WP T2 – IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN THE COLLECTIVE COMMERCIAL VALORISATION OF ALPINE FOOD INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

WP leader: Kedge Business School

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Digital Ethnography Research Report on Consumer Response to the Alpine Food Intangible Cultural Heritage

Involved partners:
Kedge Business School
University of Innsbruck
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1. Introduction

This document, prepared in the context of the Alpine Space INTERREG project AlpFoodway’s Work Package (WP) T2, employs an innovative research method, digital ethnography, to analyse online social networks such as Instagram and TripAdvisor, to identify consumer responses to and appreciation of Alpine food and its intangible cultural heritage (ICH). In the context of the present document, ICH is defined based on the UNESCO’s (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, according to which cultural heritage goes beyond monuments and material objects to include “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (art. 1). According to the UNESCO Convention, ICH can be manifested in the following domains (art. 2): oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. These guiding principles, as well as the preliminary results and other WP T2 ongoing research activities, shaped the goals and methodological choices of the studies here reported. In particular, this work builds on the 2018 AlpFoodway Deliverable D.T2.1.1, “Map of ICH Food Commercial Valorisation Practices Across the Alpine Space”, which highlighted how products – particularly, but not always, those protected by geographical indications – and cultural events and festivals can contribute to safeguarding and valorising food-related ICH.

Social media are undoubtedly a cultural space where Intangible Cultural Heritage can be expressed and discussed. Yet, the characteristics of most social media favour the tangible over the intangible aspects of cultural heritage, which is much more difficult to detect. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time an enquiry on the presence of, and consumer responses to, intangible cultural heritage on social media has been conducted. Methodologies for the analysis of social networks are quite developed today, but to the best of our knowledge they have never been applied to study ICH in ways consistent with the goals of the AlpFoodway project. We searched extensively in published academic and applied literature on the topic, but we could find only limited methodological benchmarks to guide our data gathering, analysis and interpretation efforts. As a result, we devoted extensive intellectual labour to adapt social media analysis methodologies to find traces of ICH and its appreciation on various social media platforms. At the beginning, we were frustrated by the lack of results of standard approaches, since – to a great extent – what is intangible is also invisible on social media. This is to some extent due to the fact that the object of our analysis, intangible cultural heritage, is a scholarly category employed by experts which does not recur in laypersons talk or posts on social media.

The discipline of anthropology has well debated the differences between the language (and related concepts) that are used to make sense of the world by members of studied communities (the so-called emic viewpoint) and those of the researchers who study them (the etic viewpoint). Intangible cultural heritage is therefore an etic concept that is difficult to translate in emic terms. To complicate things further, some of the emic categories employed by laypeople to refer to cultural heritage, such as ‘tradition’, ‘typicality’ or ‘authenticity’ have been heavily scrutinized and in some cases rejected in heritage studies and other social science disciplines. For example, UNESCO warns that authenticity is not a useful concept to make sense of intangible cultural heritage; and well-established sociological work highlights the facts that all traditions are invented. The development of our methodology was thus affected by unanticipated practical and theoretical difficulties.
In this document we report key findings from a multi-sited analysis of social media content focusing on visual and textual content that, roughly, correspond to emic notions of Intangible cultural heritage. As our methodology was experimental, we adopted an explorative research approach, with limited pre-conceived hypothesis. Our overall goal was to understand the meanings consumers attribute to Alpine food and its intangible cultural heritage. We now turn to describe the general research methodology, research sites, and the partners involved in the realization of this research activity.

Digital research methods (Rogers, 2013) use of data spontaneously produced by social media users and/or subsequently aggregated by platforms and are adapted to the characteristics the social media platform analysed, which shape user behaviour, the type of content that it is possible to upload and share, and patterns of user interactions (i.e., Twitter is not the same as Instagram or Facebook in all these respects). More specifically, our digital research methodology combined qualitative ethnographic analyses (Caliandro and Gandini, 2015; Kozinets, 2015) with quantitative data capture, analysis and visualisation procedures. This mixed qualitative-quantitative methodology combines aspects of the two main approaches to social media analysis, namely ‘big data’ and ‘thick data’. The big data approach permits to quantitatively analyse massive samples of user-generated social media data. Big data methodologies have generated new manners of capturing, analyzing and visualizing online consumer behaviour and interactions. Thick data approaches (Wang, 2013), which are qualitative in nature, work with much smaller samples with the goal of contextualizing and making sense of the use individual make of social media. Our work of combining insights from both approaches was facilitated by previous and ongoing research activities carried out in the context of the AlpFoodway project on the selected research sites and ICH elements.

A preliminary methodological decision regarded the social media platforms to retain for analysis. Our work was affected by the Cambridge Analytica scandals that sparked greater privacy concerns among both users and social media platforms, making it much more difficult than in the past to capture data on most platforms. Mindful of these limits, we considered various platforms. After careful considerations of their pros and cons given the goals of our study, we focused on Instagram and, for one of our research sites, TripAdvisor. Facebook was excluded as most accounts are private, limited the quality and representativeness of the data that could be gathered. Twitter—which at present is the platform that provide better access to data—was also excluded as it was very difficult to obtain ICH-relevant data. More specifically:

- **Instagram (IG)** is a photo and video-sharing social network platform owned by Facebook, Inc. Launched in 2010, the app allows users to upload content to the service that can be edited with filters, and organised with tags and location information. Users can decide to make their accounts public or to share their posts with pre-approved followers only. They can browse each other’s content by tags and locations, and view trending content. They can like photos and videos, and follow other users. IG was selected in the context of the current study because frequently posted content includes pictures and videos of food, landscapes, tourist attractions and cultural events, making it particularly suitable in the context of a study on Alpine food heritage. Additionally, IG-enabled user interactions are not characterised by the same level of conflictuality of other platforms, which facilitate the analysis. On IG, users post a picture or video typically accompanied by a brief text and one or more hashtags (see example in Figure 1).

- **TripAdvisor (TA)** is a social travel network with more than 500 million user-generated reviews of hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions. Founded in 2000, over the years TA has greatly impacted the tourism industry. Users can post in the form of a textual description and evaluation of the experience and a quantitative evaluation on a 1-5 scale, with the option to upload pictures. Given the focus of our study, TA was selected as its restaurant reviews could provide an important complement
to IG’s more visually-oriented content as well as a better understanding of the emic language used by consumers to talk about Alpine food-related ICH.

Geographical sites and objects of our report were selected among those with sufficient social media presence that had already been the object of other WP T2 research activities, which provided the contextual knowledge necessary to make sense of user-generated online content. The selection of research sites was also restricted by the fact that not all AlpFoodway WP T2 partners had the research skills necessary to carry out social media analysis. Despite these limits, we manage to gather data from three Alpine regions in Italy, Switzerland, and Austria.

**Figure 1 – Instagram: Illustrative post on #raclette**

![Instagram post](https://www.example.com/instagram-post)

*Source: Instagram online search engine.*

The *Aosta Valley* (Italy) was the first research site that allowed us to develop and test a social media analysis methodology adapted to the goal of the study (studying food-related Alpine ICH). Extensive work enabled us to make sense of the role of Alpine Food ICH in the overall image of the Aosta Valley on IG; user-generated content for two of the most well-known Aosta Valley heritage food products, Fontina Cheese and Arnad Lard, both protected by the Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO), and for two cultural festival and festive events, the *desarpa* (descent of cattle from high-mountain pastures at the end of summer) and the *Festa de lo Pan Ner* (Festival of Rye Bread). In this research site, we also managed to carry out an analysis of TripAdvisor restaurant reviews in selected tourist destinations. Digital research activities in this site were facilitated by the collaboration with AlpFoodway partner Autonomous Region Aosta Valley (Assessorato Turismo, Sport, Commercio, Agricoltura e Beni Culturali, Bureau Régional Ethnologie et Linguistique (BREL), which we gratefully acknowledge, and carried out by Kedge Business School (Prof. Diego Rinallo and Dr. Valentina Pitardi) with the help of Dr. Guido Anselmi, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca. Related research findings are reported in section 2 of this document, written by Prof. Diego Rinallo. Research activities in the *Canton of Valais* (Switzerland) focused on its most known cheese, Raclette of Valais, which is also employed to prepare the eponymous melted cheese dish. Carried out with a replication logic in mind, this research site permitted to compare research findings and refine insight coming from the analysis of Fontina cheese and Arnad Lard in Valle d’Aosta. This case was included in our sample thanks to the Musée de Bagnes, which expressed an interest in understanding IG content posted on #raclette and related hashtags in the context of a forthcoming exhibition dedicated to Raclette of Valais cheese. We are grateful to the Musée de Bagnes for helping us with data interpretation and for the opportunity to study such an interesting case. Research activities were...
carried out by Kedge Business School (Prof. Diego Rinallo) with the help of Dr. Guido Anselmi. Related research findings are reported in section 3 of this document, written by Prof. Diego Rinallo.

Research activities in Tyrol (Austria and Italy) focused on Graukäse (grey cheese), which represents a traditional food especially in the Eastern Alps. Rural farms and small Alpine dairies have been practising the production of this piquant, spicy sour milk cheese for many centuries. Today, the Alpine cheese speciality is officially recognised by the European Union through a Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO). Formerly considered ‘poor people’s food’, today it can be found in high-end gastronomy and it embodies a best practice example for the Alpine Food ICH. The empirical data analysis is based on the hashtag #graukäse posted on Instagram. The data collection and interpretation was carried out by the University of Innsbruck team (Prof. Andrea Hemetsberger, Dr. Michael Klingler, BA Julia Sanftl).

Emerging data from the Aosta Valley research case were presented during various six-monthly AlpFoodway project partner meetings; the ensuing discussions and feedback obtained by partners and observers are gratefully acknowledged. Data from Aosta Valley and Tyrol was also shared and discussed in the context of two WP T2 Technical Meetings, which were beneficial to the development of a common understanding and a shared methodology. The contribution received during these workshops by other WP T2 partners is gratefully acknowledged. During the final rounds of data gathering, research findings from different research sites were compared by Kedge Business School. The results of such comparative work and the related insight for the commercial valorisation of Alpine food ICH are reported in the concluding part of this document, written by Prof. Diego Rinallo (see section 5).
2. Case study Aosta Valley, Italy
The Aosta Valley is a much-appreciated tourist destination with a strong food culture. On Instagram, various hashtags are devoted to the Valley as a whole, and to specific products such as Fontina, Arnad Lard, and many others. It also hosts various cultural events and festivals rooted in the region’s food heritage. Being our first research site, we developed our digital methodology in an iterative manner. We initially focused on Instagram with the goal to verify to what extent the tourist image of the Aosta Valley is driven by its food heritage. We extended the analysis to two of the region’s most popular PDO products, the Fontina cheese and the Arnad Lard. Here, we wanted to assess to what extent the user-generated content on related hashtags highlights the intangible cultural heritage behind the tangible products and the recipes that it is possible to prepare with them. Finally, we extended the analysis to two cultural events, the Désarpa and the Festa de lo Pan Ner, to understand to what extent user-posted content is coherent with the goal of promoting the Valley’s rich heritage. The AlpFoodway project partner Bureau Régional Ethnographie et Linguistique, Assessorato Turismo, Sport, Commercio, Agricoltura e Beni Culturali, Autonomous Region Aosta Valley helped in the selection of the relevant products, events and hashtags to focus on. In a second step, we extended the analysis to TripAdvisor restaurant reviews, with a particular focus on the emic language used to describe the region’s food heritage and the products and dishes most frequently mentioned. The results of these research activities are reported and discussed in the sections that follow.

2.1 Role of Alpine Food ICH in the overall image of the Aosta Valley on Instagram (IG)
The analysis initially focused on the hashtag #valledaosta (>490,000 posts on June 30th, 2019). Thanks to a data capture script we acquired data on a fairly large number of posts (N=20,000). We subsequently extended the analysis to two additional hashtags with the goal of comparing and contrasting results: #aostavalley (>210,000 posts); and #volgovalledaosta (>82,000 posts). These hashtags, which are to some extent overlapping with #valledaosta, were selected to provide access to different typologies of IG users and content: we anticipated for example that #valledaosta would include mostly Italian users, both tourists and residents, whereas #aostavalley would be more used by non-Italian users, mostly tourists. #volgo identifies a growing community of Italian IG users characterised by a love for photography, art, culture, and the beauty of places. The hashtag #volgovalledaosta was selected for the possible greater heritage sensitivity of its contents. The number of additional posts acquired was 1,500 for #aostavalley and 2,500 for #volgovalledaosta, for an overall total of about 24,000 posts. Data collection took place in several rounds in 2018 and the first semester of 2019. Posts refer to the period between 2012 and 2019, with a concentration in the years 2018 and 2019.

