

INTRODUCTION

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Foodways is an area of research that has not always been as prosperous as it is now. It was only in the 1960s that the first dissertations on food research were defended and first syllabus courses held at universities (see Bringéus 2013). Preparing and eating food were taken as given: so basic that they did not need to be talked about, and not serious enough for academic study. By now, the picture has changed beyond recognition, as culinary culture has risen into the limelight of interdisciplinary interest. And it is not only in the academy where food-related issues are more visible than before: restaurants do not hide their preparation processes behind closed doors, whole shelves are dedicated to cookbooks and other culinary literature in bookstores, food is on people's minds and in conversations as they take photographs of their dishes and post them on social media, organise social gatherings and select their daily food according to their special diet requirements. This collection of articles represents the interdisciplinarity in a modest way, bringing together ethnologists, folklorists, and linguists from Eastern Europe to reflect on their data connected to the history and present day of culinary habits of the region and – for comparison and etymological insight – also beyond.

The special issue of *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, dedicated to culinary culture, consists of eight articles, most of them dealing with food culture in the Eastern European context, but also Central Europe (Trieste), and wandering even towards the Far East, in the analysis of Chinese food-related symbolism. It is, above all, motivated by the fact that food research in Eastern Europe is not yet as abundant as in the West, and points of comparison are welcome in this international and interdisciplinary field of study.

The special issue came about as part of the cooperation project between Estonian and Polish Academies of Science, *Communication Styles: Developing a Cross-Cultural Theoretical and Methodological Framework* (2016–2018), with the general aim to present a novel model for studying cultural communication

styles, starting from the assumptions proposed by sociologists and business/marketing researchers, and developing these in order to adjust them to the needs of linguistics and folkloristics. Culinary culture is seen here as one possible way of communicating with the surroundings: after all, what we consume, how we acquire it, who prepares it, who eats first, etc., is a form of communication that is rich with meaning (Stajcic 2013). The project sets out to provide new knowledge on communication styles typical of particular cultures and to describe the fundamentals of stylistic diversity both on the individual and collective levels.

The first part of the special issue deals with commensality and its relation to identity in the present day. Bringing examples from a number of Eastern European countries, the authors show how reinventing food traditions and stressing their communicative aspect may entail anti-mass-consumption attitudes and celebrate people's creativity in reinforcing their identities through their eating habits and inclinations of taste. The second part of the special issue shows how ideas about food and eating influence our daily culinary practices and vice versa – how our eating habits leave a trace in our language.

Ester Bardone and **Anu Kannike** talk about temporary venues of consumption – so-called pop-up restaurants – and their effect on the dimensions of public and private, professional and amateur, business and leisure in commensality. Their study targets recent examples through participant observation in different parts of Estonia and through in-depth semi-structured interviews (from 2011 to 2014) with the restaurant/event managers. The authors pinpoint the motives, visions, and practices of the pop-up restaurants and other food-related events, showing that social communication is valued as highly as the food itself on such occasions. Equally important is the insight that pop-up restaurants introduce dynamic spaces of gastronomic innovation and individual creativity to the often conservative culinary culture.

By revisiting the concept of nostalgia, **Daša Ličen** addresses contemporary restaurant culture in Trieste, which looks back into the Habsburg era in search for an authentic culinary identity. She explains how history can motivate quite separate and unique foodways in an area with strong Italian influences (and a lack of evident Slavic ones): evidence of nostalgia for the imperial Habsburg era is visible in the frequent use of mustard, *cren* (horseradish), sauerkraut, etc. – elements quite unknown to the Italian cuisine. For her fieldwork, she visited the typical culinary topoi of Habsburg nostalgia, among them restaurants, bars, and cafés, and talked to their owners and local as well as foreign visitors to find out what appeals to the crowd and what is behind the success of such establishments. She stresses that the “authenticity” of those places is not so much a result of the actual historic precision but rather tells us about the present day and future of Triestine cuisine dictated by gourmet authorities (owners of restaurants and cookbook writers) who construct this image and carefully choose what fits in.

