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Gastronomy as cultural heritage: The case of Sicily and the literary hero 'Montalbano'

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Abstract

This study examines Sicilian gastronomy as an element of intangible cultural heritage, focusing on its promotion through the literary production of Andrea Camilleri. In his work, and especially in his series of novels featuring the protagonist Inspector Montalbano, gastronomy takes on a multi-level significance: it functions not only as an everyday practice but also as a tool for narrative connection with local identity, historical memory and social structures in Sicily. Through the detailed descriptions of food and customs, the multicultural influences (Greek, Arab, Norman, etc.) that have shaped Sicilian cuisine are highlighted. At the same time, the study links the literary representation of gastronomy with contemporary practices of cultural management and sustainable tourism, proposing the Sicilian case as a model for enhancing cultural identity and local development through gastronomic tourism.

Keywords: Gastronomy; Cultural Heritage; Sicily; 'Montalbano'; Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

Gastronomy is a key element of the Sicilian identity, reflecting the historical and cultural influences of Arab, Spanish and Norman. In Camilleri's work, and especially in the Montalbano series, food functions not only as a means of enjoyment but also as a carrier of cultural memory and identity (Manola et al., 2024; Tsatalmpasoglou et al, 2024).Traditional dishes, such as arancini and caponata, reveal the synthesis of cultures that have shaped Sicily, while being embedded in the everyday life of the characters, highlighting the connection with the local heritage (Manola et al, 2020).According to Venuti (1995), gastronomy in Montalbano reflects the tensions between local tradition and contemporary pressures, acting as a commentary on the social reality of the island. As Manola & Koufadakis, (2022) points out, food becomes a cultural expression, inextricably linked to Sicilian history and collective consciousness.

2. Sicily - cooking's connection with cultural identity and history

Sicilian gastronomy is a living carrier of cultural memory and historical continuity. The island, at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, has been influenced by a succession of cultures from antiquity to the late Middle Ages. The Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans and Spaniards have left their mark on Sicilian cuisine, creating a rich mosaic of flavours and techniques.

Local gastronomy is not just about taste; it is a means of expressing identity and a tool for cultural management. Traditional dishes such as arancini (stuffed rice balls), caponata (eggplant and vinegar dish), cannoli (ricotta pastries), and the use of local olive oil and wines (e.g. Nero d'Avola), are deeply rooted in the Sicilian collective imagination and are passed down from generation to generation.

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3. Strade del vino e dei sapori di Sicilia

The promotion of Sicily's gastronomic and cultural heritage has led to the development of thematic itineraries, such as the Strade del Vino e dei Sapori di Sicilia, which combine cultural and wine tourism (Tsatalbassoglou & Karagianni 2020; Tsatalmpasoglou et alI,2025).

The Region of Sicily established in 1999 (Law 268/27-7-1999) the regulation of the 'Wine Roads', enhancing local wine production through organized organized hospitality services, cultural and educational activities, with the aim of agro-tourism development (Manola, 2024).

This experience, as Manola & Koltsikoglou refers (2021) is made more complete by mapping the 13 main wine routes:

- Strada del Moscato di Noto e di Siracusa
- Strada del vino d'Alcamo DOC
- Strada del vino Cerasuolo di Vittoria da Barocco a Liberty
- Strada del vino dell'Etna
- Strada del vino della provincia di Messina
- Strada del vino di Marsala Terre d'Occidente
- Strada del vino e dei sapori Castelli Nisseni
- Strada del vino Erice DOC
- Strada del vino Terre Sicane
- Strada del vino Val di Mazara
- Strada del vino Val di Noto
- Strada del vino Malvasia di Lipari
- Strada del vino e dei sapori della Valle dei Templi

The recording of these routes is not simply a tourism tool but a cultural management strategy, widely recognized as a successful model of connecting local production with tourism and the narrative of the place (Croce & Perri, 2010).

The 'Wine Train' is a typical example, offering a five-hour experience on a historical route, with tasting of local products, contact with winemakers and tours of cultural sites of interest, integrated in a sustainable tourism approach.