In a first step, the analysis focused on the use of hashtags which, for the purpose of this study, represents a semantic classifier of content IG users themselves choose. While there might be exceptions to the rule, it is safe to assume that in most cases the hashtags used to describe a post actually describe the content of the picture or video uploaded, whether literally or symbolically. As also shown in Figure 1, Instagram users often use several hashtags to qualify each post. This permits to carry out the so-called analysis of co-occurrences, i.e., of the hashtags which are most frequently employed together with a focal hashtag. In the specialised language of network analysis, the hashtags are called nodes, and if they are in mutual relation because of a joint use in an IG post, it is said that there is a link between them. With the help of a software, we created a matrix of co-occurrences that was visualised through the so-called hashtag networks for each of focal hashtags selected for our analysis (see Figure 2). In the following analysis (in this section and in the rest of this document), we refer to hashtags that are not visualised in the Figures because of more limited number of occurrences.
Figure 2 – #valledaosta: Hashtag network

Source: Our elaborations.

Overall, our sample of posts on #valledaosta (N=20,000) is at the centre of a dense network of co-occurring hashtags, most of which co-occur however less than 10 times, meaning that IG users associate them to the central hashtag only rarely. Snow, mountains, natural beauty, skiing and other winter activities dominate the #valledaosta network of hashtags. The most frequently co-used hashtags (1,000 or more co-occurrences) include: #snow, #mountains, #montagna, #neve, #winter, #nature, #ski, #mountain, #landscape, #alpi, #alps, #ski. The most frequently co-occurring destinations (>500 occurrences) include: Aosta, Courmayeur, Montebianco/Montblanc, Cervinia, Pila, La Thuile, Cogne, Champoluc, Gressoney, and the Val Tournenche.

Overall, in Figure 2 nature prevails over culture. Hashtags related to the Aosta Valley’s tangible and intangible heritage are only infrequently associated to #valledaosta. For examples, the hashtag #castles counts only 277 co-occurrences. Well-known attractions like the Fort of Bard and the Castle
of Fenis rank far below ski resorts (e.g., #bard, 286 co-occurrences; #castellodifenis, 89). The most recurring feature of the Valley’s built cultural heritage are mountain shelters and chalets, which however recur only rarely in the hashtag network (#rifugio, 88; #chalet, 84; #baita, 81); other posts highlight instead building materials typical of the Valley, such as wood and stone. The well-attended Sant’Orso craft fair has similar limited visibility (#santorso2018, 260 associated posts; #fieradisantorso, 217; #santorso, 59; #foiredesaintours, 56); so are carnival festivals (#carnevale, 80; #carnival, 44). The Aosta Valley craft traditions is referred to with numerous hashtags which are similarly infrequent and marginal (#artigianato, 152; #scultura, 48; #artigianatovaldostano, 48; #woodworking, 34; #fattoamano, 26; #woodcarving, 19; woodcarver, 18). Emic terms related to cultural heritage are very infrequent (#tradition, 53; tradizioni, 46; tradizione, 45; #traditional, 34; #cultur, 33; #culture, 29; #prodottitipici, 21; #beniculturali, 11; #conservareletradizioni, 8; #culturalheritage, 7).

Food-related hashtags, too, are not frequently or centrally associated to #valledaosta. A first group of hashtags generically refers to food, foodporn, or food blogging (e.g, #food, 340 co-occurrences; #foodporn, 268; #instafood, 169; #foodblogger, 144; #foodie, 97; #foodgasm, 94; #foodpic, 85; #cibo, 69; #foodlove, 52). Other hashtags refer to the meals of the day (e.g., #dinner, 80 #lunch, 62; #breakfast, 62; #cena, 60; #aperitivo, 42). Among those referring to specific foods and drinks, the most recurring hashtags are wine-related (#wine, 221; #vino, 120; #winelover, 120; winetasting, 80; #sommelier, 58; #instawine, 50; #winelovers, 48; #italianwine, 43; #redwine, 42; #whitewine, 33; #winetime, 33). In sum, most of these hashtags are quite generic and do not refer to the Aosta Valley’s rich food heritage.

There are however some exceptions to this rule – albeit very marginal. Few posts also use the tags #piattitipici (7 times) or #cucinavaldostana (9 times). Among wines, the fumin – made with the eponymous autochthonous grape variety is associated to #valledaosta 31 times (but #beer, 53; and #champagne, 30). The most recurring traditional foods and recipes include #fontina (85 times, also present with the hashtags #fontinacheese, 7 times, and #fontinadop, 9, #fontinavaldostana, 3; #fontinadalpage, 1); #polenta (66; but also #polentaconcia, 16); #fonduta, 41; #genePY, 41; #miele, 18; #lardo, 17 (also, lardodiarnad, 11). Even less frequent are co-occurring hashtags referred to the Valley’s productive landscapes: high-mountain pastures (#alpeggio, 14) and vineyards and winemaking, qualified as by some users as heroic because of the difficulties of montain agriculture (#vineyard, 6; wineyard, 6 [sic]; viticolturaeroica, 7).

The overall picture does not change much for the networks of hashtags computed for #aostavalley and #volgovalledaosta (see Figure 3 and 4). In the case of the former, references to food and food heritage are even less frequent and more marginal. Fewer traditional foods and recipes are mentioned. Contrary to expectations, not even IG users posting on #volgovalledaosta pay much attention to food and its heritage. Their posts reveal an even greater engagement with natural landscapes and local flora and, particularly, fauna, which is the object of a large number of hashtags. ‘Foodporn’ is arguably not an appropriate content for this more refined and photography-oriented group of users.
To confirm these research findings, we manually coded the visual and textual content of a small randomly selected sample of posts on the three hashtags #valledaosta (N=500), #aostavalley (N=350), and #volgovalledaosta (N=600). Codes were decided through an iterative process, to reflect typical content posted on these hashtags. Some of the codes were associated to ICH-relevant content, including heritage products, consumption rituals, productive landscapes, cultural events and rituals, and traditional knowledge. Others were consistent with the content associated to a tourist destination, and included natural landscapes, architecture, food, sport, nature, selfies, and others (a residual category for heterogeneous and difficult to categorise content, were other categories were not applicable).
Results from this content analysis for #valledaosta are reported in Figure 5 (results for #aostavalley and #volgovalledaosta are very similar; we omitted them for brevity’s sake). The picture that emerges is that the Aosta Valley’s image on IG is visually driven by natural landscapes (41%) and sport activities (13%, mostly ski), coherently with the image diffused by tourism promotion agencies, operators, and the few influencers who dominate the online conversation. ICH-consistent content is much more limited, representing only 6% of the overall content in the sample. Finally, foodporn represent a marginal typology of content on #valledaosta (approximately 1%). These research findings are overall coherent with those emerging from the hashtag network analysis: when posting pictures and videos on #valledaosta, IG users do not think primarily to the region’s rich cultural heritage or food traditions. This does not however mean that cultural heritage or food is not posted on IG, as the other hashtags we examined show.
2.2 Heritage Products (1): The case of Fontina cheese PDO

Fontina is the Aosta Valley’s most known cheese. It is produced with raw and unskimmed cow milk from red spotted and black spotted Valdostana breeds, processed as quickly as possible after the milking. It is ripened in cool, damp natural caves for at least three months. It is consumed as a table cheese, and as ingredient for traditional dishes such as fondue or polenta. Its production is linked to the age-old Alpine transhumance practice – the seasonal droving of cattle between the valleys during the winter and the high mountain pastures (alps, or alpeggi in Italian) during the summer. Already in 1955 Fontina benefitted from a protected geographical indication, the Controlled Denomination of Origin under the Italian law, which paved the way for the Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO, or DOP in Italian) in 2005 under the EU rules. Fontina is now produced all year long in lowland dairies but during the summer high-pasture Fontina (Fontina d’alpeggio) is also produced in one of the Aosta Valley’s 200 alps. Every year, a product contest – the Modon D’Or – recognized the best high-pasture Fontina. Based on these considerations, we selected five different Fontina-related hashtags. The generic hashtag #fontina, also used by non-Italian speaking IG users, is the one with the greater number of posts on Instagram (N > 49,000 on June 30, 2019); the other hashtags are less popular (#fontinacheese, 4,900 posts; #fontinavaldostana, 535 posts; #fontinadop, 665 posts; #fontinadalpeggio, 256 posts) but were included in the sample for their possible more heritage-consistent content.

Figure 6 reports the hashtag network for #fontina, computed on a sample of about 2,000 posts. The hashtag is at the centre of a dense network of other hashtags, the vast majority of which (72%) are only co-occurring one time. Many of the most frequently co-occurring hashtags are generically about food, foodporn and food blogging (e.g., #foodporn, #food, #instafood, #foodie, #foodblogger, #foodphotography). In terms of geographical origin, Fontina is associated not only to the Aosta Valley (#valledaosta, #aosta, #aostavalley, #vda, and many others) but also to Italy more in general through a multitude of hashtags (#italianfood, #italy, #italian, #italia, #cucinaitaliana, #madeinitaly, #ciboiitaliano, #bontaitaliane, #italiancheese, #piattiitaliani, #italiancooking, #italiansdoitbetter, etc.). In terms of evaluation, Fontina is #goodfood eaten with #love, as it is #yummy, #delicious, and #tasty; it can even provoke a #foodgasm. Some IG users highlight that this cheese is also #healthy (e.g.,
(healthyfood, healthyeating) and also adapted to people with dietary restrictions (#vegetarian, #glutenfree). In terms of occasions of use, #fontina can be eaten both during #dinner (#cena), #lunch (#pranzo), and – less frequently – #brunch and #breakfast. As an ingredient, it can be used for many recipes, both traditional and innovative; the first in terms of co-occurrences is #pizza, followed by #pasta, #polenta, a #sandwich/#panino, #risotto, #fonduta/#fondue, #gnocchi, #hamburger, #frittata, #salad, #tortasalata, and many others. The hashtag is also frequently co-occurring with various other types of cheese, including #mozzarella, #parmesan/#parmigiano/#parmigianoreggiano, #gorgonzola, #asiago, #ricotta, #guyere, #gouda, #brie, and #provolone. The most quoted accompanying ingredients are #prosciutto/#prosciuttootto, #speck, #mushrooms/#funghi, #bacon/pancetta, #patate, #spinach, #tomato, #asparagus/#asparagi, #bread/#pane, #garlic, #eggs, #salami, #basil, and #truffle.

Figure 6 – #fontina: Hashtag network

Source: Our elaborations.

Fontina thus proves to be a very versatile cheese that can be consumed with many ingredients in ever varying manners, lending itself to a variety of foodporn pictures. The link between the product Fontina and the material conditions of (and the know-how behind) its production is however almost absent from the content posted on IG. Very few users among those who post on #fontina also use
#dop, #fontinadop or #fontinadalpeggio. Even less are those who highlight that those prepared with fontina is a #typical or #traditional cheese that is made with #rawmilk. Even #cows are almost absent from the #fontina hashtag network.

To sum up, fontina’s cultural heritage does not show much in the hashtags IG users employ to categorise their content. Fontina producers (breeders, cheesemakers) are not present in the hashtag network. IG users treat Fontina like an undifferentiated product: there’s very limited awareness that this cheese comes in different varieties (lowland, alp) and that there might be taste differences between those made by different producers. If we take for example the case of Champagne, the hashtag network would also feature prominently the different brand names of individual Champagne producers, such as Moet & Chandon, Veuve Cliquot, Mumm, Pommery, and others – all of whom allocate significant investments to their promotion on online media. In the case of Fontina, this does not occur. The picture emerging from #fontina does not change much for the hashtags #fontinacheese and #fontinavalostana. There are some differing details (for example, in #fontinacheese, co-occurring hashtags are more often in English and some of the accompanying ingredients are more exotic), but there is not much more to highlight in the context of the present study. For brevity’s sake, we do not report the related hashtag graphs and concentrate instead on #fontinadop and #fontinadalpeggio which attract posts that, to some extent, are more heritage-sensitive (see Figure 7).
In the case of #fontinadop (see the left side of Figure 7), not only – as it should be expected – co-occurring hashtags emphasise the fact that Fontina benefits from a geographical indication (#dop, #prodottodop, #onlydop, #valledaostadop), but more in general it is more prominently associated to Aosta Valley than to Italy as a regional traditional/typical cheese. A surprising deviation from this trend is the not so negligible presence of some hashtags referring to Naples (#napoli, #napolitavala, #napolidamangiare and others), possibly in connection to pizza-related content (#pizzanapoletana, #verapizzana). More central is the link to the Fontina contest Modon d’Or (#modondor, #concorsofontina), which rewards Fontina produced in high-mountain pastures only. This partially motivates the more central presence of #fontinadalpeggio (but also, in French, #fontinadalpage) and, less frequently, #alpeggio/#alpage/#pascolo. In one rare instance, an Instagram user tagged a specific pasture (#alpeggorza). This greater prominence is possibly due to the fact that high-mountain dairy shelters in the Aosta Valley all showcase a plate qualifying them as production sites for PDO Fontina. This might encourage some tourists visiting them to use the #fontinadop in lieu of the generic #fontina.

