



Under the Croatian Sky

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The Balkans: a region rich in culture, traditions and foods of great value, many of which are still little known but which could act as a driving force for the many rural communities that produce them

The third edition of Terra Madre Balkans was held in Dubrovnik from June 19 to 22. After two editions in Sofia, the challenge of moving the event to a new location paid off, with over 300 registered delegates from 11 countries around the Balkans attending the eight programmed events, including conferences, workshops and round-table discussions.

This network, which unites food communities from southeastern Europe, has strengthened the voice of small-scale producers*, as shown by the presence of the authorities, from the support of the president of the Republic of Croatia to the participation of the Croatian Minister of Agriculture and high-ranking representatives from the European Union Directorates-General for fishing and health and consumers and the FAO.

The event is growing, not only in the number of participants, but also in the quality of the discussions and the range of themes being tackled: from the defense of small-scale fishing in the Adriatic to protected geographical indications, from sensory education and food in schools to sustainable tourism in the region's rural areas. Most importantly, Terra Madre Balkans was an opportunity for relaunching a desperate plea to the relevant authorities of member states and candidate countries to develop new policies able to establish a fair equilibrium between hygiene and food safety laws and the protection of small-scale food production, too often relegated to semi-illegality and the black market.

The president of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini, attended the event, and added his voice to the appeal: "In the Balkans, Europe is gambling with its credibility. This region is rich in culture, traditions and gastronomic products of great value, many of which are still little-known, but which could serve as a driving force for the many rural communities that produce them. Allowing small-scale producers, the true guardians of biodiversity, to access the market is the first step towards giving this land a future."

Terra Madre Balkans was also an opportunity for celebration, with a glorious Earth Market held in the splendid setting of Gradac park, a few steps from the historic center and the sea. For two days, visitors could discover products and meet producers from food communities and Slow Food Presidia from all over the region, including many of the 150 products currently listed in the Ark of Taste, Slow Food's catalog of food products at risk of extinction.

We had a chance to hear from many people here, such as Greek journalist Angelina Kalogeropoulou. Specializing in the food sector, her aim is to get people cooking again, as the habit of making food at home has been largely lost. In this distancing, Angelina recognizes a general trend that particularly concerns the urban population, though also those living in the countryside. Food has become more expensive just as people have lost their ability to manage a kitchen. "This is happening in Athens," says Angelina, "and especially among young people. I'm very interested in the fact that people are cultivating even just a small pot on the balcony, because in this way they can start to understand the economy of the kitchen, and the tools for managing their own food."

Angelina works in collaboration with Organizationearth.org and every Sunday, accompanied by a group of volunteers, she tests out a form of practical education. Together they have created a collective kitchen, six kilometers from the center of Athens. From 10 am to 2 pm they cook with fresh, seasonal, organic ingredients, often with the participation of famous chefs. "First we take a walk through the garden, we pick garlic and onions, and we have a workshop where we explain what we're going to do with the food we've harvested and then we cook. With a group of volunteers of all ages, we're guaranteed a generational exchange of knowledge and the kind of education that is passed on through experience."

The next Terra Madre Balkans will be held in two years, to give a voice to those who believe that a new way of interpreting food production and consumption—better, cleaner, fairer—is a dream that can become a reality and an essential objective for the complete integration of the region into the new Europe.

* Within the report "European gastronomic heritage: cultural and educational aspects" adopted on 12 March 2014 the European Parliament:

- Calls on the Member States to exchange knowledge and best practices concerning gastronomy-related activities in education and to promote gastronomic awareness in the various regions; calls also for an exchange of best practices or for thought to be given to shortening the food chain by focusing on local seasonal produce.
- Supports such initiatives as may be developed by Member States and their regions to promote and preserve all the territories, landscapes and products that make up their local gastronomic heritage; urges the regions to promote local and dietetic gastronomy in schools and collective catering in association with local producers in order to preserve and enhance the regional gastronomic heritage, stimulate local agriculture and shorten supply chains.
- Calls on the Member States to take measures to preserve the European gastronomy-related heritage, such as protection of the architectural heritage of traditional food markets, wineries or other facilities, and of artefacts and machinery related to food and gastronomy.
- Highlights the importance of identifying, cataloguing, transmitting and disseminating the cultural richness of European gastronomy; advocates the establishment of a European observatory for gastronomy.

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Terra Madre Balkans was organized by Kinookus and Slow Food Dubrovnik, with the support of Slow Food, the Croatian Agriculture Minister, Dubrovnik–Neretva County and the City of Dubrovnik in partnership with the University of Dubrovnik, and with the contribution of the FAO, the NGO Redd and the project "Table for Nine Billion." The event is one of the activities of the ESSEDRA project, co-funded by the European Union through DG Enlargement, and organized by Slow Food with the aim of supporting the Balkans and Turkey's European integration process through the strengthening of civil society and its capacity to influence policies and promote sustainable rural development models.

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