The couples working in the enterprises studied are most often engaged on a par with their employees, supervising and managing the processes of production and marketing. If the owners' family has high school children, they are also enlisted in their off-school time. The labour organisation thus presented is similar to the distribution of labour in the town craftsmen's bakeries from the early twentieth century. When it is a matter of public events, i.e., interviews to the media, participation in fairs or in food presentations, basically men are involved, while their wives are taking care of the production and trade in the bakeries.

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF THE BREAD-MAKERS

First, I discuss *the strategy of cultural opposition*, used by the bread-makers in their presentations during the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv. This strategy declares an anonymous loaf of bread, manufactured in bread-making plants by high technologies, to be harmful to health because of the multitude of artificial additives. It is opposed by the bakers to “the real bread home-made by hand”, which they knead, bake, and offer in their enterprises. They present bread-making as a process, radically different from the modernisation processes of mass factory production. Vladimir, a master-baker from Pleven, said the following in the interview:

At the factory everything is made by machines and with additives, whereas I do everything by hand and use natural products. The technologies are completely different. Our bread is part of the art of living a healthy life in harmony with nature. Factory-made bread is inferior to boutique bread. Bread is no longer meant just to fill your stomach.

Secondly, I would point to *the strategy of adding emotion to the maker-buyer relationship*. During the Crafts Fair the producers of bread in their conversations with the fair attendees laid emphasis on the fact that when the product is sold in their bakeries there is a direct connection between people, which is not

random and occasional but is repeated in the course of time. In this way there is no anonymity: direct contact between the customer and the producer is made and information is passed on to the consumer about the quality of materials and the product (Fig. 5). The internet page of the bakery of Georgi, a master-baker from Plovdiv, features the following information: “We offer people a live contact with the master-baker, who has made that bread for you. We WANT TO DO and ARE DOING OUR BEST to bring the baker’s craft back to your town, neighbourhood, and street”.⁷

As a third narrative strategy, I have identified *the strategy of mythologising the product*. During the Crafts Fair master-baker Dimitar from Plovdiv repeatedly explained to the fair visitors that the loaf of bread had been alive until put into the oven and therefore one had to treat it respectfully, like a living being. According to master-baker Georgi, bread often serves as medicine; he was telling those present how asthma could be treated by eating roasted rye bread. Georgi often addressed the visitors with the following words: “Bread is invaluable today. Today we do not sell loaves of bread. We hand them out to the people. But you may ask about bread.” Vladimir emphasised his beliefs by saying: “There is something good in every grain. And we strive to offer you ever more numerous healthy products – to take what is good from every grain.”



Figure 5. Direct contact between a bread producer and a little buyer at the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv. Photograph by Ivanka Petrova, April 2015.

Another narrative strategy is *the strategy of idealising the bakers' work and their production and making it sacred*. Dimitar was explaining to the fair attendees: "Bread is made with love and good intentions. Everything else is just a recipe. And we must make it with positive energy, because otherwise it would not do." On the internet page of his bakery we can read the following: "For me making bread is like meditation: I experience supreme bliss while kneading bread. When the dough is kneaded with the master-baker's love and from quality products – this is what good health is."⁸ This is what master-baker Georgi was telling the visitors at the Crafts Fair: "We have the most important backing – we have been chosen by the Lord because we are making bread, and each one of the bakers has forty sins absolved."

The last narrative strategy I have identified is *the strategy of "going back to traditions"*. The master bakers explained to the customers that the technology of making bread with live yeast used by them in their bakeries has a millennial tradition and could not be compared to the use of the yeast sold in the shops. During the fair the bread-makers explained to the visitors that the practice of kneading using live yeast as it has been known to our grandmothers should be mastered in home conditions. Master-baker Vladimir commented in the interview: "It is already time young women and our daughters learned how to make bread, but not in the baking machine; they should rather learn to knead by hand." Dimitar's words addressed to the customers give us an idea of the traditions of bread eating and its place in the traditional Bulgarian home:

Once we first placed a loaf of bread on the table; now lukanka⁹ comes first. That's why we are not healthy... Bulgarians have somewhat forgotten about bread. What they put on the table is salad and rakiya¹⁰, while bread is placed aside... I have been singularly striving to go back to the traditions of old time and to revive creativity, because man has been made to create.