These same elements (including the surprise Neapolitan pizza connection) recur with little variation in the hashtag network of #fontinadalpeggio (see the right side of Figure 7). Geographical indication-related posts are still present but slightly less prominent in the graph, whereas high-mountain pasture-related posts are more frequent and central, as is the Fontina contest. For both these hashtags, other heritage-sensitive hashtags (too few and peripheral to be shown in the Figures) highlight the material conditions of Fontina production, including the fact that it is made with raw milk and subject to aging before it can be consumed. If cows are sometimes tagged in reference to Fontina (#mucche, #mucchealpascolo, #vacche), still absent are the people who take care of the herds and produce this heritage cheese (the only reference is the hashtag #produttorifontina, only recurring once in the sample).

We conclude this analysis of the five Fontina-related hashtag networks in our sample by noting that in all cases, the language used to refer to cultural heritage by IG user is that of typicality and tradition.
#typicalfood, #typical; #cucinatraditionale, #tradizioni, #tradition, #traditions, #tradizioniculturale, #cibotradizionale) are however not as frequent or central in their respective networks. Overall, the insights generated by the hashtag network analysis were confirmed by our qualitative content analysis of visual and textual content for a small random sample of posts on fontina-related hashtags. As shown in Figure 8, #fontina (sample: 500 posts) and #fontinacheese (N=220 posts) report predominantly food/foodporn content (>70% of the posts in the sample in most cases), whereas ICH-consistent content is limited.

![Figure 8 – Content of posts on #fontina and #fontinacheese (%)](image)

**Source:** Our elaborations.

Also these hashtags contain posts that make reference to the link between the grass cows graze in a pasture during the summer and the rich flavour of the alp Fontina produced there, but these are rare than those found on #fontinavalostana (sample size: 80), #fontinadop (N=70) and #fontinalpeggio (N=50) which, as anticipated, are used by IG users who post more heritage-sensitive content (see Figure 9). In particular, content on #fontinadop contains many pictures of wheels or half-wheels of Fontina which highlight its PDO logo, as well as aging cheeses in ripening cellars; more rarely, pictures of cheese-makers and the experts at work during the Modon d’Or Fontina contexts. The hashtag #fontinalpeggio contains more pictures of productive landscapes and traditional knowledge. The subjects are cows depicted over beautiful mountain scenery or being milked; the cheese itself being made; the wheels aging in cellars; and a few breeders and cheese-makers.

![Figure 9 – Content of posts on #fontinavalostana, #fontinadop, and #fontinalpeggio (%)](image)
2.3 Heritage Products (2): The case of Arnad Lard

Arnad lard is a traditional cured pork product made with pieces of fatback in a brine aromatised with juniper, bay, nutmeg, sage and rosemary. Granted PDO status by the EU in 1996, product specifications require that production take place in Arnad, a small municipality in the lower Aosta Valley with fatback from pigs raised in the Aosta Valley and nearby Italian Regions (Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, and Emilia Romagna). Three certified PDO lard producers (Maison Bertolin, Arnad Le Vieux, and F.lli Laurent snc) coexist with small artisanal producers who adopt family recipes. Promotion of the Arnad Lard is carried out by the local association Lo Doil (in patois, doil is the traditional wooden container used to prepare lard), that for almost 50 years has organised the annual Lard Festival (Fêthà dou Lar). In Italy, there is another lard product protected by a geographical indication: the Colonnata Lard, named after the eponymous city in Tuscany, which is protected by a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI, or IGP in Italian). PDOs have a stronger link to the territory of origin, requiring that all aspects of production, processing and preparation are local. PGIs are granted based on local know-how and a close link between a product and the local area, but do not require that all stages of production, processing or preparation take place in the area. The PGI Colonnata Lard, which has much higher production volumes than its Arnad PDO counterpart, dominates the general #lardo hashtag (see Figure 10). Despite the presence of various hashtags linked to the Arnad Lard (#arnad, #lardodiarnard, #larddarnad, etc.), these are used in fewer posts that are less centrally positioned in the network.

Source: Our elaborations.

Figure 10 – #lardo: Hashtag network
Source: Our elaborations.

On IG, the frequencies of lard-related posts are in IG (as of June 30th, 2019) are as follows: #lardo, >53,000 posts; #lardodicollonata, 8,696 posts; #lardodicollonataigp, 156 posts; #lardodiarnad, 682 posts; #lardodarnad, 258 posts; #lardodarnaddop, 16 posts; #lardodiarnaddop, 14 posts). The Colonnata Lard totalises more than 10 times the number of posts on IG than the Arnad Lard. Awareness of the fact that these two products benefit from geographical indications is limited in both cases, but higher in the case of Colonnata Lard. These findings confirm that the Colonnata Lard is more prominently associated by IG users to the product category lard. The reasons for this might refer to a greater market share and consumer awareness, but also to a larger digital marketing investments.
Let’s now turn to examine the hashtag network of #lardodiarnad (Figure 11), built on a sample of approximately 400 posts (mostly referring to 2018 and 2019).

**Figure 11 – #lardodiarnad: Hashtag network**

![Hashtag network diagram](image)

*Source: Our elaborations.*

Having in mind the results of #fontina, the picture emerging for #lardodiarnad are hardly surprising. The most central and frequent co-occurring posts refer to its geographical origin (#valledaosta/#aostavalley, #arnad, #italy, #madeinitaly), its product category (#lard and, more in general, cured meats, or #salumi in Italian), and the fact that it is #foodporn. Some of the hashtags in the network refer to specific localities and attraction in the Aosta Valley, such as #fortedibard.

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1 For brevity’s sake, we do not report the analysis of the hashtag network of #lardodarnad, which totalises fewer posts and has very similar results. The #lardodarnaddop and #lardodarnaddop, which have less than 20 posts each, were omitted from the analysis for their limited significance. Please also note that analyses on Arnad Lard were carried out in a follow-up phase of the Aosta Valley study, and we did not code visual and textual content.
#montebianco, #cervinia, #courmayeur, #aosta, and #gressoney. The most prominent occasion of use on IG is #aperitivo, followed by #dinner/#cena and #lunch/#pranzo. As appetizer, lard is often used with other cured meats (#salumi in Italian) such as #mocetta (also spelled #motzetta) and hams (#prosciuttocrudo, #prosciutto, #jambondebosses); with cheeses (above all, #fontina); and tasted with chestnuts, walnuts, and honey (#castagne, #noci, and #miele), accompanied of course by rye bread (#panenero) and #wine or #prosecco. The most frequently co-occurring dish is #pizza (sometimes, a gourmet one, #pizzagourmet), followed by #risotto, #polentaconcia, #fonduta, #pasta, #hamburger, and #crostini. IG users sometimes consider Arnad lard a traditional or typical food product (e.g., #tradition, #tradizioni, #tradizione; #cucinatradizionale; #prodottitipici; #tipico).

Respect to #fontina, however, three main differences are worth mentioning. First, the graph prominently shows one (and only one) certified PDO producer, Maison Bertolin (#MaisonBertolin, #Bertolin). Maison Bertolin indeed has an official IG account (https://www.instagram.com/maison.bertolin/) with 94 posts and more than 2,000 followers, which contributes to the centrality of its presence. In the more general hashtag #lardo, however, Maison Bertolin has a much more marginal position, with very few posts. Taken together, this means that this brand is strongly associated to Arnard Lard but not to the product category lard, which as we highlighted above is dominated by producers from Colonnata. Second, #lardodiarnad contains some content from the Lard Festival of Arnad, under various hashtag including #festadellardo and, in the local patois, #fethadoular. The Festival has a limited digital presence on IG, but it contributes to generating posts on #lardodiarnad. Fontina does not benefit from a similar product-centred cultural initiative, which could generate more heritage-sensitive IG content. Finally, production methods are even more marginal than in the fontina hashtags, where at least some of the more heritage-sensitive IG users could make a link between the end product and pasturing cows. Tourists in the Aosta Valley do not have the chance to see free range pigs; and slaughterhouses are removed from public view and their images are not used in the context of lard promotion. The lard production process does not lend itself to be promoted on IG in the same way as cheese making is.

2.4 Alpine heritage events on IG: The cases of Desarpa and the Festa de lo Pan Ner

Festive events are an important part of Alpine culture. They are a way through which communities can stage their traditions and provide opportunities to tell stories, educate tastes, and showcase an area’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage (AlpFoodway, 2018). We analysed IG posts referring to two cultural events that play an important part in showcasing the Aosta Valley’s rich food heritage. One is the Désarpa (descent from the alp), linked to the transhumance tradition, which traditionally takes place on the 29th of September, on St. Michael’s day. The descent from high-mountain pastures is a traditional festive event taking place in different Alpine countries. Cows are typically decorated with flowers, ribbons, and large bells. At risk of disappearing, this festive event has been revitalised during the 1990s for its cultural significance and valorised as a tourist attraction. In the Aosta Valley, it takes place in a ritualised manner in various municipalities, most notably in Valtournenche (in the Matterhorn valley) and in Cogne in the Gran Paradiso Park area, where it is also called Devétéya. We focused our analysis on the main hashtag #desarpa, which attracts the larger number of posts (N=600 on June 30, 2019), as other hashtags are much smaller in size (e.g., #désarpa, 45; #desarpa2018, 36 posts).
As shown in Figure 12 (built on a sample of 400 posts), the desarpa in Valtournenche is the more frequently and more centrally co-occurring in the hashtag network. This might be due both to a greater attendance of the désarpa taking place here respect to the one in Cogne, and to the fact that the latter is also tagged as #deveteya. Co-occurring hashtags highlight several aspects of this heritage event, including its link to the #transumanza tradition (#transumanza) and the descent from the alps (#alpe, #alpeggi, #alpeggi; #pascolo; #mountainpasture; #vitadalpeggio) at the #endofseason/beginning of #autumn. Other IG users highlight the festive nature of the Désarpa (#festa. #festadipaese; #giornatadifesta; #paeseinfesta, #folkfestival) and the joy and excitement brought by live music and marching bands (#musicadalvivo #banda). The core of the event consists in the #cowparade, and #cows (#mucche, #cow, #mucca, #vanches, #vache #bovini, #vache, #vacca, #mucchevaldostane, #vivovalledaosta #transumanza #cow #mountain #alps #italy #valledaosta #mountains #mucche #desarpa2017 #transumanza #valtournenche #valledaosta #mucche #desarpa2015 #valtournenche #valledaosta #mucche2015 #cogne #valleddaosta #autunno #volgvalledaosta #vda #ig_valdaosta #igersitalia #igersvalledaosta #viva #vivvalledaosta #tradizione #desarpa #alpi #alps #tradizioni #valledaosta #aostavale #cows #cows #italia #tradizioni #Valtournenche #alpi #cows #vives #tradizione #transumanza #valledaosta #cogne #autunno #vivevaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta #igersitalia #igersvaldaosta 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#muccacarolina, #bellemuccone, #muccheinposa, #bovine, #milkcow), admired for their traditional cowbells (#campanacci, #campanaccio, #sonnailles) and for their floral decorations (#flowers, #fiori), are the most photographed element of the event. Leading the parade are the horn and milk’s queen, the cows that during the summer stood out for their fighting spirit or for producing the highest quantity of milk, which are tagged in multiple manners (#reines, #reina, #regina, #regine, #reinedesvaches, #reinadoulace, #reinadellatte, #reinadellecorna, #reinadicorna). Also the #bosquet, the flower wreath hanging to the queens’ neck (red for the horn queen and white for the milk queen), is featured in various posts. Beyond the cows and their queens, #desarpa is used also for content related to a variety of other domestic animals, including goats, sheeps, dogs, horses and donkeys. Less central but still present in the #desarpa content are the people in the parade (representatives of the local associations and the cow owners with their families), often noted for their #traditionaldress (#costume, #costumi).

