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NEGOTIATING FOOD HERITAGE INTERPRETATIONS: EXPERIENCES OF A PROJECT AT THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT
The article examines varied interpretations of food heritage in contemporary Estonia, relying on the authors' experiences of a three-year research and development project at the Estonian National Museum (ENM). The study focuses on the museum researchers' collaboration with different stakeholders, representing small entrepreneurs and the public and non-profit sectors. The authors tackle the partners' expectations and outcomes of diverse cooperational initiatives and the opportunities and challenges of a contemporary museum as a public forum for discussions on cultural heritage. The project revealed that diverse, complementary, and contested food heritage interpretations exist side-by-side on the Estonian foodscape. Additionally, the project enabled the authors to become better aware of the researcher's role in the heritagisation process and of the museum as a place for negotiating the meanings and values of food culture.

KEYWORDS: food heritage • heritagisation • museum • research and development • small-scale food production

INTRODUCTION: FOOD HERITAGE AND MUSEUMS

Historically, museums have been seen as authorities and experts on cultural heritage. In the museological context, cultural heritage refers to the conscious selection of valued objects and documents, for example collections and displays always represent curated heritage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2017: 178–179). The changes in cultural heritage policies and management towards democratisation and principles of new museology have also affected the ways cultural heritage is treated in museums where communities, groups,

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and individuals have increasingly become engaged in its interpretation. Museums have started regarding themselves as social spaces where public discussion about cultural heritage takes place (ICOM). Modern museums are seen as institutions that enable participatory action and collaboration with heritage communities and empowerment of those communities (Sousa 2020: 33). A new museum definition proposed by ICOM (2019) highlights its importance as a democratic and inclusive space for "the critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures". Thus, museums have to demonstrate their relevance not just as expert bodies but as public forums by engaging multiple stakeholders. For instance, in safeguarding food culture (including knowledge, skills, and practices) as part of intangible cultural heritage, museums can use different awareness-raising activities, including the heritage community itself. Museums can also act as brokers between heritage bearers and (state) authorities to set safeguarding policies (Blake 2020: 28). Within the context of displaying or performing cultural heritage, museums have to take responsibility to avoid misinterpretations and (over-)commercialisation, especially if aiming to offer edutaining activities and events (see Balloffet et al. 2014).

In this article we use *food heritage* as an analytical concept that enables us to examine the processes of food culture heritagisation in contemporary society. Although in cultural research as well as in cultural policy documents the term food heritage is increasingly used, in Estonia different actors in the food and tourism sector use also other terms (food history or historical food, traditional food and sometimes local food, regional food, or artisanal food) that can be related to the attempts at heritage-making. The extent to which historical, traditional, local, regional, or artisanal characteristics are combined in the interpretations of food heritage can vary considerably according to different contexts and agendas. We follow the constructivist understanding of food heritage, not aiming to provide a normative and exhaustive definition of *what it is* but instead examining *how it is understood* and *used*. Thus, it is necessary to explore "why and how certain aspects of foodscape are labelled as heritage" and "how contemporaries deal with heritage" (Geyzen 2014: 75). Accordingly, we aim to study what is considered constitutive elements of food heritage, in which contexts, and how various actors negotiate its meaning and boundaries relying on distinct agendas.

Looking into how the past's food culture is interpreted in the process of heritage-making in the present (i.e. heritagisation) enables us to have insight into values and meanings given to food today. For example, Harry G. West argues that preserving and promoting artisanal foods as part of cultural heritage is an example of heritagisation, contrasting their craft to industrial production. The production or consumption of such foods enables people to connect to the past (even if imaginary) and to others who share similar values. (West 2016: 408–411) Artisanal foods become associated with symbolic values even if their making is re-established or re-invented (see Grasseni et al. 2014). Yet, heritagisation of food culture has also become a political as well as an economic tool for promoting regional development, marketing places, branding nations, and boosting entrepreneurship and tourism, a way of commodifying traditional specialities and adding value to food products or catering services (Grasseni 2011; Bessiere 2013). Yet, heritagisation also encompasses the risk of selective exploitation of the past for legitimising current needs, the invention of 'traditions' that have no historical roots or even creating ahistorical abstractions of food culture (Di Fiore 2019: 44–46).

Museums of today have become aware of their role as producers of food heritage and places for negotiating the meanings and values of food culture and food heritage. Several recent museum programmes and exhibitions focus critically on historical food culture along with current food systems and relationships.[1] Museums face the challenge of rethinking food interpretation by bringing their collections into a dialogue around present food issues and ideas, including people involved in food production and consumption – farmers, producers, cooks, restaurateurs, etc. (Moon and Stanton 2018: 2, 109). Engaging a variety of stakeholders enables the memory institutions to grasp the multiple perspectives of the food experience and negotiate contemporary interpretations of food heritage, address the concerns and needs of communities (Davis 2007; Johnson 2016; Levant and Michalache 2016; Moon and Stanton 2018), and foster different types of collaborative initiative.

Using a three-year research and development (R&D) project at the Estonian National Museum (ENM) as an example, we aim to examine some collaboration cases with different stakeholders in the food sector. We focus on varied interpretations of food heritage emerging from the outcomes of such cooperation and the possibilities and challenges of a contemporary museum for providing a public forum for encounters and negotiations. We firstly give a brief overview of food heritage in the Estonian context and introduce the ENM's role in food heritagisation and the aims of the R&D project. The analysis focuses on cooperation with food producers and the public and non-profit sectors within the project, highlighting the diversity of food heritage interpretations unveiled through specific forms of collaboration.

