

SLOVENIAN CHILDREN COOK LIKE THEIR GREAT-GRANDMOTHERS

Culinary tradition as part of cultural heritage

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PHOTO: IGOR ZAPLATIL



Do you remember your great-grandmother's recipes, or those of old village cooks, and flavours from your childhood? Do you know why some dishes were only for special occasions and others were part of everyday meals, even if always in a slightly different form? And how do you put together a tasty meal using only local and seasonal ingredients, maybe gathered from around your home?

Children from selected Slovenian primary schools set themselves the challenge to prepare dishes of their predecessors in a modern way. By exploring their culinary heritage, they want to raise awareness among their own generation and that of their parents. Through the media, they also want to spread their knowledge to a broader public in Slovenia and abroad. Based on six years of work to revitalise culinary culture, in which more than 2,000 primary school children have been involved each year.

The Traditional Slovene Breakfast project is being upgraded in the current school year under the auspices of a new campaign called Dober tek Slovenija – Enjoy your meal Slovenia!

PRESERVING CULINARY RICHES

In addition to concern for the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, striving to preserve the culinary characteristics of each individual region belongs amongst one of the fundamental motives of humanity. The aggression of globalism in this area is extremely strong and is reflected in the attitude of the younger generation towards local food and, consequently, in the general culture of living, where the eating occupies one of the main positions. The intention of the project is to have a long-term influence on the thinking of young people about their diets, to encourage them to consume healthy local food, to discourage them from reaching for ready-prepared dishes and, through fun activities, to enjoy being creative in the kitchen and spread information about healthy food among their own generation. By taking small steps, the project aims to increase the awareness of all those involved in the process of feeding children, to provide understandable causes and consequences of enjoying healthy food, and make such foods part of children's daily lives.

The aim of the project is to equip primary school children, who are in the most effec-

tive period in terms of perceiving essential information, for a safe and responsible way of life.

Grown-ups can contribute and be information providers, whilst children generally, with their own views and acquired knowledge, can be important in shaping not only the grown-up world but also in the introduction of other content in everyday and occasional meals.

Where is the origin and what are the reasons that typically local dishes were created in a given period, in relation to village initiatives or the resourcefulness of cooks? Where is the connection of dishes with occupations and habits – be it the working, peasant or bourgeois population? Among these we include religious or secular holidays, pre- or post-festive periods, jubilees and peasant weddings, births or deaths, the start and successful end of work done in the fields, in vineyards and forests, typical Sunday lunches or everyday dishes. A necessary consequence of the emergence of typically local dishes can be perceived in locally recognised harvested or processed ingredients. Some of these are branded (with certificates) with the traditional or geographical origin which, in a case of 'culinary awakening', is becoming synonymous with certain regions, both in the area of development of the production of local food, and in maintaining health, jobs and tourism, which are among the most rapidly developing industries. These are simple dishes, reflected in the poverty of the population and resourcefulness of cooks who, using rare ingredients, conjured up nutritious and flavourful everyday meals.

We shouldn't measure Slovenia according to its size in square metres, but rather the geographical, and consequential climatic and cultural diversity of its landscape, where each type of cuisine is unique.

Through the six-year exploration of their own food and cultural heritage by Slovenian primary school children, they were re-introduced to over 1200 dishes which the majority of the younger generation no longer know.

MOTIVATING THE YOUNG – TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The children have been entrusted with an extremely important role. They use their excellent culinary skills to create visually appealing dishes which are then presented to acclaimed food experts at major culinary and cultural events both in Slovenia and abroad. As young ambassadors of their primary school, their generation and, above all, their region or Slovenia as a whole, they are acquainting the public and attracting domestic and foreign guests. They realise that such dishes could also be a reason to visit a particular place or region, and that this is an important part of the project. The target group – primary school children – are considered to be the most susceptible in absorbing the aforementioned points which, in the long-term, they will know how to appreciate and in doing so preserve the specifics of Slovenia's culinary recognition. If children are offered such content in suitable ways, it takes only a short journey to achieve good results. Thus, in an organisational context, the project has been seen to be 'children friendly', since in competitive activities they acquire experience at numerous workshops held by producers of typically local ingredients or dishes.

They learn how to clean and prepare fish, how yoghurt and curd cheese is formed, how to use herbs in cookery in innovative ways, they practice manual dexterity by making Idrija 'žlikrofi' or Kobarid 'štruklji', they enter the kitchens of renowned chefs who open wide their doors and share their secrets with the children.

The project has been designed to integrate knowledge from various fields such as history, culture, geography, health, aesthetics, cookery, and craftsmanship. Not only high-achieving pupils but also those with lower educational achievements find motivation and in doing so strengthen their own self-esteem. More self-confident, they are also more successful in other areas as well as in overcoming the fear of various challenges in life. Fostering intergenerational communication and cooperation between groups of young people leads to socialisation, accepting others, the surroundings and ourselves. A healthy and responsible way of living becomes natural. Through motivational processes and peer influences we can ensure long-term retention of knowledge and experience, a desire to change or expand taste and the use of local ingredients. Simultaneously, we encourage a broadening of horizons of thinking about professions or 'What would I like to become,' thus ensuring the existence and upgrading of rural industries.

STUFFED BOŠTANJ VOŠČENKA APPLES

This fruit is found in almost every region in Slovenia. It was indispensable in the majority of dishes of our ancestors.

Apples can be found in strudels, cakes, in porridge or other substantial dishes, in stews - especially combined with beans - dried or as jams, juices and other drinks.

Among the numerous varieties of apple there are also native varieties which are particular to narrow individual areas. Thus, Boštanj in the Posavje area is home to the yellow (Dolenjska) 'voščenska' apple (the name is derived from the Slovene word for wax, to illustrate the fruit's shiny, 'waxed' skin). Prior to World War II, this area had a well-known and very active association of fruit growers. One of these brought in the native type of apple which today adorns the coat-of-arms of the town of Boštanj.