Strong nostalgic feelings are also present in the Estonian example: a study of cookbooks that aim to revive old cooking traditions (baking bread, cooking with ecologically pure ingredients, linking culinary traditions with seasonal rhythm of life, etc.). This is the way in which the “Estonianness” of foodways is constructed in the present day. **Liisi Laineste** underlines what Ličen points out in her article, namely that nostalgia says considerably more about contemporary social configurations than about the past; it defines the identity of the people who crave for the past. She suggests that the politics of food has plenty to do with the creation of nation-states and that contemporary Estonian identity relies greatly on the legacy from the first republic of the 1920s–1930s – and so does contemporary Estonian culinary art. A longing look into the past stimulates and inspires ideas of integration, nostalgia for the “good old days”, a longing for nobility that Estonians as a nation never had, and last but not least – the revival of national ideals after a long and difficult period under totalitarian regime. In her analysis on recent (multilingual) cookbooks, Laineste shows how the authors of these books re-write history in a way that brings culinary nostalgia and authenticity into the discourse of national identity, and through that contributes to the process of nation-building. The cookbooks convey nostalgia, stepping closer to realising the ideas of authenticity, tradition, and national cuisine.

Ivanka Petrova, who writes about baking bread in contemporary Bulgaria, addresses another aspect of “authentic cooking” in the article. Petrova presents the narrative strategies of the bread-makers, whereby bread-making has been structured as cultural heritage, studying the self-presentation of the members of the organization called the Bulgarian Guild of Bakers during their participation in the Spring Crafts Fair in Plovdiv in April 2015. The strategy of adding emotion to the maker-buyer relationship is skilfully used to create an intimate, authentic atmosphere that challenges similar products made through mass-production. The small bakeries do not just sell bread: they sell emotion; they sell a story.

Anastasiya Fiadotava writes about family lore concerning humorous tales about cooking traditions within families. By comparing these to cooking-related humour found on the internet, she concludes that their forms, topics, and functions differ greatly and reflect separate aspects of Belarusian foodlore. The longitudinal data shows that jokes themselves have changed, but the motivation for the jokes has remained largely the same. As cooking is still a family activity in Belarus where she conducted her fieldwork, it gives a much-needed insight into family life, gender roles, and values associated with domesticity. As a sidenote, she also points convincingly at the differences of oral and internet data, claiming that it is impossible to mechanically extrapolate any conclusions made regarding studying internet jokes to the dimension of humorous family anecdotes, and vice versa.

Verging further away from European culinary traditions, **Dorota Brzowska** shows what is universal and what is culture-specific in eating by purposefully analysing an exotic example, that of China, as compared to the previous, mainly Eastern European ones. Her case study is based on literary examples, first and foremost the novel *Peony in Love* by Lisa See, a Chinese American author. She lists the various things food can symbolise and concludes that not just the basic need for nutrition but beliefs and emotions are crucial in making the decision of what to eat and how.

Ene Vainik writes about the crossroads of emotion and taste, aiming to provide a much-needed template for the further studies of other languages and/or cultural comparisons of different languages with regard to food lexicons. The bitterness and sweetness of emotions offers a good example of how emotions are conceptualised in more tangible, approachable terms and what are the etymological, cultural, and evolutionary roots to such a conceptualisation. She shows convincingly that emotional connection is more deeply rooted than was thought earlier, and thus makes a highly useful contribution to the study of emotion and taste.

Last but not least, **Władysław Chłopicki** tackles the subject of translating menus. He asks whether it is the inherent untranslatability of such texts that sometimes makes menus so illegible for cultural outsiders, or should an experienced translator always be capable of overcoming the barrier and generating an understandable translation. The frequent assumption that customers do not care about the translation as long as the food tastes good does not end well; instead, it produces unwanted humorous – or even worse than that – discouraging results for the customer. Chłopicki asserts that the four principles to be followed in translating menus or other culture-sensitive texts are comprehensibility, completeness, economy, and carefulness, with comprehensibility being given the priority over the others.

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