The Etna region stands out as a model of thematic tourism, with pricing models adapted to the needs of different visitors. Experiences range from economic nature activities and gastronomic tours ($46.23) to private wine tastings ($167.59), offering accessibility and enhancing the sustainability of the region's tourism product. There are 13 wine roads in Sicily:

The Wine Roads tourism experience in Sicily is an exemplary form of thematic, wine and gastronomic tourism, where the natural landscape is harmoniously linked to local wine production. It is a multi-sensory experience that incorporates experiential elements, highlights the cultural identity of the region and enhances local development. Through their authenticity, gastronomic tradition and links with the natural and cultural environment, these routes are a model for exploiting local heritage in the context of a sustainable and diversified tourism model.

4. Cultural management and sustainable tourism

Gastronomy is an integral part of intangible cultural heritage and, at the same time, a powerful tool for cultural management. In the case of Sicily, the local cuisine is an emblematic expression of the historical diversity of the island, being a meeting point of peoples and cultures that have successively shaped the identity of the region.(Messina,2018)

The cultural management of Sicilian gastronomy is based on the promotion of its historicity and its protection as intangible cultural heritage. Food acts as a means of preserving historical memory and cultural diversity. Every recipe and every culinary practice incorporates cultural references ranging from the ancient Greek and Roman periods to the influences of the Arabs, Normans and Spaniards. Traditional dishes are not just tasty products, but living cultural narratives, capturing the continuity and mutations of local identity. (Everett, 2016)

In the context of sustainable tourism, Sicilian gastronomy has emerged as a key pillar for the development of alternative forms of tourism, such as gastronomic and cultural tourism. By promoting local products, supporting small producers

and involving local communities in promotional and experiential activities (e.g. cooking workshops, farm visits), a model of tourism development is being developed that respects the environment, strengthens the local economy and protects cultural identity. Manola & Gioka, 2021; Manola, & Angelopoulos, 2020).

The management of gastronomic heritage, therefore, is not limited to the preservation of a tradition; it extends to its dynamic valorization in the present, with the aim of empowering the local community and promoting a more sustainable, equitable and culturally sensitive tourism model. Sicily, with its richness of flavors and historical complexity, is a prime example of how gastronomy can be a driver of development and cultural sustainability. (Montanari, 2006 Bessière, 1998)

5. Cultural heritage and social context

Stivers (2021) examines how Sicilian gastronomy is highlighted in Camilleri's novels through the character of Inspector Montalbano (Manola et all.,2022) The gastronomic detail in his works functions as a vehicle of cultural identity, linking the narrative to local history, family tradition and the Sicilian way of life. Sicilian gastronomy is an integral part of its cultural identity, reflecting the diverse cultural influences that have shaped the island's history. Sicilian cuisine bears strong elements from the Greeks, Arabs, Spaniards and other peoples who have passed through the island, incorporating ingredients and techniques from different cultures. (Manola et all.,2022)

A typical example of this cultural synthesis is the dish "Pasta 'ncasciata", which became more widely known through Andrea Camilleri's novels with the hero Inspector Montalbano. This dish, originating from Messina, includes pasta, ragout, fried eggplant, fried eggplant, caciocavallo cheese and other local ingredients, reflecting the rich gastronomic tradition of the area.

Sicilian gastronomy, with its variety of dishes and its historical evolution, acts as a carrier of cultural heritage, preserving and promoting the traditions and values of the island. The promotion of this gastronomic heritage through literature and tourism contributes to the preservation and promotion of Sicily's cultural identity

Furthermore, according to Serkowska (2006), gastronomy in Montalbano highlights the Sicilian landscape as living and interactive. It is a landscape that is not static, but actively participates in the narrative - an environment that is not just a setting, but an interlocutor with the hero. Sicilian nature, through its food culture, becomes a narrative tool that reveals relationships, tensions, memories and values.

In the works of Andrea Camilleri (1994), gastronomy is not just an aesthetic element, but becomes a key narrative and socio-political tool. Through the enjoyment of traditional Sicilian dishes, Inspector Montalbano presents the social reality of Sicily, revealing social hierarchies, interpersonal dynamics and political tensions (Manola & Koufadakis, 2022; Manola, 2024; Gallo, 2003).

Food acts as a mirror of society: meals are scenes where both intimacy and tensions are manifested, highlighting the complexity of everyday life and the contradictions of Sicilian life (Manola & Raftopoulos, 2024). The insistence on local production and descriptions of authentic flavours constitute a form of cultural resistance to globalisation globalization and economic exploitation.