ESTONIAN CONTEXT: POLICIES AND PUBLIC IMAGE RELATED TO FOOD HERITAGE

To better understand the social setting of our case study, introducing some contexts that have shaped the understanding of food heritage in Estonia is necessary. The public representation of Estonian food is predominantly based on peasant food culture. Indeed, until the 1940s, Estonian society was mainly rural. Urbanisation and more expansive industrial production started from the 1950s; during the Soviet deficiency economy (1940–1991), rural and urban households were engaged in food production in private subsidiary holdings (see Bardone and Kannike 2020). Furthermore, 19th-century peasant food culture was most thoroughly studied by Estonian ethnologist Aliise Moora (1980; 1991), whose work is well known and has shaped the understanding of Estonian food heritage.[2] Until recently, museums also contributed to the heritagisation of a standardised image of peasant food culture. In the modernised and globalised food system, peasant foodways evoke nostalgia and feelings of ethnic identity (Brulotte and Di Giovovine 2014: 3–10). Our ongoing fieldwork has demonstrated that the understanding that sees food heritage as a matter of the distant rustic past is still widely shared in Estonia. However, for the younger generations, food heritage may also relate to small-scale (rural) artisanal production, sustainable lifestyle, etc. New contexts of production and consumption also give novel meaning and values to heritage-associated foods. For instance, baking rye bread from sourdough at home has become a creative hobby for many middle-class people and is no longer a routine or necessity.

In recent decades, food writing and media (including social media) has been the most influential channel shaping the everyday understanding of culinary heritage. Media shows interest in food history related to Estonian peasants' folk calendar celebrations, sometimes dishes and customs from the interbellum Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) and the Soviet period (1940–1991) are described from the nostalgic perspective. Food bloggers and cookbook authors mainly focus on local food, i.e. locally grown or made food, not so much on the historical aspects of food culture. In restaurants, traditional peasant dishes are interpreted in a gourmandised form of cooking and serving. A recent contest for a new Estonian national dish chose sea-buckthorn flummery with caramelised cover as a winner and the organiser claimed that "if traditional flummery is just a gray ooze, the new version transformed it into an effective *crème brûlée*" (Eero 2018).

The Ministry of Rural Affairs is the state body responsible for agriculture and food. In policy documents, food heritage is a relatively new term that has come to use in the last decade, and is seldom mentioned. To some extent, food heritage is recognised as a resource for place branding and tourism. The development plan of Estonian food for 2015–2020 acknowledges that "developing and introducing regional cuisines brings into focus the distinctiveness of diverse regions in Estonia and their food heritage" (Development Plan 2014). Yet, the action program for realising this goal has been fragmentary. Two of the best-developed initiatives have been the yearly nomination of a food region and Estonian food month in September to promote the consumption of local produce. Government bodies have not envisioned the need for applied ethnological or anthropological research on food culture. In turn, the Estonian Ministry of Culture does not regard food as as valuable a part of national cultural heritage as folk music, dance, and crafts.

Regarding international 'heritage regimes' (Bendix et al. 2013), in 2006 Estonia joined the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage. In 2010 the state established a national inventory of intangible heritage. The inventory highlights cooking or eating practices, not just the recipe or dish itself as parts of cultural heritage. From 2010 until 2021, almost 30 food-related practices were inscribed into the Estonian inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage by local experts and enthusiasts. Most of the inscriptions on the inventory are related to peasant food culture and emphasise regional culinary differences. However, about 70 per cent of Estonian population today lives in modern urban settings, and food habits have become more homogenised.

In conclusion, although interest in Estonian local food and food traditions has increased over the recent decades, general awareness of food as part of cultural heritage on the level of both the general public and the state is modest or limited to the peasant past.

INTRODUCTION OF THE FOOD CULTURE PROJECT AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The ENM is a state-financed public ethnological and cultural-historical museum that has been a major authority collecting, studying, popularising, and thereby constructing national cultural heritage since the early 20th century. Alongside objects related to the

production and consumption of food, the museum has extensive and growing archival collections, both transcripts of interviews and written answers to questionnaires by members of the national network of correspondents documenting recollections of food practices from the second half of the 19th century to contemporary times.

Food history research at the ENM has been traditionally focused on characteristic regional features (Kurrik 1929; 1934; Ränk 1932; Lõoke 1959; 1960; Jaagosild 1967; Moora 1980; 1991), and food-related materials in the museum's collections have been organised along regional lines. Today, ethnographic archives are still a valuable source of information on peasant foodways, especially their regional varieties. Yet, researchers have also become aware of the limits that their uneven social representation cause to including some national groups. Several topics are considered marginal or are fragmentarily reflected in the collections. Over the past decades, especially after 2016, when a new museum building opened, the general focus of research shifted to the study of and communicating everyday culture in its historical, spatial, and social diversity (Rattus 2016). Both research and curatorship at the ENM have also broadened to contemporary aspects of food culture (Võsu and Kannike 2011; Bardone and Kannike 2017; Bardone and Spalvēna 2019; Bardone and Kannike 2020).

In 2017–2019, the ENM carried out an R&D project dedicated to food culture (hereafter FCP) partly funded by the EU institutional package measure for R&D institutions (ASTRA). The project focused on studying the dynamics of tradition and innovation in food heritage through cooperation with diverse stakeholders. The broader aim was to "evaluate and analyse the museum's potential as a specific research institution and, thereby, the sector of the humanities and social sciences, to contribute to the innovation of the economic sector" (ASTRA project 2016). A novel goal for the museum was related to product development (including creating and testing the prototypes of new products) based on food heritage in collaboration with food producers using ethnographic archives, object collections, and previous studies. Considering the rather limited funding (66,743 EUR) and personnel resources (one researcher responsible for project management, four researchers and curators contributing to specific tasks of the project), we decided to regard this three-year period as a pilot study for mapping key partners and forms of cooperation.