Despite the fact that, ironically, quite a few hashtags refer to a notion of #nature, of all the Aosta Valley hashtag networks so far examined this is the one where cultural heritage-related terms are more central and prominent. The notions IG users employ the most is tradition (#tradizione, #tradizioni, #tradition, #tradizionipopolari, #tradizionivaldostane, #tradizionivda), but also folklore (#folklore, #folcloro, #folkloristic), customs (#usiecostumi), and popular culture (#culturapopolare). Still, #fontina is a very marginal node in the #desarpa network, as if IG users found it hard to associate the spectacle of the herd’s descent from the pastures to the Aosta Valley cheesemaking tradition.

The Festa de lo Pan Ner (Black Bread Festival) is a recent initiative that aims to promote the Alpine rye bread baking traditions. Conceived in 2015 by the Autonomous Region Aosta Valley (from now own, the Region), since 2016 the initiative has spread to other areas, including Lombardy (Valtellina and Valcamonica), Piedmont (Antrona Valley), Switzerland (Poschiavo Valley), France (Natural Regional Park of the Bauges Massif), and Slovenia (Upper Gorenjska). In all the involved areas, during the days of the Festa, traditional ovens are simultaneous lighted. In the Aosta Valley, the Region coordinates the initiative, manages the festival web site, designs a common visual identity for the event, produces and distributes event signage, and provides participating communities with rye flour for baking. Involved communities provide volunteer work and, within the general framework of the festival, design and implement educational activities for children and adults, tasting experiences, guided tours and conferences, visits to ovens and mills, etc. Community involvement and effort vary based on size, available infrastructures, local enthusiasm, and other circumstances. This event is non-commercial and was designed with the goal of safeguarding rye bread-related ICH and promoting inter-generational knowledge transfer. The main hashtag for this event is #lopanner (N=373 posts on June 30th, 2019); other relevant hashtags (#lopanner2018, #lopanner2017) were omitted from the analysis for their limited number of posts.

Figure 13 shows the hashtag network built for #lopanner (sample size: 200 posts). The most frequently co-occurring hashtags refer, as one might expect, to rye bread (#pane, #panenero, #segale, #bread, etc.) and to the festive nature of the event (#festa). Geographically, the image of the Aosta Valley prevails (#valledaosta, #aostavalley, #vda, etc.), given the large number of participating communities, the regional-level scope of the event, and the central coordination by the Region. Most of the fifty-one communities taking part in the Festival are not directly present in the #lopanner network with a dedicated hashtag; those more visible are Saint-Marcel and Valtournenche. Outside of the Aosta Valley, the areas more visible are #valtellina and #valcamonica, with the municipalities of #teglio and #cerveno. The Antrona and Poschiavo Valleys are mentioned less frequently. Non-
Italian speaking adhering communities (Parc des Bauges and Upper Gorenjska) do not use the hashtag #lopanner. Notable in this hashtag network is also an organised presence of #foodbloggers, thanks to a collaboration between the Region and the #aifb (Association of Italian Food Bloggers) to promote the Aosta Valley’s rye bread heritage. Focus on the process of breadmaking result in a less central presence of the (still present) hashtag #foodporn.

**Figure 13 – #lopanner: Hashtag network**

Various hashtags in this network focus on ovens and the fact that during the Festa they are lit (#forno, #forni, #forniaccesi, #ilforno). Also on the limelight are the ingredients and process of homemaking bread (#farina, #farinadisegale, #lievitomadre; #panificazione; #handmade; #panefattoincasa), which is considered by some IG users as healthier and tastier (#salute, #stiledivitasano, #mangiaresano, #mangiaresanoecongusto, #mangiaresanoebene). Like in the case of #desarpa, also users who post on...
22

The Désarpa marks not only the beginning of autumn, but also the end of the summer tourist season, and seems appreciated both by both residents and tourists alike. The Festa de lo Pan Ner is a community-oriented event which has so far not been planned in the context of a tourist attraction strategy. Both have a remarkable non-commercial character: in the case of Désarpa, the link between the cattle breeding tradition of the Aosta Valley and its most iconic product, Fontina, is not highlighted. In the case of Lo Pan Ner, the Festival does not aim to promote a specific product (traditional bread in the Aosta Valley is not protected by a geographical indication, as it is for example the case of the Canton of Valais PDO rye bread). Results of our qualitative coding of selected posts on these two hashtags (sample size: 70 and 100, respectively) show, unsurprisingly, that a vast majority of content (70-75%) is heritage-consistent. Posts in both cases mostly refer to the ritualistic element of ICH (the cow parade in one case, the breadmaking ritual on the other), but the two cultural festivals highlight different elements of the Aosta Valley’s ICH. Traditional know-how is much more prevalent in the case of #lopanner (the lighting of ovens, the skills needed to knead the dough, etc.), whereas productive landscapes (high-mountain pastures) are on the limelight in #desarpa.

2.5 Consumer Reviews of Restaurants on TripAdvisor

With the help of automated content analysis procedures, we extended our analysis of the Aosta Valley food heritage to TripAdvisor (TA) restaurant reviews with the goal to understand the emic language restaurant goers use to talk about Alpine food, and the ingredients and dishes most frequently employed. Our sample contains 21,162 reviews of 121 restaurants from 6 municipalities in the Aosta Valley (Valtournenche, La Thuile, Champoluc, Châtillon, Morgex, and Nus; see Figure 14). These reviews refer to the period from 2011 to February 2019 (see Figure 15 for their temporal distribution). Our sample does not include restaurants which are not relevant for our research goals (e.g., Japanese, Chinese or other ethnic restaurants). Information on place of residence is not available for all reviewers, but the sample contains both Aosta Valley residents and tourists. An important methodological step in automated content analysis methodologies is the development of a dictionary that identify words that correspond to the construct of interest (Humphreys and Wang, 2018), which in our case is the Aosta Valley’s food related Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). We used as a methodological benchmark an authenticity dictionary developed by Kovacs, Carroll and Lehman (2013), who content analysed a sample of TA reviews of US restaurants. Given the difference of language and context, however, these authors’ dictionary proved of limited utility. We thus developed a context-specific dictionary based on a qualitative content analysis of a limited sample of 1,000 reviews, based on which we identified keywords that translate the etic notion of food-related ICH
into emic terms. During this first step, we also realised that judgement on traditionality/typicality also often refer to the restaurant atmosphere and interior design, and accordingly we included related terms in our dictionary. Finally, we included terms referring to ingredients and dishes related to the Aosta Valley’s food heritage.

**Figure 14 – Analysed TripAdvisor Reviews: Distribution by municipality**

![Bar chart showing distribution of TripAdvisor reviews by municipality.]

*Source: Our elaborations.*

**Figure 15 – Analysed TripAdvisor Reviews: Temporal Distribution**

![Bar chart showing temporal distribution of TripAdvisor reviews.]

*Source: Our elaborations.*
Table 1 report our dictionary for ICH-related terms, spelling variants, and their frequency in the review sample. Some relevant keywords had to be omitted from the analysis because of their dual meanings. For example, in Italian the word locale as an adjective can refer to local cuisine or traditions, but as a noun can be used as a synonymous for restaurant, resulting in a very large number of irrelevant results. Other keywords present this problem in a more limited manner and were for this reason retained in the analysis. Despite these limits, research findings provide a first view on how consumers make sense of the food heritage of the Aosta Valley.

Table 1 – TripAdvisor Reviews: Frequency of food heritage-related terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Terms and spelling variants (in Italian)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>... heritage-related</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>Tipico, tipica, tipici, tipiche, tipicità</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Tradizionale, tradizionali, tradizionalità, tradizione, tradizioni</td>
<td>1,218</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Semplice, semplici, semplicità</td>
<td>1,205</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>Caratteristico, Caratteristici, Caratteristica, Caratteristiche, caratteristicità</td>
<td>1,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh ingredients</td>
<td>Fresco, fresca, fresche, freschi, freschezza</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rustic</td>
<td>Rustico, rustica, rustiche, rustici</td>
<td>397</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classic</td>
<td>Classico, classica, classiche, classici, classicità</td>
<td>385</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genuine</td>
<td>Genuino, genuina, genuini, genuine, genuinità</td>
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<td>Casalingo (homemade)</td>
<td>Casalingo, casalinga, casalinghi, casalinghe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Storico, storica</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic</td>
<td>Autentico, Autentici, Autentiche, Autentica, Autenticità</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casereccio (homemade)</td>
<td>Casereccio, casereccia, caserecci, caserecce</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autoctonous</td>
<td>Autoctono, autoctona, autoctoni, autoctone</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>... denoting a distancing from heritage</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ricercata (sophisticated)</td>
<td>Ricercato, ricercata, ricercati, ricercate, ricercatezza</td>
<td>560</td>
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<td>Refined</td>
<td>Raffinato, raffinata, raffinati, raffinante, raffinatezza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>Originalità, originali, originale</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>Innovazione, innovazioni, innovativo, innovativa, innovative, innovativi, rinnovato, rinnovata, rinnovati, rinnovate</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Our elaborations.

Similar to what happens to Instagram users, TA reviewers make ample use of notions of typicality and traditionality when categorising restaurants, their cuisine, and/or individual dishes. Other terms employed, some of which are hardly translatable in English without losing some nuances, are simple, characteristic, rustic, classic, genuine, homemade (casalingo, casereccio), historical, authentic, and autoctonous. Most of the time, these terms have a positive valence, but they can also be used in sentences lamenting the lack of a desirable quality (e.g., “it’s not a traditional restaurant” or “if you look for simple dishes, this restaurant is not for you”). Notions of tradition and innovation sometimes oppose each other: in some cases, the menu is said to contain a mix of traditional and innovative dishes; in others, a recipe is said to have been revisited with new ingredients or a more refined
presentation; sometimes, the entire menu is qualified as more refined (*ricercato, raffinato*) respect to the traditional cuisine of the Aosta Valley. The traditionality or typicality of the restaurant’s cuisine is contextualised in various manners. As show in Table 2, TA reviewers often qualify a restaurant’s cuisine as typical of the Aosta Valley (e.g., *cucina tipica valdostana*) or regional (*cucina regionale*); in other cases, they note that clients can order not only regional cuisine, but also dishes that are typical of the Italian or national cuisine. The cuisine is also referred to as characteristic of mountains or, less frequently, of the Alps. Reviewers also note if clients (sometimes, ingredients) are from nearby (*della zona, del posto*) or rather if a restaurant is mostly patronized by tourists. Only in rare instances they referred to a restaurant as a tourist trap.

**Table 2 – TripAdvisor Reviews: Frequency of heritage contextualisation terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Terms and spelling variants (in Italian)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... referring to the local context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical of Aosta Valley</td>
<td>Valdostano, Valdostana, Valdostane,</td>
<td>4,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valdostani, Valle, Vallé, Aosta, Aoste,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical of Mountains</td>
<td>Montagna, Montagne, Montanaro,</td>
<td>1,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montanara, Montanari, Montanare,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montagnard, Montano, Montana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpine</td>
<td>Alpi, alpino, alpina, alpini, alpine,</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional cuisine</td>
<td>Regione, Regionale, regionali,</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regionalità</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients and ingredients from nearby</td>
<td>Della zona, del posto</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... referring to a non-local context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian cuisine</td>
<td>Italiano, Italiani, Italiane, Italiana,</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National cuisine</td>
<td>Nazionale, nazionali</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients are tourists</td>
<td>Turisti, turista, turistico</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Trap</td>
<td>Trappola</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Our elaborations.*

Some of the terms in Table 1 and 2 can refer both to the restaurant cuisine and its overall atmosphere, based on architectural and interior design elements. For example, ‘rustic’ can refer to both the menu and the restaurant’s furniture and furnishings. TA reviewers also often employ terms referring to heritage architecture and interior design terms, reported in Table 3. Reviews often highlight the fact that the restaurant is hosted inside a chalet or that it is furnished as if were a chalet or an Alpine shelter. Construction materials, such as wood and stone, are often mentioned. Other architectural elements, such as chimneys and (less frequently) wooden beams are noted to convey a sense of warmth.

