





Culinary traditions, endemic resources, San Juan del Río, Querétaro

Tradiciones culinarias, recursos endémicos, San Juan del Río, Querétaro

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Abstract

Local gastronomy is little known, and it's not highlighted despite its potential. This research addresses local gastronomy's lack of visibility, which has not been neither properly documented nor promoted. The aim: to get to know some of the culinary customs of San Juan del Río, Qro. Through the identification of representative dishes and contributing to their preservation and recognition. The research topics are theoretically analyzed, exploratory and descriptive research is used, with a qualitative approach, deductive hypothetic method, with tools of observation and directed interview. Findings: a great variety of dishes which could give an identity to the municipality do exist, which are elaborated with endemic products from the region and are consumed in accordance to their seasonal availability; other are produced for cultural, patronal or family festivities; even though the traditional ways of producing them have been lost, some are preserved and therefore made explicit, enriching this research.

Resumen

La gastronomía local es poco conocida y no figura a pesar de su potencial. Esta investigación aborda la escasa visibilidad de la gastronomía local, que no ha sido adecuadamente documentada ni promocionada. El objetivo: conocer algunas de las tradiciones culinarias de San Juan del Río, Qro. mediante la identificación de platillos representativos y contribuir a su preservación y reconocimiento. Los temas de investigación se analizan teóricamente, se utiliza una investigación exploratoria y descriptiva, con un enfoque cualitativo, método hipotético deductivo con instrumentos de observación y entrevista dirigida. Hallazgos: existe una gran variedad de platillos que podrían dar identidad al municipio, los cuales se elaboran con productos endémicos de la región y se consumen de acuerdo con su disponibilidad estacional; otros se producen para festividades culturales, patronales o familiares; y aunque se han perdido las formas tradicionales de elaborarlos, algunos se conservan y así se hacen explícitos, enriqueciendo esta investigación.

CULINARY TRADITIONS, ENDEMIC RESOURCES OF SAN JUAN DEL RÍO, QUERÉTARO.

Objetivos	Methodology	Contributions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Culinary traditions of San Juan del Río, Qro. * Endemic resources * Relevant dishes * Local identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Theoretical tours *field trips to communities *endemic resources gathering *elaboration of dishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *first dive into San Juan del Río communities, to get to know endemic resources. * progress in culinary procedures and techniques of communities

TRADICIONES CULINARIAS, RECURSOS ENDEMICOS, SAN JUAN DEL RÍO, QUERÉTARO.

Objetivos	Metodología	Contribuciones
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Tradiciones culinarias San Juan del Río, Qro. * Recursos endémicos * Platillos relevantes * Identidad local 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Recorridos teóricos *Visitas de campo a localidades *Recolección de recursos endémicos *Elaboración de platillos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Primera inmersión en comunidades de San Juan del Río, para conocer tradiciones culinarias y recursos endémicos. * Avances en procedimientos y técnicas culinarias de comunidades

Culinary traditions, endemic resources, identity, San Juan del Río, Querétaro

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Introduction

In recent years, Mexican food has gained great relevance because, according to the official website of UNESCO (2015), 'traditional Mexican cuisine is a complete cultural model that includes agricultural activities, practices, rituals, ancestral knowledge, culinary techniques and customs, as well as ancestral modes of community behaviour.

The author Paz Álvarez (2023), via the El País website, stresses that 'There are only four cuisines in the world declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Mexican cuisine is not only one of them, but it was the first to obtain this distinction from Unesco'. Likewise, on 20 June 2023, the gala The World's 50 Best Restaurants 2023 was held in Valencia, Spain, where Mexico stood out for its culinary art, obtaining three places on the list of the world's 50 best restaurants, Paz Álvarez, (2023) points out, this has led each state to be concerned about extolling its local gastronomy; however, it is known that as far as the municipality of San Juan del Río, Querétaro, is concerned, the local gastronomy is little known; local gastronomy is little known, with the exception of the barbacoa de borrego (cooked in a hole in the ground with maguey stalks) Animal Gourmet (2024); since according to various gastronomic rankings carried out at the national level, Querétaro does not appear in any of them, however, the Royal Ibero-American Academy of Gastronomy named Querétaro as 'The Ibero-American Capital of Gastronomy' in the previous year,

1. Objective

The objective of this research was to know part of the culinary traditions of San Juan del Río, Querétaro, in order to find some relevant or identifiable dishes that are customary, elaborated with endemic resources and that can give identity to the municipality.