Small-scale and micro-producers (SMPs) interested in product development involving food heritage became a major group of partners. The reasons for focusing on the cooperation with SMPs were varied. The ENM, as a state-funded public museum, supports such aspects of entrepreneurship that serve to safeguard cultural heritage. The fieldwork and cooperation within the FCP demonstrated that small-scale producers may have interest in regional food traditions, providing employment and social sustainability in rural regions (Kannike et al. 2021). Yet, SMPs who in Estonia make up 87 per cent of producers in the food industry usually lack resources for doing cultural or marketing research concerning their products. Another group of partners included regional development organisations (NGOs) involving coordinators or specialists working on local food-related projects. They manage collaboration networks with producers and caterers and have a good overview of their profiles and needs. We regarded such NGOs as appropriate intermediaries between producers and the museum because the former often do not see the opportunities for cooperation with research institutions and lack

time to negotiate these opportunities. To some extent, the FCP also collaborated with tourism organisations to promote food tourism in Estonia. Major public events of the project were planned and conducted together with partners and targeting regional food communities.

The FCP was designed to respond to the needs of applied research based on an action research approach and emergent and collaborative design (McNiff and Whitehead 2000; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt et al. 2014; Hinchey 2016). Throughout the project, we acted as "reflective museum practitioners" (Martin et al. 2019), continuously analysing our role and contribution in the project and feedback from the partners for planning the activities. We continued to rely on models of participatory strategies (Simon 2010) previously used and further developed at the ENM (see Tatsi 2013; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Runnel 2014; Runnel 2018). At the first stage of the FCP, ethnographic fieldwork enabled us to find potential partners for cooperation. During repeated short field trips to several regions in Estonia, we documented how traditional food culture is interpreted and used by SMPs as well as how regional organisations develop and promote food heritage. We mainly relied on observations and collected the material through fieldnotes, photography, and film. We conducted semi-structured and conversational interviews and studied documents and relevant thematic online materials (media texts, websites, social media content). The research data also included memos, minutes, written and personal communication among project members and external partners. Relying on information from collected data, we designed the subsequent research process and action plan. The primary public events were targeted at specific food heritage communities, planned at joint meetings, roundtables, or seminars with external partners, and conducted together. In the product development process, we also tested co-creation possibilities (Simon 2010) with food producers and local developers.

We were involved in the FCP as researchers and managers. We encouraged members of the project team and other museum colleagues and partners to give feedback at regular meetings or via personal communication. Based on these reflections, we critically examined the lessons learned and planned further activities. We also communicated project activities in the printed and social media.

INTERPRETATIONS OF FOOD HERITAGE: COOPERATION WITH FOOD PRODUCERS

To map the expectations and needs of local food producers and envision possible forms of cooperation, a kick-off workshop was organised at the beginning of the project. Representatives of the ENM introduced their areas of expertise: knowledge related to regional food history, the cultural and historical background of particular foods, skilled use of museum archives and collections, and external food culture sources. Producers and developers also emphasised the need for such expertise and support. This meeting demonstrated that product development was one of the potential partners' interests. However, we made explicit that the main focus of the FCP as well as the museum's institutional capabilities was restricted to certain stages of the product development process. Although we encouraged producers to develop new products, we could not pro-

vide food technology or design consultation but rather contributed to increasing 'added value' (Dare et al. 2013) of existing heritage-based food products or prototypes. SMPs confirmed the need for consultations to create new or improving existing products, especially advice for elaborating product stories and packaging design. Thus, it became clear in the initial phase of cooperation that, contrary to what was promised in the project proposal and described in the most common models of product development (see, for example, Kahn 2013), the SMPs were more interested in partnerships that dealt not with the initial, but with final or commercialiation stages of product development.

Capturing Diverse Interpretations of Food Heritage on Film

Museum collections, archives, and exhibitions accommodate not only objects but also various audio-visual media, including film and video. The film enables curators to create an "elastic" and "expanded museum" transforming the spatiality and experience of the museum visit (Wasson 2015). Screening films at the museum can trigger discussion around exhibitions or engage new themes and audiences. ENM researchers started using a film camera in the 1960s to make ethnographic films that documented traditional folk culture in Estonia (including staged performances of peasant farm work) and among Finno-Ugric ethnic groups living in the USSR (now Russian Federation) (Estonian Ethnographic Film I–III 2011; 2013; 2015). Additionally, the ENM has organised and hosted the World Film Festival since 2003, which has sometimes also included food documentaries. Until recently, film has not been used with the specific aim of capturing or interpreting modern food culture. The permanent exhibition of Estonian cultural history at the ENM includes short films that show reconstructions of iron-age food habits, today's cooking at home, and chefs at different Estonian restaurants.[3] Considering the aims of the FCP and the lack of films about contemporary food production at the museum, we concluded, in a dialogue with an entrepreneur, that creating a short film about her product would be a good way for the museum to contribute to ethnographic documentation as well as marketing. Inspired by this, we soon decided to extend this cooperation idea to other two enterprises and saw the films as contributing to product development.

In what follows, we focus on collaboration with three micro-scale businesses from the Võrumaa region in southeast Estonia. We had contacts with some producers of this area from our previous research. Mooska and Metsavenna Farms are located in different parts of Võrumaa region. The hosts come from the region, purchasing their farmsteads in the 1990s. Today they operate as micro-enterprises involved in the rural tourism business as well as food production. Eda Veeroja[4] from Mooska Farm focuses on personal interpretation of local folk culture heritage. Clients can have a smoke sauna with her guidance, and the farm produces meat smoked in the smoke sauna as a regional speciality. She considers smoke sauna meat as an important part of clients' experience of smoke sauna, and many of her customers have also experienced Mooska sauna rituals. Eda's previous work experience in the tourism sector contributed to a strong business concept based on local cultural heritage (see Võsu and Sooväli-Sepping 2012). Meelis Mõttus from Metsavenna Farm started with milk production for the industry in the

mid-1990s, today he has Estonian native red cattle (ca 250 animals), which are considered a heritage breed. Since 2015 the farm has made its own dairy products, including French type cheeses from non-pasteurised milk and a regional speciality, a curd cheese called *sõir*.

Knowledge and skills related to making the two regional products are inscribed in the Estonian Inventory of ICH. The products have a regional quality label called *Uma Mekk* ('Own Taste'), giving them added value.[5] Both entrepreneurs regard storytelling as an essential part of marketing and often sell their products at local fairs and farmers' markets themselves or welcome visitors at their farms. In order to manifest a regional heritage-based identity, they speak in Võru language with Estonian customers.