As a final step, we identified the most frequently mentioned ingredients and dishes among those that are part of the Aosta Valley’s food heritage (see Table 4). We omitted from the list pizza (well-represented in our sample, given the large number of pizza restaurants) and those dishes and ingredients from the non-local cuisine offered by some upscale restaurants (salt water fish and seafood, foie gras, etc.). Among dishes, the most frequently mentioned are polenta (often with melted cheese, or polenta *concia*) and fondue, as well as platters of cured meats (lard, mocetta, boudin) and cheeses (fontina, Blue d’Aoste) served on wooden cutting boards (*taglieri*). Among the traditional alcoholic drinks of the region, the most frequently mentioned is *génépy*, a traditional herbal liqueur. Some also mention the grolla, a wooden cup used to drink *caffe alla Valdostana* in a ritualized manner, passing it from hand to hand and never putting it down until it is empty.
Table 3 – TripAdvisor Reviews:  
Frequency of heritage architecture and interior design terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Terms and spelling variants (in Italian)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... referring to restaurant type or furniture/furnishings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baita (chalet)</td>
<td>Baita, baite</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalet</td>
<td>Chalet</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain shelter</td>
<td>Rifugio, rifugi</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... referring to materials or architectural elements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Legno, legni</td>
<td>809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone</td>
<td>Pietra, pietre</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimney</td>
<td>Camino, camini</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(wooden) beams</td>
<td>Trave, travi</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Our elaborations.

Table 4 – TripAdvisor Reviews:  
Frequency of heritage dishes and ingredients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>... referring to dishes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polenta</td>
<td>2,483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagliere (wooden cutting board)</td>
<td>1,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fondue</td>
<td>1,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Polenta) Concia</td>
<td>755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonade</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierrade</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grolla</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civet</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... referring to ingredients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lard</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fontina</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chestnuts</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mocetta</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue d’Aoste cheese</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Génépy</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberries</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamois</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckwheat</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boudin</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Our elaborations.
Taken as a whole, these research findings suggest that restaurant goers use a nuanced terminology to refer to the Aosta Valley food heritage. Tangible elements of such heritage, such as ingredients and dishes, are made sense of with the more abstract categories of (mostly) typicality and traditionality, and contextualised as instances of local, regional, or mountain cuisine. This does not occur in all reviews: for example, terms referring to typicality only occur 3,072 times in our sample of 21,162 reviews. Most reviews focus on other aspects, such as value-for-money, the rapidity of service or the courtesy of staff. Our research design did not allow to test the impact of traditionality/typicality content on reviewer rating, which we speculate might depend on the restaurant type and various other factors. The restaurants in our sample propose the dishes and ingredients of the Aosta Valley food heritage in different manners, depending on their positioning, price level, and target market segments. Some revisit typical recipes or offer a mix of traditional and innovative dishes to offer their clients some variety; others adopt an upscale positioning with a more refined cuisine. These different approaches are overall consistent with the notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage, according to which ICH is constantly recreated by individuals, groups and communities and is at the same time traditional contemporary and alive.
3. Case study Raclette of Valais cheese PDO, Switzerland

The PDO Raclette of Valais is a semi-hard, smear-ripened cheese produced from raw milk. It is mainly consumed in melted form after a ripening of at least three months (a small part of the production is dry-ripened for at least nine months and is consumed in planed form). The term raclette also identifies the eponymous dish that is made with this melted cheese, which is scraped onto diners’ plates. The tradition of melting cheese by the fire or on hot embers is very ancient and diffused in many Alpine areas, but the term ‘raclette’ (from the verb racler, to scrape) with this specific meaning has entered the French language from the Canton of Valais. Today, the term is masculine when referring to the cheese (le raclette) and feminine when referring to the dish (la raclette). In Switzerland, the vast majority of raclette cheese is not protected by a geographical indication and is produced in other Cantons, often with more industrialised methods. Raclette of Valais obtained is PDO in 2007 after a previous attempt to register under the PDO scheme the term raclette without further geographical specifications, which was successfully legally opposed by the Swiss Raclette Association. Raclette is also produced outside of Switzerland, notably in France where, since 2017, producers from Savoie have been granted a Protected Geographical Indication for the Raclette de Savoie. Today, the collective organisation Interprofession Raclette du Valais AOP comprises 25 cooperative dairies, 51 high-mountain pasture (alpage) cheese-makers, and 5 ripening cellars.

On Instagram, raclette is at the centre of various hashtags, in different languages, which reflect the international diffusion and success of this dish and its different production sites (see Table 5). While some hashtags refer to the raclette cheese, the posted content is mostly about the dish. Veritable consumption ritual, raclette is typically eaten in group. Various hashtags underline the festive and convivial nature of communal meal around raclette, such as #racletteparty and #racletteotime (but also #raclettedinner and #raclettenight). Raclette is also an identity marker: some IG users refer to themselves as #teamraclette, #raclletelovers, #raclleteadicts, or even #jesuisracllet. The raclette consumption ritual implies the melting of cheese close to a source of heat, whether it is hot embers or an oven. In the Canton of Valais, raclette is traditionally consumed with a gas or an electric oven especially conceived to accomodate a half-wheel of cheese, but elsewhere the dominant consumption form is a grill with individual pans. Raclette equipment is frequently photographed and posted on IG (#raclletegrill, #raclletemachina, #appareilaraclette).

Only a minority of raclette posts use hashtags specifying a geographical origin: #raclletedvalais, #racllettesuis, #swissracllet. #raclleteduvalaisaop was instead excluded from the sample because of the very limited number of posts it attracts. The situation reminds that of the Arnad Lard producers, who are overshadowed on Instagram by their competitors from Colonnata. In this case, producers face the competition from other Swiss producers, who contribute with their marketing activities to an awareness of raclette as a national Swiss dish and not as a regional speciality of Valais. Additionally, many consumers (in France and elsewhere) believe that raclette is a French cheese and dish, and are unaware of their Swiss origin.

Our analysis focus on three hashtags: #racllettevalais, #racllettesuis, #swissracllet; #raclleteduvalaisaop was instead excluded from the sample because of the very limited number of posts it attracts. We collected the majority of posts on these three hashtags (respectively, 204, 559, and 642), for a total of 1,405 posts. Data was collected in May and June 2019. Most of the sample posts were made in 2018 and 2019, but some are of previous years (from 2012 onward).
Table 5 – Raclette: Frequency of main hashtags

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hashtags</th>
<th>Number of posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclette</td>
<td>472,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettecheese</td>
<td>19,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#laraclette</td>
<td>3,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettekäse</td>
<td>1,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#quejioraclette</td>
<td>2,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#fromageraclette</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumption occasion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#racletteparty</td>
<td>39,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettetime</td>
<td>10,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettenight</td>
<td>1,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettedinner</td>
<td>766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity marker</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#teamraclette</td>
<td>2,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#racletteforever</td>
<td>857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettelovers</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#jesuisraclette</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#racletteaddict</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation equipment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettegrill</td>
<td>1,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettemachine</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#apparelaraclette</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#swissraclette</td>
<td>1,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettesuisse</td>
<td>821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#frenchraclette</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#racletteduvalais</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#racletteusesavoie</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#raclettesavoyarde</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#racletteduvalaisaop</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Instagram search engine (30 June 2019).

Figure 16 reports the hashtag network built on #racletteduvalais. IG users posting on this hashtag often highlight – in a somewhat redundant manner – its geographical origin with hashtags such as #valais, #valaiswallis, #wallis, or even with the name of specific municipalities and areas such as #bagnes, #valdebagnes, #bruson (possibly the areas where consumption took place). Much rarer are co-occurring hashtags emphasising the fact that the Raclatte of Valais benefits from a geographical indication (#aop, #racletteaop, #raclatteduvalaisaop). Its Swissness is highlighted much more frequently, as shown by the frequency of the co-occurring hashtags #switzerland, #swisscheese, #raclettesuisse, #suisse, #swiss, #fromagesuisse, #formaggisvizzeri, #swissracllette. In many posts, the raclette is mentioned with many other Swiss cheeses, such as #vacherinfribourgeoisaop, #gruyèreaop, #appenzeller, #emmentaler, #sbrinz, #tetedemoine, and #etivaz. With the same logic, the Figure also shows some hashtags referred to another popular melting cheese Swiss dish, the fondue (#fondue, #fondueparty, #fonduemotiomotie). It is worth mentioning also the hashtag
#weareswissabroad, employed by Swiss expatriates when they organise a nostalgic #racletteparty abroad (#expat, #expatlife).

**Figure 16 – #raclettezuvalais: Hashtag network**

Source: Our elaborations.

On #raclettezuvalais, the number of posts showing raclette (as a dish) dominate over those, much more limited, showing raclette cheese. Other dishes are also present, but in rarer circumstances. Posted content also shows the electric ovens used to melt the half-wheel of raclette cheese, which is less frequent in the content on #raclettesuisse and #suisseraclette. More rarely, some users post pictures of cheese melting by the fire or on hot embers. The iconic act of scraping melted cheese onto a plate is another favourite content posted on this hashtag. Raclette is eaten with #wine (#vino,
#swisswine, #vinduvalais, #vinblanc, #sparkling, #nebbiolo, #beaujolaisnouveau) or more rarely with beer (#germanbeers, #beerfrombelgium). When grills with individual pans are used, posts show well-cut slices of cheese, often together with pickles (#cornichons), potatoes (#pommesdeterre), and cured meats (#charcuterie).

Places and occasions of consumption are multiple: meals with family or friends; at home, at the restaurant, or during events (#events, #eventplanner, #eventplanning, #swisseven, #eventprofs); in Switzerland and abroad. The hashtags employed underline the festive nature of eating raclette together, which turns a meal into a special occasion: #racletteparty, #gardenparty, even #weddingraclette. For some IG users, it is always #raclettetime, even if most consume it during their winter mountain holidays (#ski, #neige, #snow, #mountain, #mountains, #mountainlife). Despite this, some eat raclette also when the #sun shines in the summer (#summerparty). A rather flexible dish mostly for the evening meal (#raclettedinner, #raclettenight), but also for #lunch and the aperitif (#apero). Few co-occurring hashtags provide an evaluation of the raclette experience; #foodies, however, seem to like their raclette (#delicious, #gourmande, #yummy, #qualitycheese), which generate positive emotions (#happy, #love, #foodlove, #lovelife, #loveraclette, #instalove). Respect to the hashtag network of Fontina and the Arnad Lard, #foodporn is less prominent, but raclette can, too, generate a #foodgasm.

Only a minority of hashtags make reference to the supply chain behind the end product and its cultural heritage. As highlighted above, very few posts highlight the fact that the Raclette of Valais cheese benefits from a geographical indication (#aop, #racletteaop, #raclettedvalaisaop). Other posts emphasise the notions of terroir (#terroir, #produitsduterroir, #valaisterroir, #imageduterroir, #terroirsuisse), tradition (#tradition, #traditionalswissfood, #swisstradition, #foodtradition) and, more rarely, of authenticity (#authentique) and know-how (#savoirfaire). Overall, the link between the cheese and the milk used to make it is not very strong. There are IG users who post pictures of cows (#cow, #swisscows, #vache – even highlighting their breed, #herens) or high-mountain pastures (#alpage, #alpageducoeur, #alpages), but they are few in number and in marginal position in the hashtag network. Some posts in English note however that the Raclette of Valais cheese is made with raw milk (#rawmilkcheese, #rawmilkcheeseappreciation), whereas others highlight the ripening and aging procedures (#affinage, #affinageinthemountain). As in the case of Fontina, producers are almost absent, with one exception. Various hashtags are dedicated to Mr. Eddy Baillifard, the owner of the restaurant Raclett’House Chez Eddy in Bruson, who as ambassador for the PDO Raclette of Valais takes part in many cultural and promotional events (#eddybaillifard, #kingofraclette, #eddyleroidelaraclette).

Figures 17 and 18 show the hashtag networks for #raclettesuisse and #swissraclette, to which we turn for a comparison with #racletteduvalais. In both cases, the presence of #racletteduvalais and other hashtags underlining the origins of this cheese in the Canton of Valais is negligible. This research finding is hardly surprising if we remember that most consumers consider raclette as a Swiss national dish, rather than a speciality from the Canton of Valais, and that the majority of Swiss raclette cheese is produced outside of the Canton. To sum up, judging from these hashtag networks, if the Raclette of Valais is also Swiss, the Swiss Raclette is only marginally associated to the Canton of Valais. Posts referring to the raclette cheese supply chain, to its terroir, and to tradition are even more marginal than in #racletteduvalais. Those referring to high-mountain pastures (#alpage, etc.) are absent.

