



conferência  
internacional



**Food 4  
Thought**

# manifesto

for creativity in gastronomic  
tradition

The search for food has always been a deliberate act. It has never been innocent. It has resulted from nutritional needs, safety, sustainability, pleasure and well-being. This evolutionary adaptation in the selection and treatment of food has taken place in the presence of a territory that has conditioned and required a certain constructive path of food and gastronomic knowledge in the communities where it has taken place.

It is in the umbilical relationship between human beings and the territory, at the intersection between what communities find available and the way they transform these same resources, that food culture is born. The gastronomic creation movement uses what the territory offers and makes the necessary changes to the products in order to make them edible beyond their physical, chemical and organoleptic characteristics or the duration predestined by the life cycle.

In a way, gastronomy is a cultural interpretation of the set of resources provided by the natural environment. Through the transformation of products and the creation of recipes, a food lexicon was created that represented not only the characteristics of the territory and the climatic conditions, but also the interpretation that the populations made of what they found. In this journey of constructing the language of food, the social and cultural symbols arising from the relationship between human beings and their families, communities and divinities formed the basis of food identity, promoting specific culinary methods and techniques.

A combination of the strength of the product, simultaneously food and a social and cultural symbol, the expression of identity has been affirmed as the root of many communities in the form of products and recipes with unique characteristics. The differentiation in the use of resources and culinary creativity has generated the differentiation of gastronomic expressions according to the territory and culture, the latter understood as the set of social, political, economic, ethnic and aesthetic values.

Because they are so closely linked to the social and cultural foundation of communities and are the basis of agricultural practices, expertise, culinary practices, ways of life, rituals, tastes, religious or pagan symbols, gastronomic products and recipes have been categorized as tradition. This translates into an interpretation of existing resources taking into account the set of predominant cultural values. It is, therefore, not only a support for the identity of a community, but also an expression of it. A product or a recipe can communicate the political, economic, religious or aesthetic choices of a community. It is, therefore, what the members of a community rely on when they want to affirm their identity and affirm who they are. It is in this tradition that they find comfort and security in what defines them and what they are accustomed to.

However, this tradition was not born closed and complete, but was built in layers that included adjustments, changes and balances, which reflect the changes that societies have undergone. Migrations, climate change, biological evolution, innovation in knowledge and access to techniques and products were factors that conditioned the tradition and made it evolve in a constant readjustment between needs and resources.

Gastronomic tradition should not be confused with myth. It has a history that expresses the evolutionary journey that products and recipes have undergone. In a constant dialogue between the set of rules commonly accepted over time and the transformations that the human condition demands, a balance is continually achieved between tradition and innovation, between the past and the future.

Gastronomic tradition is not immutable, but it is permeable to the changes in lifestyles that the present time demands. Over time, whether through addition or reduction, the layers of gastronomic traditions are balanced between what makes sense or not for a given community. This goes unnoticed, as changes are slow and happen over time, and do not allow us to realize that tradition only remains because, in some way, it renews itself, adapts, transforms itself, evolving to serve the purposes and needs of the current communities.

Gastronomic history and culture demonstrate the evolution that products and recipes have undergone, which is not visible to the generations living in the present, as they cling to the certainty of what they have always known and which gives them comfort.

Respecting tradition must involve respecting the communities that underlie it. While it is important not to lose sight of what identifies and characterizes each group, it is also important to allow dietary practices to breathe so that they serve a human purpose, that is, to be an opportunity for energy, pleasure, health and well-being.

In this evolutionary process and constant adaptation over thousands of years in the territory of the Mediterranean basin with an Atlantic slope, as is the case of Portugal, a food crossroads between the cultures of the East and the expansion to the West and South, it is worth reflecting on the changes that have occurred over the last 75 years.

The first and most significant is the dematerialization of the notion of territory associated with the place where “food” is produced and consumed. In recent decades, populations have gradually aged or reduced their presence in the territories where food is produced and now live mainly in territories without food production. The evolution of the way of consuming or the inherent gastronomic concept and its trends is taking place, mainly in large urban centres, far from the knowledge generated in the past in the productive places, which is happening on this scale for the first time among us.