The packaging design and materials for Mooska smoke sauna meat emphasise elements of ethnic rustic heritage and artisanal production, with the product available for purchase directly from the farm only. The package and labelling of *sõir* from Metsavenna Farm highlight the red cattle as a heritage breed but not the curd cheese as regional food heritage (except the use of the *Uma Mekk* label). *Sõir* is available at farmers' markets and in selected grocery stores. Meelis sees Metsavenna *sõir* as similar to traditional home-made curd cheese because the farm uses full milk, butter, and eggs (see also Bardone and Spalvēna 2019: 50). However, today meat smoked in the smoke sauna, as well as *sõir*, are commodified versions of food heritage as their production spaces and process correspond to the EU food safety and hygiene requirements. (For example, to get official permission to sell the smoked meat, the family had to build a new smoke sauna used only for this purpose.) Mooska Farm does not have livestock, the raw meat supply is purchased from other farms. Additionally, whereas domestic production of both foods was seasonal in the past, today they are made all year.

Kolotsi Farm is also a family business where the hosts Merle and Mart Leibur are involved in ecological dairy goat farming and producing cured goat cheese and Dutch-style cheeses from cow's milk (from a neighbouring farm) mainly to restaurants and in limited amounts to retail customers. Sometimes the hosts also sell cheeses at fairs or markets. Unlike Eda and Meelis, they were urban people who previously worked in the pharmaceutical industry and tourism sector and moved to this farmstead in 2009. Not having any regional roots, they had to create their own story and learn goat keeping and cheesemaking from scratch. Historically, goat farming has not been significant in Estonia, goat cheese has become more widely produced and consumed only within the last decade. Thus, in Kolotsi Farm, the food heritage aspect is not so much related to their products as to locally rooted small-scale farming and family business, which have a long history in Estonia. In all three cases, artisanal production in small batches can be related to cultural heritage as most food Estonians consume daily is industrially made.

A cooperation agreement enabled the three enterprises to use the museum's human and technical resources, whereas buying this service from an advertising agency would have been expensive. Furthermore, the latter would not provide expert consultations in food history. The film was shot during short visits to farms by a visual anthropologist across several months in 2018–2020.[6] Except for a few details, all activities recorded were performed naturally, not staged. In this cooperation, the museum's primary interest was detailed visual documentation of contemporary entrepreneurs' interpretations of food culture. Unlike earlier use of ethnographic film at the ENM when the museum researcher or curator selected what to film and what matters as heritage and is neces-

sary to document, in this case the main choices of what to show and how were made by entrepreneurs themselves. As a result, three longer films (ca 20 min) recording the whole production process, and several short clips (ca 5 min) were created. The former can be used for informative and educational purposes, and the latter in marketing and at sales events. All three films focus on the production process and context of the farm and the hosts' narrative about their products.

All three entrepreneurs had different expectations of the cooperation, and accordingly, the results were also somewhat different. Eda Veeroja (Mooska Farm), who proposed the idea, expected something beyond an average product promotion video and recognised the potential of research-based and professionally made visual materials. For her, the ENM was a heritage authority that could legitimise her story and add extra symbolic value to the product. She envisioned that the film should depict the whole production process, from salting the meat to showing how she sells it to customers. Her personality and informative narration in Võru language play a crucial role in the film. In general, Eda was satisfied with the result, although the film did not fully meet her ambivalent expectations to combine detailed documentation with captivating visual storytelling. Meelis Mõttus (Metsavenna Farm) was the busiest of all entrepreneurs during the filming period and therefore he lacked time to reflect upon how to show his production and how to perform for the camera. Although the film mainly focuses on the product itself and its making, Meelis tells the history of *sõir*, speaks of his dairy business's main characteristics, and explains key principles of being a rural entrepreneur. He was content with the outcome but did not give specific feedback. The hosts of Kolotsi Farm dedicated extra time to co-create the film with the visual anthropologist. In the course of filming, the hosts suggested focusing on the way of life on the farm, its milieu, and their relationship with the goats and the cheese as a living matter. Although heritage aspects are not explicit, the film gives a good overview of how artisanal food production is practiced today, combining bodily skills and sensibilities with machine assistance. In comparison with others, Merle and Mart expressed most clearly that they were satisfied with the result.

All in all, these three collaborations challenged the ENM to extend its traditional forms of heritage expertise and related documentation and, to some extent, also create content for marketing purposes. This ambivalent aim, of making short films that are both ethnographic depictions (for the museum) as well as promotional videos for entrepreneurs inevitably proved challenging for both sides. We learned that the negotiating process should be even longer and the plans and aims more explicitly formulated. After the films were completed, the visual anthropologist admitted that she would have liked to focus more on entrepreneurs' personalities. Furthermore, food culture is not her research priority, and therefore she did not continue with this topic after the project ended. Nevertheless, these films (especially the longer versions) are valuable education and research material for the museum that we have used at workshops, seminars, and conferences. The films are stored in the ENM film archives. They are likewise publicly available on YouTube (with English subtitles),[7] making contemporary interpretations of food heritage accessible for the wider audience and extending the museum's physical space into the digital sphere.

Food souvenirs are a valuable part of the destination experience in the context of tourism because they create a post-trip connection to the visited place and serve as excellent sensory gifts to share with family and friends (Richards 2002: 14–15). Edible souvenirs also have an important role in museum stores allowing local artisanal producers to reach both foreign and local museum audiences. When rating the overall museum experience, many visitors consider a visit to the museum shop and restaurant as being equally important as the museum exhibitions (Falk and Dierking 2016: 185–186). Food enables the museum to extend the visitor experience and add to interpretations (Mihalache 2016; Levant and Mihalache 2016). Therefore, museum shops are not just a means for generating income, they are also a selection of goods connected to museum collections and exhibitions and help to communicate the museum's mission (Komarac et al. 2019).