In the #raclettesuisse hashtag network (Figure 17), the degree of centrality of the hashtag #racletteparty, #foodporn, and #raclettetime is higher than in #racletteduvalais. The hashtag
#weareswissabroad is used very rarely, and #expat and #expatlife are absent. Two North American cities are present with many co-occurring hashtags (but in a peripheral position): Toronto (#toronto, #torontoeats, #torontoofoodie, #torontofood, #torontoofoodfestival, etc.) and New York (#raclettenyc, #nyc, #newyorkcity, etc.). One wonders what the motivations of IG users based in anglophone areas to use a hashtag in French might be – a signal of the authenticity of the raclette they consume or sell? A visual analysis of the posts in this hashtag network also reveals a remarkable presence of business operators: restaurants, but also producers of spices and raclette ovens and grills, and event organisers.

Figure 17 – #raclettesuisse: Hashtag network

Source: Our elaborations.

The hashtag #swissraclette (see Figure 18) is characterised by an even greater presence of foreign users who post in English. The greater number of posts and associated hashtags and the different
geographical origins of their authors result in a greater heterogeneity in contents. One of the most remarkable differences respect to #racletesuisse is the presence among consumption occasions of #breakfast (#americanbreakfastwithswissraclette, breakfastwithraclette); #christmas (#xmas, #christmasdinner, #christmastraditions, #familychristmas, #christmascheese) and #newyearseve; and of #champagne as accompanying drink. A greater number of cities, both Swiss and foreign, is present in the network: #zurich, #geneva, #berne, #basel, #adelaide, #melbourne, #berlin, #zagreb, #indianapolis, #essen, #aspen, #toronto, #sydney, and #london.

Figure 18 – #swissraclette: Hashtag network

The hashtags recalling the Swissness of raclette have more posts and are more central here than in the #racletesuisse network: among them, #swisscheese, #swiss, #switzerland, #swissfood, #swissraclettecheese and many more. Some IG users look worried by health considerations: raclette is #cheeseporn that can lead to #foodcoma, but still it is #glutenfree and, according to some, #healthyfood. It contains #fat, but of the good kind (#healthyfat) and it can be eaten also by those on
the #lowcarbhighfat diet. A qualitative analysis of posts also point at a greater heterogeneity of the dishes and recipes that can be prepared with raclette cheese: for example, melted inside a tasty sandwich, on poached eggs for breakfast, on a toast with the as a snack, or even as the topping of Swiss raclette pizza.

To sum up, on IG raclette is more a dish than a cheese. There is little awareness of the Canton of Valais as place of birth of raclette, which is considered a Switzerland-wide specialty (when not a French one). Even the notion that the Raclette of Valais is safeguarded from a PDO geographical indication is weakly present. Most of the posted content is about raclette as a dish (foodporn in a strict sense) and the consumption rituals about it, with their festive and convivial associations. The production side of the raclette cultural heritage has a very limited visibility on #racletteduvalais, and is absent on #raclettesuisse and #swissraclette.
4. Case study Tyrolean Graukäse, Austria/Italy

Graukäse (Grey Cheese) represents a Tyrolean cheese specialty that is officially recognised by the European Union through a Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) geographical indication. This type of cheese is a matured sour milk pot made from skimmed milk, formerly ‘poor people’s food’ and today to be found in high-end gastronomy. This type of cheese matures from the outside to the inside and, depending on how it is pressed, it matures completely and gets a greasy, glassy interior or the typical Ahrntaler Graukäse retains a potty core. Due to its production from skim milk, Graukäse is characterized by its low fat content (max. 2% fat in dry matter). Since the lactose is converted into lactic acid during production, Graukäse can be described as almost lactose-free, corresponding to low-fat foods. However, its appearance typically changes with increasing degree of ripeness: it gets a yellowish, brownish to grey surface, which can be covered with mould. The Graukäse captivates by its variety. The further the maturing process, the more intense the taste becomes. The ‘Topfige’ (potty) is rather milder in taste whereby the ‘Speckige’ (greasy) has a substantially stronger and more intensive taste (Hofkäserei Moarhof, 2019).

4.1 Data collection, sampling, content analysis and network visualisation

The study on Graukäse aims to gather, analyse and interpret the data available on Instagram, comprising a simultaneous examination of the images as well as the applied hashtags and comments in the posts that Instagram users allocate to the activities and content they produce as well as on the practices and cultures of interactions on the platform. The collection of the data was done using the Instagram API, a digital tool for downloading Instagram data sets based on search requests based on the overarching defined hashtag #graukäse. All data was collected until the date of April 24, 2019. The entire gathered data set comprised a total of 693 Instagram posts; images in combination with hashtags, likes and comments. The next step included the choice of the sample for the qualitative visual content analysis. As an in-depth analysis of the entire data set is unfeasible and the selected sample still needed to be both representative and significant, the visual content analysis relied on a specific sampling procedure, the random but systematic sampling strategy. For this type of sampling, every tenth picture of the sample was selected and analysed, resulting in a total of 69 images that were part of the visual content analysis. Due to the specified date of download, some images were not able to be found later on Instagram. Four images of the sample were concerned and have therefore been skipped in the content analysis.

The visual content analysis included both the investigation of material as well as expressive image components as the study aimed to analyse both the image content as well as the sentiments and emotions the pictures convey to the researcher. To enable the categorisation of all images and ensure that the categories are more evidently interpretable, six major categories were developed: food product; landscape; food selfie; rituals and practices of celebrating; practices of farming and processing and leisure, tourism and vacation. The category of food product contained three subcategories: purity, traditional cuisine and modern cuisine. The subcategory purity was applied when the image represented the raw, unprocessed food product itself. The subcategory traditional cuisine was used when the image referred to the traditional cooking and preparation of the food product: if the image represented the traditional Brotzeit or Marende, a traditional snack in the late afternoon with the cheese being prepared with vinegar and oil (Alztaler Hofmolkerei, 2019); if the image referred to traditional dishes and recipes using Graukäse such as Tiroler Kasspatzen (Hotel Sägerhof, 2019) or Kaspressknödel filled with the cheese (Alztaler Hofmolkerei, 2019) which are prepared with the Speckige type of the cheese (Hofkäserei Moarhof, 2019); see Table 6.
### Table 6 - Examples of traditional cuisine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Brotzeit</th>
<th>Traditional Recipes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Graukäs» mit Essig und Öl**  

**Zutaten:**  
400 g möglichst speckiger Graukäs  
2 große Zweiein  
80 g Walnusskerne  
Salz  
Pfeffer aus der Mühle  
2 EL Honigmarmelade  
4 EL Walnussöl  
Fein gehackte Petersilie oder Schnittlauch


**Source:** Alztaler Hofmolkerei, 2019.

| **Kaspressknödel**  

**Zutaten für 4 Personen:**  
1 Knoblauchzehen  
200 ml Milch  
250 g Knödelbrot  
2 EL  
100 g Graukäs  
Salz, Pfeffer, Petersilie, Majoram, Butter, Schnittlauch


**Source:** Alztaler Hofmolkerei, 2019.

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In contrast, the subcategory modern cuisine was used when the image could be related to high-end gastronomy, modern cooking or preparation skills of the food product or modern dishes using e.g. the *Topfige* type of the cheese (Hofkäserei Moarhof, 2019). The category landscape was applied either when the image portrayed nature, architecture, a certain region or if the image depicted a cultural landscape. Nature was selected if the post depicted a nature scenery such as mountains or farms; architecture if the architecture represented the central element of the post; region if a certain region was attributed and cultural landscape was chosen if the post depicted a cultural scenery. The category food selfie was used when the image depicted a single person or multiple persons as its central
element or if food was depicted in connection with a single person or multiple persons as equal elements of image. The category rituals and practices of celebrating referred to images including either popular festivals such as Almabtrieb (bringing the cattle down from the mountain pastures into the valley) or folk festivals; table rituals such as Brotzeit, a family or joint meal; or if the image portrays a private or commercial product tasting. The category knowledge and practices of farming, processing and cooking consists of three subcategories: cattle breeding, manufacturing, production, and cooking. Cattle breeding was used if the post depicts a farm, animals or breeding; the subcategory manufacturing and production was used if the post portrays a process of commercial or private manufacturing and processing of food and finally, the subcategory cooking was applied if the post reveals traditional knowledge about the production and processing of the food. The last category contained all images related to leisure, vacation lifestyle and sports representing the central picture elements. These categories were applied for the detailed coding and analysis of the material components of the images, including physical products such as food or consumers.

Secondly, the analysis focused on the expressive components of the images to reveal the underlying emotions and sentiments expressed and conveyed by the images to the outside. Expressive elements usually pertain to communicative elements such as brand narratives or aesthetics, consumer gestures such as class or gender and heritage in particular. The following expressive components have been identified which can in turn be differentiated according to components referring to positive emotions and components revealing negative sentiments. The expressive, positive components comprised happiness (post conveys happiness / subject appears happy), indulgence (post conveys joy of eating), self-expression (post depicts showing off of cooking skills / subject depicts itself), tradition (post signifies traditional background of food), community (post relates to social belonging), healthy lifestyle (post relates to healthy lifestyle) and sensuality (post conveys a sensual meaning, e.g. #foodporn) whereas the negative expressive components are related to anger and dissent (post conveys anger or non-supportive attitude) and sense of guilt (post conveys guiltiness of eating, e.g. in relation to #foodporn).

After having developed the coding categories, the next step consisted of the coding of the images to identify, label and code the different material and expressive components of the images. First, a pure visual analysis of the images was conducted, where all images were merely coded based on the Instagram aesthetics and if they could or could not be allocated to the diverse categories. The aim here was to primarily describe and highlight what is actually shown on the pictures without taking the comments and links in the posts into account. Yet, as images might reveal several possibilities of interpretation than e.g. simple texts, the comments and links in the posts are further considered in the content analysis of the images to add clarity and transparency about the true meaning of the posts. Thus, the analysis of all other material and expressive categories is based on an interplay of image and comments that were considered in the further course of the coding procedure.

The coding phase was followed by analysis and interpretation of the results. First, the frequency of each of the material and expressive components was counted to generate a quantitative count of their content. This was done by generating relative and absolute frequency counts. Furthermore, a cross-case analysis across all sample images was applied by reading and re-reading all the images and exploring the relations between the different categories to determine the content as well as the latent meaning of each image to assess what becomes central regarding the culinary heritage of the Alps (such as the transmission of culinary traditions or knowledge, the relevance of certain landscapes or region or the role of tourism). The analysis further concentrated on identifying recurrent patterns in the images as well as commonalities or differences within and across the diverse image types.
Next to the site of the image itself, referring to its meaning and composition, the site of production and actors behind the images were also taken into account, pertaining to the where and how of taking the picture. On the one hand, this enabled the researcher to clearly mark the origin of the image and to differentiate between consumer created and brand-generated posts. On the other hand, considering the site of the image, its production and audience helped to comprehend the social impacts of a picture as well as its broader cultural context and meaning. Furthermore, the analysis also paid attention to the likes of each picture as well as the number of comments by other users to generate a broader, interpretative picture of the intangible culinary heritage and its cultural significance.

Finally, to juxtapose and support the findings from the visual content analysis, a hashtag visualization analysis was conducted using the software Gephi. The goal of this supportive analysis was to examine the hashtagged visual performances of the culinary heritage, complementary consumer-generated content and a co-occurrence of related hashtags. The visual content analysis network in combination with the network visualization assisted in making the investigation into consumer meanings interpretatively accessible. The hashtag visualization identified and highlighted the entire network of co-occurring and widespread hashtags related to #graukäse.

4.2 Overall resonance of the Alpine heritage food product Graukäse on IG

In the first place, it can be stated that the intangible culinary heritage clearly resonates among both consumers and producers as well as the marketing side, represented through the image posts on Instagram. The pure visual analysis of the image aesthetics, considering the material components of the images, revealed that most of the images are related to food photography (82%), depicting the food product Graukäse either in its raw or processed form. All other categories are almost equally represented with 14% of all images portraying landscapes, whereas single or multiple persons (in connection with food) are only shown in 12% of all images, referred to as food selfies. Rituals and practices of celebrating as well as practices of farming, processing and cooking are both depicted in 12% of all images. Lastly, 17% of all images broach the issue of vacation, leisure and the lifestyle aspect of food.