The speed of demographic change, with the rapid disappearance of those who possess popular gastronomic knowledge, is also associated with the rapid growth of the presence of technology in the production, selection and preparation of food. Preservation methods that are thousands of years old, such as salting or smoking, now have more efficient and healthier equivalents, such as refrigeration or freezing. And the speed, automation and energy efficiency of preparation have gained prominence in cooking, where technology has facilitated the widespread use of microwaves or kitchen robots, for example.

The speed of demographic change must also be associated with social changes, with substantial changes in family size and the greater role of women in professional life. This reduces the time for a close and prolonged relationship with food, from production to preparation, and also for the direct transmission of food knowledge and ancestral culinary practices and even the in-person introduction to food consumption, common between parents and children.

The speed of climate change has also increased in recent decades. These changes are increasing uncertainties in the production (volume and price) of certain food products, particularly fresh produce and products that were traditionally affordable but are no longer so. The speed of climate change has also reshaped consumer perceptions of certain foods whose production or transportation has implications for greenhouse gas emissions or water use, for example.

Finally, health issues and the relationship between “eating behaviour and health outcomes”, which has been scientifically robustly established in the last century, with the emergence of Nutritional Sciences, which has forced us to look at food in a different way. The search for longevity and more years without disease has made this determinant of health unavoidable, particularly when average life expectancy has gone from 50 to 85 years in just a few decades. We have learned that many of the most prevalent diseases in these final years of life are shaped by what we eat. This means that diseases that were rarely mentioned or heard about at the beginning of the 20th century, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer, which are strongly influenced by diet, are today the main causes of death in our ageing society.

All these changes in society and on the planet are imposing unprecedented changes in eating patterns. This is the evolution and adaptation of food and gastronomy as it has always existed, but now with somewhat different assumptions and, above all, at very different speeds. The slow evolution and adaptation that existed until the mid-20th century was replaced by an increasingly accelerated evolution in the 21st century. The slow evolution was carried out mainly by those who held ancestral food knowledge, in many cases the inhabitants of the territories where the food grew and was prepared. The rapid evolution may (most likely) no longer be carried out by those who hold popular gastronomic knowledge and geographical proximity, and much of this value will be lost. This is particularly true if the processes and products resulting from a long tradition remain in a protective shell without being able to be changed and if they are not encouraged to adapt to a new model of consumption and relationship with society.

In this context, there is a need to understand how to deal with these accelerated changes and what impact they will have on our adaptive capacity, which is historically slower. What can we do to avoid losing the accumulated knowledge that values and protects us, but also to avoid losing sight of the innovation that can equally value and protect us? This requires a balance between what is considered tradition and what can be included in this traditional evolutionary practice. It is in this context that the challenge becomes greater, as it requires consideration, knowledge and common sense, never losing sight of the guiding principles of tradition and the potential added value of evolution.

In this sense, we have produced this Manifesto. Manifesto means “a text of a dissertative and persuasive nature, a public declaration of principles and intentions, which aims to alert to a problem or publicly denounce a problem that is occurring. The manifesto is intended to declare a point of view, denounce a problem or call a community to a certain action.” Thus, the Manifesto for creativity in the gastronomic tradition aims to call upon the community to value food culture as a central part of its identity and its relationship with nature (and from this point of view, protective of its health and well-being); to the need to map this knowledge and practices; to identify what constitutes the central and distinctive core of a food and gastronomic culture; to understand that,

as this is an evolutionary process in constant and accelerated relationship with society and technology, it is necessary to identify ways to preserve this cultural identity in permanent construction without closing the tradition in a bubble; and, at the same time, allow the adaptation of tradition to its time, trying to incorporate new realities without losing what defines it.