The ENM gift shop is in an excellent location next to the main entrance and has a relatively large space to display goods, in addition to which the museum has an e-shop. The selection is mainly composed of handicraft products that use folk art as inspiration, and books on folk culture and cultural history. The choice of edible goods at the shop was limited to some artisanal products before the FCP started. There are restrictions on selling perishable items like dairy and meat products as there are no refrigerators, and the sale of alcoholic drinks is not allowed. Specific ENM food souvenirs were chocolates with traditional folk patterns from museum collections printed on their paper wrappers.

Inspired by discussions with local food developers, in early 2018 we launched the ENM food souvenir competition to trigger collaboration with food producers. This initiative aimed to facilitate product development and diversify product selection at the museum shop based on food heritage. The criteria for products proposed for the food souvenir competition included connection with Estonian food heritage, predominant use of local raw ingredients, and traditional recipe and/or production methods. Additionally, the story, the quality of design, and reasonable production costs were considered (food souvenir competition 2018). We envisaged communication with producers before and after the competition and possible further cooperation. Furthermore, the food souvenir competition was expected to provide materials for researchers, including the products and their descriptions, especially the producers' interpretations of food heritage. The competition was launched in April 2018 and the results were declared in June.

Overall, 28 different products from different regions were submitted, mainly from micro- and small-scale producers. Several products were already on sale, but some were also novel (for example, a craft beer brewed for the competition) or even prototypes (flavoured mixes of the traditional cereal and legume flour *kama*). All participants received feedback and advice from the jury on developing the product further considering the story, taste, and design. In most cases, we noticed that a more elaborate story associating the product with food heritage was missing, which demonstrated the need for expert advice in creating such narratives.

The first prize was given to dried strips of flatfish made by a micro-entrepreneur

from Hiiumaa Island as it best met all the criteria of the call. The producer had used local fish and a traditional preservation method, a small ecological package, and added a humorous story about drying and eating this fish in the local dialect. We especially acknowledged a combination of good taste, reasonable price, and the added value of the story which created a strong connection between the product and the traditional culture of Hiiumaa. The products nominated for the second and third prizes represented innovative interpretations of food heritage, and both were already known at the local market. Birch sap syrup blends a historical tradition of gathering birch sap in Estonia with a modern recipe and technology and an attractive bottle design. Hemp oil is an example of a revitalised tradition in Estonia. Today this activity involves cultivating industrial hemp and making novel products that correspond to the expectations of modern needs and values, especially healthy food. All three winning products received an "Estonian National Museum Food Souvenir" sticker label and the manufacturers signed sales contracts with the museum shop.

Interpretations of food heritage by the producers greatly varied. For instance, a new entrepreneur who was familiar with regional food heritage and had contributed to the Estonian Inventory of Intangible Heritage proposed a prototype using a combination of two historical dishes. Her proposal for the edible souvenir were chips made of dried potato-barley porridge and traditional sauerkraut with barley. The idea behind the product corresponded well to the call's cultural heritage requirements and provided an interesting novel interpretation of traditional dishes. Yet, its texture and taste left something to be desired. The jury gave her feedback, and she soon produced an improved version of these chips.[8] A few entrepreneurs had approached food heritage in a very creative manner, for example, dried reindeer moss snacks in chocolate or a designer brooch made of rye bread.

The jury for the competition included museum researchers and curators, the sales manager and the marketing specialist from the ENM, and some external members (a design historian, local food specialist, etc.). During the assessment process, jury members expressed conflicting interpretations and evaluations of the product qualities. The research department emphasised the connection with tradition and story, whereas the sales department focused more on aesthetic appeal (including the package design) and the price. As a result, leaflets with stories were not included with the winning products in the museum shop, although a short product description was added to the fish strips.

The sales of all three winning products were low at the ENM museum shop (from July 2018 to June–July 2019). The sales manager explained that in the case of the flatfish snack, the producer changed the package design, whereas the birch sap syrup and hemp oil were rarely bought, and that was the reason to stop the sales contract with producers. The latter two were probably not the best food souvenirs in a museum context because glass bottles are not easy to carry for those who travel and also the price was considerably higher than purchasing the products from a grocery store or directly from the enterprise.[9] However, in the case of the flatfish snack, the decision to disqualify it because of the change in package design was made by the sales manager alone. Such developments revealed that decisions related to museum shop management and the selection of goods in the museum shop are not discussed with other colleagues; unlike in some other museums, there is no board to analyse what should be sold in the ENM

shop, and why. Overall, the food souvenir competition highlighted the need for a more extended intra-organisational analysis of the museum shop's role as a place representing and communicating the ENM's collections, exhibitions, and understanding of food heritage to the visitors.

In conclusion, the food souvenir competition brought several new food souvenirs to the museum shop, raised public awareness, and attracted media attention to contemporary food heritage interpretations. The initiative gave us a good insight into the diversity of these interpretations among producers and made us reflect critically on the ENM as a cultural heritage authority. The competition inevitably put the museum in the heritage expert's position of giving advice and consultations, rather than that of a broker creating a public forum for the negotiation of different interpretations of food heritage. Although several entrepreneurs were content with the recommendations, this did not lead to co-creative product development. In contrast to what we expected before the competition, very few of the proposed products were prototypes that could have been developed in more extended collaboration. From the museum management perspective, the food souvenir competition (as well as some other initiatives related to the FCP) brought up several differences not just in the interpretation of food heritage but also in the museum shop's role and the decision-making process.

INTERPRETATIONS OF FOOD HERITAGE: COOPERATION WITH THE PUBLIC AND THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

The initial FCP did not foresee cooperation with public sector organisations, yet the need to develop such partnerships emerged at an early stage of the project. We realised that NGOs or government institutions often mediate and coordinate cooperation with SMPs through their networks. They also finance such activities from the state budget and, to a remarkable extent, via the EU Leader measure targeting rural development which operates through local action groups. Thus, if the direct partner for the museum was an organisation belonging to the public sphere the output of the cooperation also involved the economic sphere. Partners' ongoing projects shaped the character of some collaborations, therefore in the majority of cases the museum had to take into account the goals and needs of these initiatives. In what follows, we investigate cooperation with NGOs that develop tourism and food production, and local R&D institutions.