2. Theoretical framing

2.1 Culinary traditions

According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) a tradition is anything that is transmitted from generation to generation, a story, a legend, a doctrine, a rite, a game, and among them is the elaboration of food.

A culinary tradition can be said to be a replicated behaviour related to food that has been passed down through time and generations. That is to say that a certain food was selected by social groups in a community and its preparation was accepted to such a degree that it was replicated in the same groups by new generations until it became a tradition.

This can be seen in the statements of Harris (1989) quoted by J. Hernández Ramírez (2018) that food is not only what can be consumed, but also what each culture selects from a wide range of possible products as a result of complete historical processes that give rise to specific culinary traditions.

This is also affirmed when it is said that gastronomy refers to the study and practice of the preparation, presentation and appreciation of food and drink. It includes cultural, historical and social aspects related to food, as well as culinary techniques and the creation of dishes. It is considered a form of cultural and artistic expression that varies throughout the world.

From a culinary perspective, gastronomy is defined as the art and science of food preparation, involving the selection of ingredients, cooking techniques and the creation of dishes that satisfy both sensory and nutritional aspects. It involves creativity and innovation in cooking.

From an anthropological perspective, gastronomy is considered a fundamental component of human culture, encompassing the production, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, including rituals, traditions and symbolism related to food, and plays an important role in the cultural identity of societies.

2.2 Characteristics of gastronomy

Gastronomy, at its core, is characterised as a field that fosters culinary creativity, where chefs and cooks experiment with ingredients, flavours and culinary techniques to bring unique and delicious dishes to life. It also reflects cultural diversity worldwide, as each region and culture has its own culinary traditions, ingredients and distinctive dishes.

The aesthetics and presentation of the dishes are fundamental, being considered a true gastronomic art that includes the arrangement on the plate and the choice of the vase. Gastronomy also requires a high level of technical skill, as chefs must master a wide variety of culinary techniques, cuts of ingredients and methods of preparation. Finally, it is a constantly evolving field, where innovation and the search for new ways of combining ingredients and techniques are a constant.

2.3 Background of gastronomy

The background of gastronomy dates back to ancient civilisations, where the preparation and consumption of food plays a crucial role in survival and culture. According to Echeverría (2006), Egyptian gastronomy used aromatic herbs and spices in its dishes while ancient Chinese cuisine had more balance of flavours. He also points out that ancient Rome had advanced cooking techniques and valued ostentation in their banquets. It is considered that there is a long history of the evolution of gastronomy over the centuries and its diversification in the different cultures of the world.

2.4 Endemic resources

Endemic resources are considered to be those that are naturally available in the environment in which the community is established, defined by Gómez Peralta (2005) as territorial space, demarcated and defined by possession; although this availability could also be induced through its immersion in the environment and its adaptability to the environment, citing the example provided by the Federal Consumer Protection Agency in Mexico (PFC) (2024), which mentions Aloe Vera, originally from the Arabian Peninsula and widely used in Mexico for various purposes.

This is so true that Good and Corona (2011) and Mintz (2003) cited by J. Hernández (2018) affirm that what is consumed is not only related to availability in the ecological environment, but is also the result of complex historical, cultural and social processes that end up deciding culinary traditions.

For example, the Nopal cactus, which according to the Mexican Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2024) is native to Mexico, has become part of gastronomic and cultural traditions that enrich us. It is considered endemic to Mexico, specifically to the central and northern zone, and although it can be cultivated in various parts of the world, it is not considered or used as human food in all parts of the world, as it is put to various uses, such as raw material for medicine, chinchilla or tunas, or simply relegated to being cattle pasture. However, in Mexico it has been traditionally used and exploited since pre-Hispanic times in gastronomy.