The internet page of Georgi's bakery features similar information:

Bread had been present everywhere; once upon a time bread dough kneading was done only by housewives wearing clean clothes and saying a prayer. Let us place the loaf of bread back in the centre of the table, where it rightfully belongs. Our bread is not made with the purpose of trading it as merchandise; it is made with the aim of bringing back the quality and tradition of bread on your table.¹¹

BREAD-MAKING AS CULTURAL HERITAGE: CONSTRUCTION AND INSTRUMENTALISATION

The process of transforming the production of a commodity into cultural heritage is realised through these narrative strategies. The construction of cultural heritage occurs in the framework of two processes: one of them is connected with its conceptualisation as a value, and the other – with the efforts to preserve it and pass on to the future generations. A number of authors have noted that cultural heritage is not something granted; it is being constantly created. It turns out to be a product of the actions of local actors, of communities and policies aimed at putting certain resources to good use (cf. Hemme & Tauschek & Bendix 2007). American anthropologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) defines cultural heritage as a way of making culture by drawing on the means from the past and producing something new. The view of structuring cultural heritage serves as a starting point in investigating the question of the practices related to its creation as well as its valuation. The elements of the traditional material and non-material culture, described by the assignment “heritage”, are largely ennobled; they are placed within a new referential framework and are given new meanings (Hemme & Tauschek & Bendix 2007).

The structuring of cultural heritage is associated with the separating of cultural fragments and practice from the ordinary context by individual actors, groups or institutions. During the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv, a way of making bread at home, common in traditional culture, was displayed in front of an audience in the city’s main street. One of the objectives of these demonstrations was associated with enhancing the symbolic capital of bread-makers through their self-presentation as positive “characters”. On the other hand, during the demonstrations and interactions with the audience the bread production was given a high symbolic value by styling it as heritage. It was tagged with antiquity, authenticity, tradition, and originality.

As David Lowenthal writes, cultural heritage as a value by itself refers simultaneously to the past and future, while as a meta-product of late modernity it is based on historical fragments and fabrications; it reflects the typical simultaneousness and non-simultaneousness of the late modern generation of culture (Lowenthal 2000). The case under consideration involves a simultaneous existence of old technologies of bread-making, practiced and highly valued by bread-makers, and modern tools of labour (electrical ovens for bread-baking), which were on show at the Crafts Fair and which were of service to the bakers for their presentations. Relevant here can also be the meditations of Hermann Bausinger, who has argued that the awareness of traditions, and the emergence of cultural heritage, is an aftereffect of modernisation, which by its fast

advancement threatens to change what had once been self-evident. Modernisation, in his view, transforms the tradition into worth, value, and the object of choice (Bausinger 1991).

Markus Tauschek notes that the multifaceted use of the past can be encountered in the present, which is highly assessed, while the traditional customs, rituals, and practices have been referred to the resources judged as significant (Tauschek 2007). Through the presentations of the bread-makers, observed during the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv, the ways and technologies of making bread, as well as its consuming known from tradition, have been placed within a new context, namely the one of the global trends of healthy nutrition. The traditional knowledge and skills acquire a different significance and also a new value. They further serve to improve the quality of life and lend new significance to the social presentation of the professional community of bread-makers. As cultural heritage they are referred to the past, but have turned into something new. All the knowledge and skills related to both the past and future are equipped with high symbolic value by the master-bakers as local actors. In their interactions with the audience during the Crafts Fair as well as in the interviews the entrepreneurs present their knowledge as subject to preservation and transmission to descendants. Here the emphasis is on the extensive knowledge of the bakers and on their efforts and willingness to involve the visitors in these traditional values, elevated to the rank of cultural heritage.

The cultural mechanism, whereby new historical fragments are split from the past and have meanings oriented to the present time, is not new. In the course of the late modern generation of heritage underway, however, the functions of that instrument usage are being ousted from ideological to economic use (Hemme 2007: 247). The demonstrations of the master-bakers during the Crafts Fair had the main purpose, alongside enhancing the social image of bread-makers, of drawing the attention of potential customers and advertising their companies and products.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that heritage is just assumed to be old, but it is actually a cultural generation of the present, looking for its refuge in the past. In the process of generating heritage, the cultural fragments, detached from their common usage, start a second life as representations of their own selves (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 370). An essential moment in this process is their being charged with value. During the Crafts Fair the heritage was presented by the master-bakers as knowledge to the external community (the numerous attendees of the fair). Thus inheritance is used as an important resource for the food industry. The close relationship of the small bakeries with Bulgarian traditional culture, the valuation of old technology, knowledge, and skills for the preparation of bread, and the economic use of cultural heritage

finds expression in the narrative strategies presented during the demonstrations of the master-bakers.