Instrumental (Ab)use of Food Heritage: Flavours of Livonia, A Culinary Route in Estonia and Latvia

Thematic routes (for example, related to a particular cultural heritage topic) are a relatively new aspect in the development of Estonia's rural tourism. Such routes can potentially make peripheral regions more attractive as destinations and facilitate cross-border collaboration (see further Kovács and Nagy 2013). The creation of thematic food routes and culinary trails are seen as strategies in rural tourism development as they provide opportunities for place branding and product diversification, as well as new business opportunities for food producers and caterers (Hashimoto and Telfer 2015:

132–133). Yet, selling a route as a coherent whole can also pose challenges for developers and enterprises (Timothy 2015: 17). Culinary heritage is deeply rooted in a place, history, and memories and to a particular territorial identity and related gastronomic production (Bessière 2013: 278), whereas in the context of tourism, historical traditions as a resource can become appropriated or even transformed.

As with museums, the tourism industry participates in heritage production using cultural heritage as an economic resource for the development of destinations and services (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Bendix 2008). Cooperation between museums and the tourism industry is mainly seen in tourists being museum visitors. However, the collaboration between private, public, and non-profit sectors is crucial in developing sustainable heritage tourism products, and stakeholder participation is likewise necessary for inclusive planning and management of heritage tourism (Timothy and Boyd 2006: 9–10). Such cooperation could bring together partners who have previously never worked together. Although the ENM is one of the main tourism objects in south Estonia, museum professionals have not been involved in compiling or editing heritage tourism materials or creating education programs by local tourism developers or businesses. In this example, we want to reflect upon the museum's chances of being a partner for tourism development organisations.

Tourism development networks and initiatives in Estonia regard local food as an essential part of the tourism experience, however, this does not necessarily involve highlighting food heritage. While food heritage as a regional tourism resource is recognised, the need for research-based development of tourism services and products has not been foreseen in respective projects. Within the FCP, cooperation with the tourism sector was realised in a particular project, Flavours of Livonia: A Culinary Route in Estonia and Latvia,[10] which was initiated to establish a new food trail that had the objective of establishing and marketing a network connecting about 250 food producers and caterers. The project was implemented by tourism development organisations in Estonia and Latvia, involving also the Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce and county development centres. We were motivated to contribute to this initiative because we wanted to initiate collaboration with tourism developers and entrepreneurs and because the project aimed at using the food culture of a particular historical region as a resource.

As a result of the project, a digital platform was created to introduce the shared culinary history and promote locally grown and produced food (see Livonian Culinary Route). Additionally, online and printed information material in six languages was compiled for travel agencies, tourism entrepreneurs, and food producers, as well as tourists. Regular seminars, training courses, and workshops were addressed to tourism entrepreneurs and food producers in Estonia and Latvia.

Livonia was a historical region on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea that included most of contemporary Estonia and Latvia conquered during the Livonian Crusade (12th–13th centuries). This administrative region existed under different foreign powers until the early 20th century. Although indigenous ethnic groups (present-day Estonians and Latvians) kept their distinctive cultures, their foodways shared significant similarities. The idea of the route evoked the shared history and traditions of the region, aiming to "strengthen the identity based on common food heritage" (Flavours of Livonia).

However, the concept of Livonia adapted for the project was not historically correct,

including areas (for example, some Estonian islands) that had never belonged to this region. This was done to involve as many entrepreneurs as possible, and as a result, a food region that never existed historically was created for the purposes of the project. Furthermore, the managers of the Livonian Culinary Route did not consider the distinction between locally produced food and culinary heritage important as their aim was to involve as large a group of producers or caterers as possible. We observed that several products and menus did not rely on food culture history.

The project application had an ambition to use culinary history as a resource of the route but already in the early phase of the project it became clear that the managers of the project lacked interest as well as the competence to put it into practice. Equating food heritage with locally produced food reflected the understanding of tourism developers but also public discourse and food policies that prioritise the local over the historical. Indeed, some entrepreneurs participating in the network offer good examples of historical foods (for example hemp spread) or hands-on experiences of food heritage (such as traditional rye bread baking workshops). Nevertheless, in many cases, producers or caterers rather offer locally grown or made products based on traditions of other cultures (for example ostrich meat and eggs, Dutch and French types of cheese). Although the information material highlights local specialities, they are often in a marginal position in the menus and the network included several pubs serving French fries, Russian dumplings, etc. Thus, the developers did not regard historical accuracy as an important basis for this initiative. Hence, for serious heritage tourists who want to learn something about the history of local food culture such an approach could be confusing or even misleading.

Food history experts were not involved in the Flavours of Livonia project planning, and neither was the need for such research foreseen in the budget. Yet, once the project period had already begun, one network member from a development organisation, who had previous experience in the heritage sector, raised the need for food history expertise. The project leaders agreed to commission a historical study from the ENM. However, they underestimated the time and cost of such work. The particular terms of reference did not correspond to the short deadline (four months). Furthermore, it would not have been possible to carry out this task from scratch, and we could do it only because we had previously published a handbook on food history in Estonia. In June 2018, we prepared an overview of food culture in Old Livonia, detailed descriptions of characteristic food ingredients, and special dishes of the era. Eventually, the texts were used on the Flavours of Livonia online platform (see Flavours of Livonia and Dishes). Apart from one short presentation by one of us, the materials were not introduced to the network members.