Endemic resources of Querétaro, Mexico used in gastronomy or culinary traditions.

It should be clarified that not all the natural resources used in the gastronomy of the State are really endemic, but their adaptation to the region makes them widely available and used in local gastronomy, so we can find resources of plant and animal origin. Only a few are mentioned here for reasons of space and for their probable use in the elaboration of pro-local-identity dishes.

Box 1

Table 1

Plant and animal resources used in the locality

Vegetales	Animales o insectos
Nopal	Chapulín
Jitomate	Xamues
Quelite	Ganado vacuno
Verdolaga	Ganado bovino
Maíz	Aves de corral
Calabaza criolla	Conejo
Camote morado	Gusanos de maguey
Chile	Escamoles
tuna	Jumiles
Pitaya	Hormigas chicanas
biznaga	Liebre

Source: Own Elaboration

2.5 Identity

A community is a geographical place with defined boundaries, but it is also a group of people who share a common history, values, goals and a shared identity.

In a community, members interact regularly and engage in joint activities that meet their individual and collective needs' McMillan & Chavis, (1986). Thus a community is not only a physical place with boundaries, but also a group of individuals who share a common history and common goals, and engage in activities that strengthen the collective identity by satisfying their individual and group needs.

This identity is shaped by particular characteristics that distinguish a group from others, a sense of belonging that fosters cohesion and attachment among its members. Identity, according to the RAE, is the set of traits of an individual or a group that characterise them in relation to others. In this sense, identity can manifest itself in various fields, including gastronomy.

When talking about a gastronomic identity, Acosta, (2016), proposes it as a relationship of correspondence and correlation between the personality of the subject under study and the personality of elements of gastronomy (food and beverages).

Dish identity is, then, that dish that is related to or identifies a specific locality. And it becomes a gastronomic emblem that identifies that locality in relation to others. Gastronomy, in this sense, functions as an element that reinforces the sense of belonging and allows a community to recognise and value its own culture through its flavours, ingredients and preparation methods.

And as stated in various national media, the state of Querétaro, specifically San Juan del Río, does not have a dish that provides that common identity among the inhabitants of the locality, which is why it is known that various events have been deployed in search of those dishes that could lead to identify the community, among these events is the field research by various groups and with different objectives and means of dissemination, and that is the reason why it is known that the state of Querétaro, specifically San Juan del Río, does not have a dish that provides that common identity among the inhabitants of the locality, which is why it is known that various events have been deployed in search of those dishes that could lead to identify the community objectives and means of dissemination.

However, in the current year 2024, chef Soriano in Animal Gourmet affirms that there is a culinary tradition in Querétaro, but that these have been lost due to various factors, highlighting the arrival of people from different states and new gastronomic attractions for purely tourist purposes such as cheese and wine.

However, the rescue of gastronomic identity is still an ongoing effort and the inhabitants of Querétaro, together with chefs and researchers, continue to explore and rediscover those dishes that could represent the essence of the region. This search for a culinary identity involves not only the rescue of recipes, but also the vindication of a sense of belonging and the consolidation of a gastronomic culture that, despite changes and external influences, continues to be a reflection of the character of its community. This, following the idea of Melendez and Cañez (2010), can result in the transfer of the preparation of traditional foods found in the domestic sphere to the commercial sphere as a means of improving the economy of families or the locality.

3. Methodology

Mixed documentary and field research is used; exploratory and descriptive; qualitative approach, hypothetical deductive method with observation and guided interview tools.

We went to the communities, making direct contact with the housewives and regional cooks so that they could share their traditional recipes, with their consent and the support and accompaniment of the representative of the association of restaurateurs of Querétaro AC.

4. Results

The research is very ambitious and wide-ranging, it is still in its early stages, for the time being it has been possible to record culinary procedures and techniques in three communities of San Juan del Río, Querétaro, that is, recipes for dishes that are traditionally prepared with endemic or available resources, obtained through direct surveys, mainly of housewives, and also through observation of the preparation and, of course, tasting of these dishes.