As expected by and in line with the methodology section, the mere visual analysis only represented a partial investigation of the culinary heritage portrayed through the Instagram images. Thus, it was insightful to take the analysis of the material components of the whole posts into account, including image descriptions, comments and applied hashtags. The more detailed approach supported the findings from the broad analysis of the image aesthetics.

Regarding the first steps in the value chain of the Graukäse, the organic cultivation and breeding of the animals producing the raw milk as well as the knowledge and practices of processing and cooking, the analysis emphasized that practices of cattle breeding are not represented at all (0%) whereas both manufacturing and production of the cheese on the alpine pastures and alpine dairies and cooking practices are illustrated in 23% of the posts. When it comes to the further processing and refinement of the product and the final consumption, the food product Graukäse itself was either depicted in its raw and unprocessed form (17%), portrayed as part of the traditional (58%) as well as modern cuisine (23%). It was further associated with the food porn photography (53%), signifying the overexposure of food and the pleasure of (excessive) food consumption. Moreover, landscapes have been highlighted as significant with posts depicting a nature scenery (9%), were related to the leisure aspect of food (vacation, tourism and leisure; 36%; lifestyle and sports: 38%). What is particularly exposed is the fact that 71% of all posts shared a regional focus and were attributed with specific regions.
Food selfies represented only a minor part of all images (8% of posts depicting persons (single person or multiple persons); 8% of posts portrayed food in connection to person(s). Lastly, the rituals and practices of celebrating were mainly characterized by product tastings (12%) and table rituals (11%) whereas posts barely depicted popular traditional festivals (6%). The sites and actors of production of the posts were mainly characterized by consumers (55%), food blogger (27%), the hospitality industry (gastronomy: 30%; hotel accommodations: 8%; tourism: 3%), manufacturers represented by farms (0%) and alpine dairies (8%) as well as the marketing side (18%). Furthermore, the analysis highlighted that 85% of all posts relating to Graukäse made use of the hashtag #graukäse to stress the content and thematic relation of their posts. Yet, in 24% of all posts, the hashtag was further applied for reasons of increased visibility and wider reach of the post on the platform.

The sentiments revealed through the post are mainly characterized by positive associations of the users such as happiness (39%). Moreover, the main emotional expression identified in the posts related to the indulgence (80%) and general joy of eating. One interesting sentiment expressed in the posts refers to the sensuality (23%), the sensuous pleasure of food and excessive food consumption concerning the foodporn phenomenon. Moreover, the analysis emphasized the need for self-portrayal as 44% of users aimed at expressing themselves through their Instagram posts by showing off of their cooking skills or consciously serving and portraying the food. In addition, 77% of all posts signified the traditional background of food, resonating with the findings from the material analysis with more than half of all posts being related to the traditional processing of the food product. The sense for a community among users was even more emphasized with users feeling a need for social belonging and affiliating to specific communities, which was expressed in 65% of all posts. One of these communities could be associated with the healthy lifestyle (17%) regarding the food as Graukäse represents a low-fat and high-protein product (Hofkäserei Moarhof, 2019; Tirol Milch, 2019), perfectly made for people living the fit and healthy lifestyle. Only few posts were associated with ambiguous meanings (3%), addressing the ambiguous meaning of the Graukäse, at times described as ‘stinkende Köstlichkeit’ (stinky deliciousness) or negative associations such as dissent (3%) about the food product itself or sadness (2%). Surprisingly, no post at all was related to the sense of guilt (0%) and the guiltiness of eating with regards to overeating and food overload related to the foodporn phenomenon.

The network visualization was applied to identify thematic clusters around the chosen hashtag #graukäse by outlining related and widespread hashtags used in connection with the original hashtag. Figure 19 shows the very dense structure of the related hashtags and thematic areas attached to #graukäse. Among the most common used hashtags are the following: #food, #foodporn, #cheese, #instafood #foodblogger, #yummy, #tirol, #südtirol, #altoadige. The visualization thus supports the overall resonance of the intangible culinary heritage on Instagram by emphasizing the widespread meanings and dimensions that producers, marketing as well as consumers attach to the hashtag #graukäse. Expressed through huge thematic clusters such as #foodporn and #instafood, the visualization first highlights the relevance of the so-called foodporn community. This is also consistent with the results of the visual content analysis, highlighting #foodporn ranging among of the main hashtags used in connection with Graukäse. Based on this aspect, another finding supported by the network analysis emerges – the posts associated with food photography (hashtags such as #picooftheday, #photooftheday are used) and the food blogger community which aims at depicting the food in a staged manner, to share the most “instagrammable" food picture and for whom the atmosphere around consuming the product counts more than the traditional product itself. This clearly points out the aesthetic relevance associated with consuming and depicting Graukäse.
Another important thematic area which is pointed out by the visual analysis as well relates to the community of a fitness and healthy lifestyle (#healthyfood, #cleaneating, #veggie). This community makes use of Graukäse in their dishes as a healthy, low-fat product, supporting their awareness of being fit and healthy. The visualization further expresses the importance of tourism and tourists visiting Tyrol with the aim to experience the Tyrolean lifestyle. Here, thematic clusters around the hashtags #visitsouthtyrol, #italianfood, #formaggio and #visittyrol evolve. Nevertheless, the analysis points out as well that it is very often tourists who use the depicted hashtag in their posts and assign meanings to them instead of local, Tyrolean inhabitants using Graukäse. Lastly, the network outlines the regional importance of certain regions that have been attached to the posts (#tyrol, #austria, #südtirol) as well as specific valleys (#altoadige, #tirol, #innsbruck). This shows the huge relevance and thus potential for marketing and producers to further promote the local and traditional meaning of Graukäse and its processing, cooking and final consumption in these areas. Summarizing one can say that the graph highlights the strong and huge network associated with the originally chosen hashtag #graukäse. It shows the relation to other food topics (such as fitness, health and the
importance of food photography) as well as to diverse culture-relevant themes (such as tourism, the knowledge of farming and refinement of the cheese and practices of celebrating), mainly all supported by the previous visual content analysis.

4.2 Consumer meanings

When it comes to consumers and the meanings they attach to the food product Graukäse, its production, processing and final consumption, the analysis mainly outlines three overarching types of consumers and meanings (see Table 7). First, the study highlights the relevance of consumers who value the regionality and authenticity of the food product. Such consumers use Instagram as a platform to spread the traditional and local meaning of Graukäse, contributing to the importance of authentic, Tyrolean products. Moreover, tourists use social media and Instagram to share their food images and to interact with friends and family on the one hand. Additionally, they are also discovering, learning, sharing and talking about the culinary heritage of the Alps online. As such, they are willing to engage with the local, traditional food heritage in this space, but mainly if the interaction promises to enrich their lives in some tangible way (e.g. #bestholidayever).

According to Lin and Lu (2011), enjoyment is one of the most influential reasons of social media use. Thus, the analysis points out the high relevance of tourists and the meanings they attach to the food product. Next to the tourists, the analysis identified as well consumers such as mountain lovers who reflect the leisure and lifestyle aspect of food in their posts. The last consumer world centres around those who value and spread an innovative, and new type of cuisine, the so-called fusion cuisine. For those consumers, Graukäse provides a basis for developing new recipes and ways of consuming, opening up the traditional, local meaning of the food product to new interpretations and combinations of dishes and ways of processing.

Table 7 - Meanings consumers attribute to Graukäse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regionality and Authenticity: The Importance of the Local, Authentic and the Tyrolean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local, traditional dishes and cooking practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local production practices of the cheese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Image credit:* Image 1: https://www.alpine-space.eu/projects/alpfoodway | project_management@alpfoodway.eu | communication@alpfoodway.eu
Local lifestyle: local festivities, product tastings

Tourism: The Significance of Tourism

Enjoyment of local food and local cooking traditions. Interest in regional processing of the cheese

Relax and unwind in Tyrol (indulgence of the Tyrolean lifestyle)
Modernity: The Emergence of a Modern Fusion Kitchen

Fusion kitchen = “the addition of a product from a different country to a particular type of cooking, or the mixing of dishes from different countries in the same menu”
(Dictionary of Food Science and Nutrition, 2006)

New experimentation capabilities and tendencies open up the traditional cuisine to modern interpretations of the dishes, combining traditional and modern food as well as regional variations of Italian, French, German or Austrian cuisine to an extraordinary new mix (Südtirol, 2019)

In summary, it was expected that the Instagram posts would display the different components of the intangible culinary heritage. Furthermore, it was anticipated that the posts would be created by both producers and consumers and that the posts would clearly reveal the meanings consumers attach to the food heritage. Moreover, it was expected that the posts would be more related to practices of manufacturing, processing and local farming. Thus, there is a need for further communication and awareness building around the elements of the Alpine Food ICH.

At the same time, the case study shows that Instagram is an effective platform for communicating Alpine Food ICH. Consumers primarily use Instagram to share their food images and to interact with friends and family. However, they are also discovering, learning, sharing and talking about food online. As such, they are willing to engage with food brands and companies in this space, but only if the interaction promises to enrich their lives in some tangible way, whether through useful information, money saving deals or entertainment. While an exceptional product and a great deal will initially attract consumers to you, this is only the starting point of a truly meaningful social media relationship.
5. Conclusions

In this document, we reported research findings from a mixed qualitative and quantitative study based on an innovative research method, digital ethnography, of content posted on social media to identify consumer responses to and appreciation of Alpine food and its Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The objects of our analysis were four products (Fontina cheese, Arnad Lard, Raclette of Valais, and Tyrolean Graukäse), two cultural events (Désarpa and the Festa de lo Pan Ner) and one tourist destination (the Aosta Valley). We focused predominantly on Instagram (IG), even though, for one of our research sites, the Aosta Valley, we extended our enquiry to TripAdvisor (TA) restaurant reviews. The nature of the study was exploratory, as no previous research has investigated how consumers and other users make sense of intangible cultural heritage on social media. Overall, key insights from our multi-sited, multiple case study and recommendations can be summarised as follows.

5.1 Key insights

**Most aspects of Alpine food ICH are invisible on social media.** Social media prominently display foodporn, that is, the spectacularised finished products (cheeses, cured meats, etc.) and dishes prepared with them. In other words, the social media examined favour consumption over production. This means that consumption-related aspects of ICH (such as social consumption practices and rituals and festive events) are more likely to be posted online. In the cases we examined, for example, the convivial ritual of raclette is the object of many pictures posted on Instagram, as was the ritual descent of herds from high-mountain pastures during the désarpa. In contrast, very few IG users make a connection between the productive landscapes they visit such as the often-photographed grazing cows on pastures and their link to the food production heritage of the areas, which remains more often than not implicit.

Part of the reasons behind such invisibility of Alpine food ICH is that *often the spaces, people and practices of production behind the finished food products and the dishes prepared with them are removed from the consumer gaze.* Each supply chain has at least some phases that could be spectacularised and made accessible to consumers, but this does not always occur. Reasons might include material conditions of productions that do not lend themselves to be shown to consumers or tourists (for example, industrial production methods that would spoil the image of craftsmanship that some products have or the initial stages of the cured meat production process at slaughterhouses) or that are no longer present in the areas (for example, if local farmers no longer produce rye locally and rye flour has to be imported, it is not possible to show rye fields).

Research findings also show that the terms ‘cultural heritage’ or ‘intangible cultural heritage’ are not used on social media. These are etic terms belonging to the language of heritage studies and experts on heritage safeguarding that do not benefit from broader public diffusion. In the emic language of social media users in the cases we examined, ICH is prevalently referred to with notions of traditionality and typicality both on IG and YA; authenticity is a much less diffused category. Ironically, even cultural elements such as productive landscapes or cattle parades are sometimes made sense of through notion of nature. From a marketing perspective, this is not necessarily bad as ‘nature sells’ (whether it is about products or tourist experiences). From a cultural policy perspective, however, lack of recognition of food as a cultural heritage is more problematic, as it might create obstacles to safeguarding and transmission efforts. The only exception to this general trend is the Festa de lo Pan Ner, where cooperation with appropriately sensitised food bloggers has resulted in a better visibility of elements of the rye bread making heritage on IG. Initiatives so conceived (and
promoted) have at least to some extent succeeded in the difficult task of making the usually invisible ICH much more present on social media.