In this cooperation, we did not have the chance to communicate directly with food producers and caterers. Hence, it was impossible to follow the principles of democratic negotiations on food heritage interpretation. From our viewpoint, the leaders of the Livonian Culinary Route project did not act as brokers between us as food history experts and entrepreneurs. We were regarded rather as external subcontractors whose contribution remained somewhat formal. Consequently, our cooperation as food scholars with the tourism and local development institutions turned out to be challenging and did not evolve into a partnership. In this limited cooperation, we could only provide information and content for tourism materials for a project, the goal of which remained

vague. The notion of '(Livonian) food heritage' remained unclear for the entrepreneurs, resulting in contradictory interpretations of goods and services presented as part of the Livonian culinary route. This case also demonstrated that third-party mediation between museum researchers and entrepreneurs might not always facilitate cooperation between the latter two.

Performing Regional Food Heritage: Days of Regional Flavours

Since museums are often considered significant regional, national, and global identity markers and makers, "explorations of food offer frames for connecting foodways in museums to communities' identities and issues in an in-depth manner" (Shields-Argeles 2016). Over three years, relying on the resources of the FCP, we co-created a new type of event – an edutaining day of regional flavours – at the ENM which enabled us to test cooperation with partners from the regions and from other research institutions. Today, museums focusing on food issues have to consider an abundance of food events in non-museum venues. Relying on the previous experiences of several museums, especially the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, organising food festivals and regular roundtables of experts (see Johnson 2016), our vision was to prioritise events and forums that are based on research and collections, are educational and incorporate issues relevant for the broader audiences. We wanted to avoid commercialisation and over-emphasis of the purely entertaining aspects of the event. Nevertheless, an opportunity to share sensory elements of food heritage related to bodily practices, smells, and tastes was a firm intention of these encounters.

Nominations of food regions in Estonia by the Ministry of Rural Affairs aim to promote local foods and improve their availability in cafes, restaurants and shops, and at events. The Ministry expects the selected food region to highlight the stories related to local foodstuffs and dishes, although terms like traditions or heritage are not used (see Estonian Food). Local bodies that implement this vision are development organisations (NGOs) that foster entrepreneurial activities through state and EU funding. We saw food region nominations as an excellent opportunity to initiate broad-based engagement; from the museum's perspective, focus on historical regions seemed to serve as a sound basis for partnership. Firstly, food history research at the ENM has concentrated on characteristic regional features, as part of which food-related materials in the museum's collections have been organised according to the regional principle, dominant in ethnographic tradition until the 1990s. For current museological research at the ENM regional historical materials are still highly relevant in education activities and consultations. Secondly, we presumed that co-created endeavours would enable a discussion and mapping of diverse interpretations of food heritage, thus adding a deeper understanding of food history that reached beyond typical promotional events. Therefore, together with partners, we decided to launch a series of events that would introduce the regional diversity of Estonian food heritage and provide a forum for local food heritage experts, developers, and producers to share their ideas and experiences.

Overall, three Days of Regional Flavour took place at the ENM during the project period (2017 the Lake Peipus region, 2018 the Pärnumaa region, 2019 the Võrumaa region). The events were co-created with regional activists managing the programme:

we discussed the topics of presentations, selected the producers, caterers, or chefs who supervised practical workshops, and consulted on the list of invited attendees. Preparations for the events lasted from six to nine months. The management tasks and expenses were shared, and the events were free for visitors. Information about the Days of Regional Flavour was published in the media. Alongside these major flagship events we have collaborated with multiple stakeholders both before and after the FCP, attending and contributing to local food events, roundtables, seminars, regional cookbooks, etc. Thus, we were familiar with interpretations of food heritage in these regions, i.e., what is considered its essential elements and how various actors understand it in different contexts.

Lake Peipus region has only recently gained prominence as a culinary destination; previously, it was known for vegetable cultivation and fishery. Over the last decade, regional development organisations and cooperation networks have been shaping a new image of local food. They highlight diverse food heritage at the lake's shores, especially fish, onions, and pie making, and promote the specific culinary traditions of Russian Old Believers and the Setu ethnic minority in the south. Several heritage-based food products have come to the market, for example, willow herb tea (Ivan chai) has become increasingly popular. The Pärnumaa region, comprising municipalities around the Gulf of Riga (including Kihnu Island), is historically best known for Baltic herring and cucumbers. While the mainland's food culture was quite similar to peasant food elsewhere in Estonia, the island of Kihnu distinguishes itself by traditional special treats like seal meat and seabird eggs. Since Kihnu has been a popular tourist destination for a long time and the Kihnu Cultural Space is inscribed into the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity (see Kihnu Cultural Space), its specific food heritage is renowned. In Pärnumaa the focus is not so much on historical foods but rather on food products of local origin. The Võrumaa region, on the contrary, has been consciously promoting its food heritage in the context of the distinct local culture for some time, partly due to the work of the Võru Institute a state-funded regional research institution (founded in 1995). Food heritage experts in this region, including producers and caterers, and developers, are distinguished by a holistic approach according to which they do not highlight single local food products or dishes but emphasise Võrumaa cuisine's uniqueness. This is reflected in a cookbook devoted to Võrumaa food heritage (Karu and Guerrin 2019 [2014]) that gives an ethnographically detailed overview of local food culture. In addition, regional development organisations value the use of local raw materials for food and traditions in regional production through the *Uma Mekk* trademark (see Endnote 5).

Each Day of Regional Flavour highlighted specific topics characteristic to a region: the Lake Peipus Day lake fish and traditional herbs, the Pärnumaa Day seafood, and the Võrumaa Day the curd cheese *sõir* and vegetables. The events began with a conference where the curators introduced materials concerning the region's food heritage in the museum's collections, followed by historical overviews of foodstuffs and dishes by historians and current uses and understandings of food heritage by local practitioners. For example, at the Võrumaa Day, a catering entrepreneur discussed the possibility of interpreting local food heritage by applying the principles of veganism.

Due to our specific interest in micro and small entrepreneur interpretations of food

heritage, we also wished to provide a forum for raising problematic issues like food policies regulating the production and catering of traditional specialities, the availability and quality of local raw produce to caterers, and the balance between food heritage and innovation in offering regional culinary experiences. For example, for the roundtable at the Võrumaa Day of Flavours, in addition to entrepreneurs, we also invited representatives of the Food and Veterinary Office and the Ministry of Rural Affairs to discuss problematic EU and Estonian legislation concerning the making and sale of traditional food products in small businesses. Yet, some of the invited stakeholder representatives did not come, which might indicate that they did not see the museum as a public forum for such issues.