## what we understand by food culture, gastronomy and tradition

- // Food culture is the result of the interpretation that human groups have made of the resources that exist in their territory and the way in which they have transformed them into nourishment to obtain food and nutritional security, sustainability, pleasure and well-being. Despite all the changes in our society and in the food system, human beings continue to seek these attributes in food.
- // The use of knowledge and creativity to adapt to what the territory offered and conditioned (including from a social and economic point of view) encouraged the chemical, physical and organoleptic modification of resources so that they would be useful to humans over time. This adaptive knowledge continues to evolve and needs to continue to play its role.
- // Gastronomy is a cultural interpretation of the set of resources provided by the natural environment in different places, expressed through gastronomic products and recipes. The repetition of these practices gives rise to what we can call tradition – ultimately representing the symbolic values of the groups that inhabit a territory.
- // Creativity and innovation against scarcity has promoted a food model throughout the Mediterranean, and in Portugal too, that is biodiverse, seasonal and plant-based, including a diversity of ingredients, knowledge and unique culinary practices that must be preserved.
- // In Portuguese gastronomic practice (as in other food cultures) tradition is a reflection of the existence of circular economies, preventing inequality, promoting the optimization of resources and avoiding waste.

Much of the gastronomic tradition was the product of creativity and innovation in the face of scarcity, in a logic

- // of survival, sustainability and in a historical context, which from an environmental and technological point of view may be difficult to sustain today due to the depletion or overexploitation of resources and technological, scientific and social change.

## tradition as evolution and coexistence with innovation

- // Gastronomic tradition is not immutable, but it is permeable to the changes that the present time demands in lifestyles. Tradition only remains because, in some way, it renews itself, adapts, transforms itself, evolving to serve the purposes and needs of the present communities.
- // As a practice that serves the biological and cultural needs of human groups, tradition may need to be adapted according to health goals in order to provide sustainable well-being to communities.
- // The preservation of gastronomic tradition has a heritage and historical value in itself, but this value may not mean or allow the survival of that same tradition.

- // In certain circumstances it may be worth maintaining tradition alongside innovation and coexisting with new products, as without knowledge of what tradition is it is difficult to create or innovate, that is, adapt what is recognized as close to the communities, updating and legitimizing its food and gastronomic function.
- // The introduction of innovation justified by technological, social, health, environmental or cultural needs can be promoted through experience and popular knowledge or the development of the most up-to-date scientific knowledge.
- // Innovation can guarantee tradition by using scientific and technological knowledge to promote improvements in existing resources and to increase quality and quantity, promoting environmental, social and economic sustainability.

what guidelines should be provided for agents on the ground? how should we act to maintain tradition without inhibiting the necessary evolution and creativity?

- // The patrimonialization of products and recipes with the recognition of their intangible nature can prevent the fragmentation or even loss of knowledge, which is why it is so important to recognize and document this aspect of popular culture.
- // The preservation of a food culture requires that its core be maintained, as human communities respond to what is familiar to them. Thus, the introduction of changes must always be preceded by a mapping, in time and space, of the characteristics of this core, understanding the main lines that support it.
- // The language of a tradition, or the set of core characteristics (products, techniques) that can be known, mastered and used to evolve in continuity is an important exercise that can vary from product to product or from territory to territory and that must be discussed and recorded.
- // Innovation is not about doing something new. It is about knowing and doing the same thing over and over again, and then doing it in a different way.
- // The introduction of new elements, now as in the past, must always be legitimized by communities and the use they make of food culture.
- // The dissemination of knowledge associated with gastronomic products and recipes was done based on the certainty that tradition does not follow a logic of ownership, it is a collective heritage, and can follow derivations of various kinds, in time and space.
- // The authenticity and genuineness of products and recipes occurs due to the uniqueness of the production contexts and their cultural integration, which also evolve. The establishment of rules can have a perverse effect in limiting creativity.
- // Maintaining gastronomic traditions or innovating them (when they allow us to achieve health, environmental or economic sustainability objectives) must provide accessibility for all, inclusion and the fight against social inequality.
- // The food culture of a region is like the air we breathe. It must be learned from a very early age, essentially through the mouth, through contact with the products, and continue throughout life through the existence of an environment that allows and facilitates action and at the same time through knowledge that values this interaction.

// Respect for the context of tradition (ingredients, production and conservation methods, geographical environment) will ensure that food practices (products and recipes) do not lose their connection to the space and time of origin, allowing them to fulfil the objectives of their existence.

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