Ingo Schneider notes that the transformation of a traditional cultural form into cultural heritage raises tradition to another level and deprives it of its self-conceptualisation (Schneider 2005: 2). The vitality of the cultural heritage has less in common with the continuity of tradition and is more strongly related to the intensity of what is being experienced. Defining their own tradition in a new way by declaring it to be cultural heritage, local people simultaneously develop, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004: 58) notes, a new understanding of a practice quite common in the past. That is, a transfer of one tradition to a new reflexive framework is achieved, the actors being overburdened with symbolic capital.

CONCLUSION

According to Robert Peckham, for most people heritage today has two related meanings: on the one hand, it is associated with tourism and with the institutions that are interwoven with its evaluation, management, and preservation. On the other hand, cultural heritage also means a sum total of shared values and collective memories; it contains inherited customs and a sense of accumulated common experience, which is put to the fore as a “birth right” and finds expression in a specific language and other cultural presentations (Peckham 2003: 1). This is just the case with the abovementioned observations of the heritage structuring during the Crafts Fair in Plovdiv. Through the presented narrative strategies bread-makers join the process of transformation of the traditional practices, knowledge, and skills into cultural heritage. An excerpt of the internet page of the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers features a similar objective:

*We may be regarded as new Don Quixotes. Upholding the idea of the fine Bread, the true art of the Bread-Maker, the right to hand down our craft to the young, we shall stand up against industrialisation and the modern technologies by upholding the behest and the customs of our forefathers.*¹²

Cultural heritage is successfully instrumentalised by these actors as a resource for the economic development of their enterprises. Thus heritage is an object – of identification, preservation, and revitalisation, but also a means to achieve certain objectives – promoting social and professional positions, income, economic growth, etc. Cultural heritage is conceptualised by the surveyed small entrepreneurs as a value left by previous generations, which must be preserved and passed on to the next ones, to continue its ‘authentic’ existence. During

the Crafts Fair the heritage constructed in the bakers' presentations was oriented mainly towards outsiders, visitors to whom it had to be presented with the aim to provoke their interest. The example of the studied small entrepreneurs shows how the cultural heritage is constructed in the present economic and social context and how it functions as a flexible system open to different interpretations and innovations. Heritage, as a concept in their enterprises, is also closely linked to both tradition and modernity, past and present. The practices and the narrative strategies reflect the entrepreneurs' efforts to use the cultural heritage as a resource to achieve certain goals, but also to protect the heritage. They seek not only to benefit from the resources, but also to help their preservation.

NOTES

- ¹ The project led by Assoc. Prof. Petar Petrov has been run by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies and the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences since 2015, and is financed by the Bulgarian Research Foundation (project № DFNI-K02/16).
- ² The empirical material collected during the Spring Fair contains interviews with a total duration of eight hours, eighty photographs, and seven short videos, submitted to the Archive of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies by the end of 2017.
- ³ I conducted investigations on the Internet mainly within two periods: May–September 2015 and August–December 2016.
- ⁴ See <https://bulgarianguildbakers.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- ⁵ See <http://news.plovdiv24.bg/633222.html>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- ⁶ See http://www.capital.bg/biznes/stoki_i_prodajbi/2017/01/25/2901564_prodajbite_na_hliab_i_hlebni_izdeliia_sa_narasnali_do/, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- ⁷ See <https://masterbaker.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- ⁸ See <https://bg-bg.facebook.com/pages/Bakery-Art/433086113457670>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- ⁹ Dried sausage (Bulg.)
- ¹⁰ Brandy (Bulg.)
- ¹¹ See <https://masterbaker.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.
- ¹² See <https://bulgarianguildbakers.alle.bg/>, last accessed on 15 January 2018.

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