The afternoons of the events were devoted to workshops where cooks or producers from the respective regions shared their ideas and skills related to using local foodstuffs. At the Lake Peipus Day of Flavours, the workshops aimed to teach the participants how to follow local historical recipes, for instance, how to cook Russian Old Believers' boiled sugar. At the fish workshop, snacks of rapidly salted raw pike perch were made. At the Pärnumaa Day, the main emphasis was on inventive interpretations of regional products. The workshops were supposed to surprise the participants rather than using food history as a source of inspiration, for example in one workshop sprat ice cream was prepared, while in another bladderwrack salad with lemon juice and olive oil was made. The caterers and cooks from Võrumaa tried to find a balance between the traditional and the modern. While all ingredients were strictly local, some dishes followed the old ways while others – such as fermented vegetables and black bread ice cream – were adapted to contemporary taste.

The Days of Regional Flavour gave a great opportunity for a closer examination of regional developers and entrepreneurs' expectations towards cooperation with the museum. The events enabled us to map different interpretations of food heritage on the collective and individual levels. The combination of the educative conferences, discussions, and edutaining workshops proved to be an effective way to engage people from different backgrounds with food issues. Yet, as the financing of the events was project-based – a combination of FCP funding and regional campaign budgets – the museum cannot guarantee the continuation of similar events in the future.

CONCLUSION

The FCP revealed that diverse, complementary, and contested food heritage interpretations exist side-by-side on the Estonian foodscape. The co-creation of films with entrepreneurs showed that regional historical food heritage is highly valued in some areas. However, the production of artisanal food has to be adapted to current food technology, hygiene requirements and consumer expectation. In some cases, heritage can be associated less with the traditional product itself and more with the specific character of the entrepreneurs' way of life and artisanal production. The food souvenir competition highlighted the diversity of contemporary interpretations of food heritage. We saw good examples of how products were inspired by historically used raw material for food, yet consumer expectation was met by using modern technologies and professional design. The Days of Regional Flavour demonstrated that today's food heritagisa-

tion largely relies on local raw material for food and its creative culinary interpretation, and less on historical tradition. It appeared that in the region branding that considers gastronomic trends and taste preferences, regional flavours are not always equal to food heritage, and priority is given to the invention of new traditions. The case of the Livonian Culinary Route made us realise uncritical heritagisation of a historical region and its food culture for commercial purposes can result in a devaluation of the meaning and the extra value that heritage gives to food producers and consumers. We realised that in the case of external projects, researchers cannot always prevent distorted interpretations of heritage for instrumental purposes.

The FCP at the ENM was a pilot project testing opportunities to engage a wider circle of stakeholders in contemporary interpretations of food heritage. From different experiences within the FCP we understood the need to focus on the dynamics and diverse interpretations of food heritage in research and museum communication as well as cooperation. Since the beginning of project, we saw our role as museum researchers not just as heritage experts who provide consultations based on museum studies and collections but also as partners with diverse actors. Thus, we were open to different perceptions of what food heritage might be today. Although quite a few entrepreneurs showed explicit interest in using historical knowledge in their product development and marketing, some of our partners did not see traditions related to food culture as a cultural or economic resource. Instead, many producers and caterers prioritised their personalities, stories and local raw produce in the shared initiatives. This reflects the general trends in marketing and communication of food products and services in contemporary Estonia. Thus, we realised that the democratisation of (food) heritage interpretations might result in multiple understandings and expressions in which individual creativity and the local origin of food could be more important for food sector actors than historical knowledge about production and consumption. Furthermore, the project enabled us to understand better our role (as food scholars) in the process of food heritagisation.

Indeed, the constructivist approach to food heritage turned out to support our flexible position as partners in dialogue and initiators of discussions over food culture rather than experts who evaluate correct or incorrect interpretations. Yet, we should not forget that heritagisation has its limits, and sometimes both researchers and actors in the food sector need to admit clearly: "this is not food heritage".

NOTES

1 Recent notable examples of exhibitions include Food: Bigger than the Plate at the V&A Museum in London (2019), Food Revolution 5.0 at the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* in Hamburg (2018) and Our Global Kitchen: Food, Nature, Culture at the American Museum of Natural History in New York (2012–2013).

2 For example, food culture of the Baltic Germans who lived in Estonian cities and manors for centuries is much less known among the wider public, often because the main sources are available only in German and the topic has remained marginal for researchers, except for some specific issues (see Plath 2008; 2012; Põltsam-Jürjo 2013; 2020).

3 The films about chefs were made in collaboration with professional director Marko Raat, who later used the material for the documentary *Kitchen Triptych* (2018; for the trailer see Allfilm 2019).

4 She was one of the spokespersons behind the initiative of inscribing the Võrumaa smoke sauna tradition into the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2014 (see Smoke sauna tradition in Võrumaa).

5 The *Uma Mekk* regional trademark was introduced in 2009. It is given to products that utilise at least 50% of their raw materials from Võrumaa region, or to dishes that use local traditions and recipes.

6 Both camerawork and editing were done by one person, visual anthropologist Karin Leivategija.

7 The films *Mooska talu, suitsuliha valmistamine* (4,871 views on November 15, 2021); *Kolotsi talu, kitsejuustu valmistamine* (424 views on November 15, 2021); and *Metsavenna talu, sõira valmistamine* (672 views on November 15, 2021) are authored by Karin Leivategija (2019a; 2019b; 2019c) from the Estonian National Museum.

8 Two years later, the producer has launched a successful brand of ecological chips, including an improved version of the porridge snacks.

9 The mark-up at the museum shop is 40 per cent.

10 The project lasted from May 2017 until May 2020; its total budget was 1,059,789 EUR.

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