*Tradition and innovation are in dynamic opposition in social media discourse.* According to the UNESCO conceptualisation, Intangible Cultural Heritage does not only represent inherited traditions. ICH is constantly recreated by communities and groups to adapt to ever-evolving needs: it is at the same time traditional, contemporary and alive, and needs to evolve. It is interesting to contrast such *etic* conceptualisation with the way social media users talk about the term that most approximate ICH in their *emic* discourse: tradition. It is not possible to deny that some social media users espouse romantic (and incorrect) views on traditional cuisine as something that has been transmitted unchanged from the past, but in many cases, the past does co-exist with the present and the future. In the case of *Graukäse*, for example, chefs and consumers alike post on IG pictures of both traditional and innovative recipes prepared with this traditional Tyrolean cheese. TA reviewers often note that tradition recipes have been revisited and reward creative cooks who create new recipes with typical ingredients. The meaning of traditional food products is also renewed as it aligns with contemporary trends: for example, once ‘poor people’s food’, because of its low-fat content *Graukäse* is now made sense of as a healthy food and, like Raclette and Fontina, it can be eaten by vegetarian and celiac consumers. Some see in the *Festa de lo Pan Ner* not only a celebration of the past but also a blueprint for social and economic innovation and a pathway to a sustainable future for peripheral Alpine valleys.

To the extent that the case of the Aosta Valley is generalisable, *food culture (and food in general) has a limited presence on the IG content of tourist destination*. Other aspects of the Region’s rich tourist offer (nature and landscapes, ski and other sports, etc) dominate online pictures and videos. This does not allow to conclude that experiencing the Valley’s rich food heritage is not a relevant visit motivation. Still, it does not show much on IG on the sampled hashtags. *TA restaurant reviews offer however a different picture*: restaurant goers write a lot about traditional dishes, their recipes, and the ingredients used to prepare them. The different technical features of these two social media platforms to some extent explain differences in content posted. It might be that the same consumers who during the day post pictures of pristine winter landscapes would later write about the great *polenta concia* prepared with Fontina they tasted at dinner in one of the Valley’s typical restaurants. Possibly, in regions with fewer tourist attractions, food heritage would have shown more prominently on IG content as well.

**Findings from our product case studies lend themselves to interesting considerations.**

- *First, IG users sometimes consider these products as typical or traditional of an area, but most of their posts do not go much beyond #foodporn.*
- *Second, and to some extent as a result of this focus on end product and dishes, the vast majority of IG users look unaware of how differences in production methods might affect product taste*. These products are undifferentiated, so to speak. Very few IG users for example are aware of the fact that Fontina comes in two varieties (the one produced in lowland dairies all year long, and the summer and better-tasting alp Fontina only produced at pastures during the summer) or that Arnad Lard can be produced under the PDO product specification or outside of it in a more artisanal manner.
- *Third, some of the products studies suffer from competition from products from the same name but produced elsewhere*, which sometimes obscure their IG visibility. This is the case of both lard (the Colonnata Lard benefit from greater consumer awareness than its Arnad counterpart) and Raclette cheese (most Swiss raclette cheese is produced outside of the Canton of Valais; and in France most consumers believe that this cheese is from Savoie).
- Fourth, the brands of individual producers are predominantly missing from these product hashtag networks – consumers are not aware of them. In other cases – one think of Champagne, who is similarly protected by a PDO – individual producers have adopted individual marketing strategies to help consumers recognise their brands. The products we examined are instead mostly promoted collectively by commercialisation cooperatives or the organisations managing their PDO, who are not always very active on social media. The only exception is the Arnad Lard, with one producer, Maison Bertolin, whose digital strategies and consumer engagement activities contribute to the overall visibility of #lardodiarnad.

- Fifth, each product is typically at the centre of various hashtags, some of which (used by more aware consumers or in the context of promotional strategies) contain more heritage-sensitive posts. It is the case for example of #fontinadop and #fontinadalpeggio respect to the more generic #fontina.

- Finally (and relatedly), some cultural events contribute to educate IG users about differences in production methods and how these affect the taste of products. It is the case of the contest Modon d’Or and the Arnad Lard Festival. The former’s award ceremony that gives visibility to the best Fontina cheeses produced during the summer in a high-mountain pasture (alp); the media coverage surrounding the finalists increases market awareness about how Fontina made in alps with different climate and flora result in remarkable taste differences. The latter expose consumers to a variety of family recipes for artisanal lard production. Visual content on IG is not the best means to educate about taste differences, of course. But content of this kind can trigger consumer curiosity that might impact further purchases and make them aware of the usually invisible material conditions of production.

Cultural events and festival can contribute to showcase an area’s cultural heritage and transmit it to new generations, new or temporary inhabitants, and tourists. One of the events in our sample, the désarpa, represents a tradition that is still strongly felt by the local communities that organise it and is not a mere spectacle for tourists, who still are present and enjoy it. While its social media visibility is still growing, pictures posted on #desarpa emphasise key elements of this ritualised cow parade, such as the horn and milk queens and the wreaths they wear on their horns. The other festival we analysed, the Festa de lo Pan Ner, is a more recent and community-oriented initiative that is similarly successful in educating about the Aosta Valley’s community oven and rye bread heritage.

Restaurants are a key site enabling tourists and locals to experience an area’s food heritage. Many reviews in our sample refer to a restaurant as a place to taste the ‘typical’ or ‘traditional’ cuisine of the Aosta Valley. There are clients who desire tradition and clients who want to escape it and look for ingredients and recipes not offered by the local cuisine; others want some variety in the form of a mix of traditional and innovative recipes, or revisited traditional recipes with new ingredients, or more refined version of them. Restaurants can thus position themselves as more or less traditional, and strategically design their menu (but also the overall restaurant atmosphere) accordingly.

5.2 Recommendations
The world of social media is very self-referential, and the content posted on IG or TA could represent a very distorted mirror of consumer perceptions in real life. Still, the new generation of the so-called ‘digital natives’ use social media to make sense of reality, to obtain information about possible purchases, to express themselves and to form relationships and build communities. Engaging with social media is therefore increasingly important for cultural policies aiming to transmit cultural heritage to the next generation as well as for effective digital marketing strategies targeting digital natives. Below, we offer some recommendations stemming from our analysis targeting those actors who can benefit from a better understanding on how Alpine food ICH is made sense of on social media.
A first general consideration is that communicating an area’s ICH is a difficult task that could be better realised through more effective collaborations among actors in the fields of culture, tourism, agriculture and food production. When they take pictures of food, consumers show very limited awareness of the supply chains behind what they are going to eat. Similarly, when they see productive landscapes, they tend to perceive them as ‘natural’ and not linked to the area’s food heritage. Actors in the fields of culture, tourism and agriculture/food production are all involved in promoting ICH, but to varying degrees and each with their own specific focus – hence, an opportunity to integrate efforts and exploit synergies emerge. So far, this has happened to a very limited degree. Cultural institutions rarely involve economic actors or highlight the link between traditional know-how and the contemporary practices of those individual and businesses who have inherited and renewed it. The marketing organisations representing farmers and food producers sometimes reproduce clichés about their area’s past tradition in their communications; their promotional use of historical facts is not always accurate, for lack of in-depth knowledge on the subject and access to critical sources. The same is true for tourist destination management organisations, who do a good job at promoting cultural attractions and events but could do more to design authentic experiences allowing tourists to engage with heritage food producers. By pooling resources and competencies together, local food-related ICH could be better promoted, resulting in a better visibility on social media.

A greater visibility of ICH on social media requires the careful design of opportunities for the creation of user-generated content (pictures and video) across heritage food supply chains, from production to consumption. To do so, the first step is a critical assessment of such supply chains in view of their possible exploitation for the staging of photographable experiences. Not all stages of food production supply chains might lend themselves to the creation of tourist experiences for various reasons. They might be unpleasant (e.g., slaughterhouses) or contradict widely-held consumer perceptions of unchanged production methods (e.g., industrialised dairy farms); interaction with tourists might not be possible as it would disturb production process or might be problematic for hygienic reasons; in some cases, some stages of the supply chain might have disappeared from the area. The second step is the creation of inclusive governance structures involving the individuals, groups and organisations with the material resources and skills necessary to create cultural heritage-sensitive experiences. So conceived, these governance structures, which might assume the forms of public-private partnerships, might take care of subsequent steps (capacity building, venue identifications, fund-raising, etc.). Cooperative efforts between cultural, business and tourist stakeholders help to avoid experiences that by emphasising just one aspect of food production processes (those controlled by individual – non-cooperating – actors, for example the aging of cheese) might unwillingly lead social media users to lose sight of the broader context of local food cultural heritage.

Creating visual opportunities for ‘Instagrammable’ moments might also help reduce difficulties in communicating ICH. Cultural institutions and experts often use an etic language that is hardly understandable by laypersons (actors in the field of food marketing and tourist promotion are less exposed to this risk). Most social media users are not aware of the term ICH and its meaning and make sense of food heritage through notions of tradition and typicality that are problematic from a social science and heritage studies perspective. It is however easy to design experiences in such a way to direct onlooker attention to elements that are important heritage elements. Opportunities for user-generated content should be designed with well-selected ICH transmission goals in mind. Coherently with a notion of ICH as continuously recreated by individuals, groups and communities, visual opportunities for user-generated content should avoid a ‘museified’ view of tradition but highlight instead its contemporary and living nature.
To engage with digital natives, all the actors involved in ICH promotion need to upgrade their digital promotion and storytelling skills and investments. Those seeking to promote an area’s ICH, whatever their reasons might be (cultural, promotional, etc.), should establish a social media presence to shape in a favourable manner the online conversation about a destination, a product, a restaurant, or a cultural event. Tourist destination management organisations, if large enough and professionally-managed, have digital marketing strategies with well-reasoned goals and adequate investments, dedicated staff, and with the help of communication agencies face limited difficulties in animating their official accounts and hashtags and taking care of relationships with social media users. In the cases of the products and events we examined, this happened to a much-reduced extent: most of the content is uncoordinated and unmanaged, and results in a plurality of hashtags and heterogeneity of messages. In the case of products, despite the renown and good sales performances of some of them, the collective marketing organisations behind them are not present on IG or, if so, do not animate their account frequently with timely content. Many of these organisations do invest in traditional promotional activities (for example, trade fairs and periodic marketplaces) which are however not valorised enough on social media. Whether caused by lack of time, skills, or investment, this situation put them in the condition of being the objects, rather than the subjects, of the social media communication around them. While the tone of the content posted by users is fortunately very positive (foodporn, festive moments, smiling faces, etc.), social media are known for empowering dissatisfied consumers and citizens. This has resulted in boycotting behaviours leading to crises that have created difficulties even to large corporations with sizeable promotional budgets. It is therefore better to build competences gradually and adopt more proactive strategies in this respect, to prevent possible crises and be ready to face them should they occur.

Small food producers, too, should invest in developing their own individual presence on social media and create experiential occasions likely to result in user-generated content. These producers tend to delegate promotional activities to their collective marketing or commercialisation organisations. In most cases, however, the latter promote the product as a whole as if it were an undifferentiated commodity. The reality is often different: for some product categories, differences in terroirs or production methods may result in remarkable taste differences that would lend themselves to be valorised with appropriate marketing activities, as is the case with Champagne and many other food products. These two promotional levels (the collective and the individual) should coexist in harmony, building on each other to generate a critical mass of favourable social media content.

Also restaurants can benefit from a social media strategy and strategically exploit consumer need for both tradition and innovation. Restaurants are important cultural spaces where tourists, but also the younger generations and new residents of an area can experience its food heritage. Our recommendations for heritage food producers (building a social media presence, create photographable moments) are valid also for restaurant owners and chefs. Only few of the restaurants in our sample customise their TripAdvisor entry with official pictures or respond in a professional manner to dissatisfied consumers. Today, investing time to manage appropriately TA and other social media is necessary as these platforms are increasingly used by restaurant goers. Given the prevalence of #foodporn, restaurants should not find it hard to direct their clients’ content to official hashtags and accounts and, as a result, generate additional consumer engagement. The inclusion in the menu of traditional or new dishes that have a strong ritual and convivial element (such as the Swiss raclette or the caffè dell’amicizia in Valle d’Aosta) might ensure further social media visibility. More in general, we recommend that restaurants position themselves more clearly on the tradition-innovation continuum, so that clients can have clear expectations on what they will find. Consumers appreciate
variety, and different restaurant models can co-exist. Food heritage is ever-evolving and even the most creative cuisine can build on local ingredients and take inspirations from the past. As the case of pizza with Fontina or Arnad lard show, today’s innovations will be tomorrow’s traditions. We recommend however that restaurants and chefs reflect on and explicitly communicate to their clients (through menus, websites, and of course digital media) their own interpretation of tradition as manifested in their recipes, choice of ingredients, and cooking methods.
References