In other words, the reality was studied in its natural context, interpreting and explaining culinary techniques and procedures with the people actually involved in the preparation of traditional dishes.

It was learned that the people in various communities in San Juan del Río, Querétaro, consume their own resources that they themselves care for, sow, harvest, feed in the case of animals. They still continue with traditions that were created previously due to the existence of a need, and that in spite of having more food resources and equipment that facilitates the preparation, they give preference to their own customs that result in an exquisite seasoning.

It was possible to learn about various traditional and representative dishes from the communities of San Juan del Río, Querétaro, although only the three most representative dishes were prepared and with the most commonly used culinary technique, since it was also learned that a single dish can be prepared in various ways and according to the resources available to each family.

It was possible to learn about the efficiency in the use of the different resources available to each participant in the research and their use in their daily diet, and that these are really representative and traditional in the community, as they are consumed regularly. The participants in the research kindly shared their culinary techniques and their endemic or available resources, as well as part of their learning history, making it clear that necessity forced them to make the best use of the resources to be able to feed or economically support their families and occasionally other members of the community.

5. Conclusions

This paper addresses the preservation and promotion of the culinary traditions of San Juan del Río, Querétaro, as part of its cultural identity. It is mentioned that Mexican cuisine is recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and is recognised in international rankings, underlining its relevance in haute cuisine.

However, this work highlights that many local cuisines, such as that of San Juan del Río, remain invisible, which represents a challenge and an opportunity for the research and promotion of these traditions. It is established that dishes made with endemic resources are a central element in the traditions of the locality and are closely linked to the ecology and local history, as well as being passed down from generation to generation, reflecting the identity of the communities of San Juan del Río.

It should also be noted that traditional ways of preparing food are disappearing due to modernisation and external influences. Although the State of Querétaro has culinary traditions, these have been diluted by the arrival of new gastronomic and tourist trends. To address this problem, a collaborative approach involving local communities, researchers and chefs in the rescue and documentation of traditional recipes is necessary to contribute as an element of cultural identity. In general, the connection between gastronomy, endemic resources and community identity is an issue that deserves greater attention in research and cultural policy, not only in Querétaro, but throughout the Mexican Republic.

The results found coincide with the work of Ruiz Olivares, V.E. (2017) who studied the traditional cuisine of Villa Progreso, Querétaro, concluding that it is fundamental to cultural identity and depends on the use of local ingredients obtained through harvesting, likewise, it highlights the generational transmission of culinary knowledge and the importance of endemic resources in everyday food practices [11]. Similarly, the research by Camarena Gómez, D. M. J. (2015). on gastronomy in Sonora also coincides in highlighting how culinary knowledge and practices reflect cultural identity, being essential to connect the past and the present through local cuisine.

On the contrary, it differs with the study by Duhart (2004) cited by Meléndez and Cañes (2010) who stated that globalisation has negatively affected culinary traditions in many regions, while the results from San Juan del Río show a continuity in the use of traditional techniques despite external influences, which may be linked to gender and social class differences.

The research work in San Juan del Río was carried out in communities far from the municipal capital and with economic disadvantages, an aspect that was not considered as an indicator or study variable, which is considered by Montecino (2006, October 11) who mentioned that gastronomy is intrinsically linked to gender and social class differences.

Research with other perspectives on gastronomy or cuisine can be found, such as that of Ruiz Olivares, V.E. (2017) who studied the traditional cuisine of Villa Progreso, Querétaro, with a focus on food sovereignty, an approach that could be integrated into future research in San Juan del Río to enrich the understanding of the ecological and social impact of these traditions.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no interest conflict. They have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the article reported in this article.

Authors' Contribution

The contribution of each researcher in each of the points developed in this research, was defined based on:

Pérez-Bravo, Julia: elaborated the project idea, research method and technique, state of the art, the design of the field instrument and application, carried out the data analysis and results systematization and carried out the writing of the paper.

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Abbreviations

PFC Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor
RAE Real academia Española

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Background

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