

History of national cuisine and identity of the Ukrainians in North America

Vadym Kuzin, Ph.D. Candidate, History and Political science, Ukrainische Freie Universität München

Summary

National identity is a social construct that accumulates a significant number of relevant elements, including national cuisine. Given the rapid growth of integration and migration processes, it is appropriate to monitor the processes and methods of preserving cultural traditions, especially with regard to traditional dishes and methods of their preparation. This issue becomes most relevant when it comes to the Ukrainian diaspora, because it is difficult to preserve traditions and customs due to the influence of assimilation processes. Given the fact that Canada is home to almost 2 million people — natives of Ukraine (and in the US this number reaches over 1 million people), who already have their own history and genesis of the Ukrainian national cuisine in North America — from a practical point of view, it is interesting to trace these transformational processes, while focusing on the role of food culture in preserving ethnic identity.

Introduction

Along with language, food is the most obvious carrier of national identity. Even in today's globalized world, it is no coincidence that certain dishes are used as a clear symbol of a certain nationality. If dishes such as onion soup, ratatouille or crème brûlée bear a French cultural imprint, borscht or varenyky are one of the national symbols of Ukraine. In the era of the formation of European political nations, the existence of such dishes-symbols significantly contributed to the consolidation in societies of the idea of national identity.

The question of the relationship between ethno-national identity and traditional Ukrainian cuisine is sufficiently unexplored. That is why the relevance of the dissertation research is due to the increasing practical and scientific interest in understanding the identity of Ukrainians and its manifestation through the national cuisine, given recent events with the attempts by Russia to appropriate specifically Ukrainian dishes. Migration processes also influence the change of approaches to gastronomic preferences. In particular, they are reduced to revealing the role and significance of national traditional dishes as one of the symbols of Ukrainian national identity in the context of political processes.



Prairie provinces are the traditional region of the Ukrainian settlements in Canada. Source: FamilySearch.



Ukrainian Village street sign, Chicago, Illinois. Source: Live journal



Ukrainian cultural heritage village near Edmonton, Alberta. Source: Epicure & Culture.

Methodology

My research will be based on the processing of newspapers, magazines, cookbooks and other archival materials. These sources will help in the theoretical part, as well as in understanding the historical context, change and transformation of the national cuisine and identity. I will also take the opportunity to have personal interviews with the owners and chefs of the Ukrainian restaurants in North America. Interviews will help to understand the current state of affairs in the Ukrainian-American food landscape.

I will apply an interdisciplinary approach based on historical, anthropological and cultural theory. I will also borrow some concepts from ethnogastronomy to understand the transformation of the the Ukrainian national cuisine in a specific period of time. The social and ethnicity of food will be considered to demonstrate that food can be a marker and/or destroyer of ethnic identity.

The historical method is expected to be used in Chapter 1 and 2 of the doctoral dissertation, in turn, the methods of abstraction, concretization, analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction — in fact throughout the whole work.

Study Area

This research is situated in Canada and the United States. Namely in Canada in the province of Alberta (different locations in Alberta will be used since different traces of Ukrainian culture can be found throughout the province) and the city of Toronto. In the United States this research will be conducted in the cities of Chicago and New York, both cities have distinct districts called Ukrainian village where different sources for my research can be found.

Significance

The scientific novelty of the obtained results follows from the relevance of the topic and the absence of such comparative studies. The practical significance of the work is revealed from the results of empirical research, which provides systematization of the recipes and comparison of the menus of Ukrainian restaurants in Ukraine, Canada and the United States, for a general picture of understanding the differences between national cuisine in isolation from the country of origin.



Ukrainian varenyky and Canadian poutine combined in one dish. Ukrainian heritage village near Edmonton, Alberta. Source: Vadym Kuzin.

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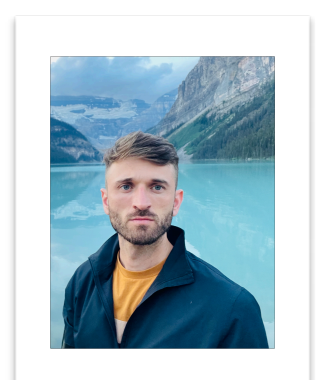
Dissertation supervisor: Ph.D. Gennadi Poberezny, Ukrainian Research Institute at the Harvard University; Ukrainische Freie Universität.



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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT

Notes

Contact info:
vadym.kuzin@yahoo.com



Vadym Kuzin, M.A.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Research questions:

1. How important is national cuisine for the national identity (among the other components)?
2. Does Ukrainian cuisine differ in Canada and the United States? If yes, then how?
3. How is the gastronomic identity of the Ukrainians in North America expressed?

Specific hypotheses:

The national gastronomic heritage of the Ukrainian diaspora in North America is an integral part of the Ukrainian cuisine, as a result, the expediency of separating the culture of the diaspora from the Ukrainian culture as such will be considered. The gastronomic identity of the Ukrainians in North America must be different, as it was influenced by various external factors.