Pezzotti (2012) sees gastronomy as a 'political weapon' that highlights political dysfunctions, while the use of the Sicilian dialect, according to Dore (2010), reinforces cultural identity and burdens translation work with the need for cultural sensitivity. Finally, gastronomy in Camilleri links aesthetics with social and political critique, projecting food as an expression of identity and resistance (Richards, 2020).

6. Montalbano and cultural entrepreneurship

The case of Sicily is an exemplary example of how cultural entrepreneurship can be transformed into a driver of sustainable and culturally sensitive development (Tsatalmpasoglou & al, 2025). The island, with its multilayered historical and cultural identity, presents a targeted strategy for exploiting its intangible heritage, linking gastronomy, literature and local production with contemporary forms of tourist experience (Richards, 2020; Montanari, 2006). Investing in localism and cultivating an authentic narrative around Sicilian cultural identity demonstrate the potential of cultural entrepreneurship to transform local values into sustainable development capital (Maniou, 2024b; Maniou et al., 2024c; Maniou et al., 2024; Maniou et al., 2025; Maniou and Mitoula, 2025; Manola et all., 2023.

In this context, the Wine Roads (Strade del Vino) function not only as a tourism product, but as a systemic cultural development intervention, where agricultural production is linked to the culture and narrative of the place (Croce & Perri, 2010). Through these itineraries, visitors do not just consume wine; they experience Mediterranean rural culture, get to know the producers, taste local flavours and develop a relationship with the place, which reinforces the tourist identity of the area in terms of authenticity and sustainability (Sims, 2009). The success of the Wine Roads in Sicily shows that planned wine tourism can offer opportunities for inland development, community empowerment and the preservation of cultural diversity. Manola, & Vouglanis, 2024)

Another striking element of Sicilian cultural entrepreneurship is the cultural phenomenon of Inspector Montalbano, character of the author Andrea Camilleri. Montalbano's literary and television narrative functions as a multimodal means of promoting Sicily through the region's landscape paintings, the use of the Sicilian dialect and, most importantly, the promotion of local gastronomy (Pezzotti, 2009; Serkowska, 2006). The frequent scenes where Montalbano enjoys traditional Sicilian dishes (such as pasta con le sarde, caponata, arancini) enhance the gastronomic visibility of the region and integrate the culinary art into the cultural narrative (Maniou, 2024; Maniou et al., 2024b; Maniou et al., 2024a).

The television promotion of the landscapes of southeastern Sicily, particularly Punta Secca (the televised Vigata), Scicli and Ragusa, has led to a significant increase in thematic tourism, making the series a peculiar 'tourist agent' of cultural diplomacy (Pezzotti, 2012). It is a form of cultural and gastronomic geopolitics, where literature and television activate cultural capital for the benefit of sustainable tourism development.

Overall, the case of Sicily demonstrates how an integrated, sensitive and culturally informed approach to the management of local resources can provide a sustainable model of regional development. Cultural identity is not consumed, but re-invented, acting as a creative force that bridges past, present and future, always with the participation of the communities themselves (UNESCO, 2021; Makri and Kefala, 2021).

In summary, we underscore the significance of digital technologies in the education field and their role in cultural entrepreneurship training. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) make education accessible to everyone, introduce innovative methods for effective teacher training, enhance knowledge retention, facilitate collaboration, boost transparency, promote learner-centered teaching methods, create new instructional strategies, and accelerate knowledge acquisition. Moreover, they provide innovative ways for representing knowledge and support educational activities through mobility, virtualization, artificial intelligence, and fresh learning environments. In particular, when it comes to entrepreneurship training, ICTs have demonstrated high effectiveness, enhancing assessments, interventions, and educational processes via mobile devices [45-46], allowing learning to occur in various locations, as well as through diverse ICT applications [47], which are crucial for education. The application of AI, STEM, and robotics [48-49] advances educational processes, making them more adaptable, innovative, and effective, while gaming transforms education into a sensory-rich, engaging, and enjoyable experience. Additionally, the integration and enhancement of ICTs with metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and emotional intelligence development theories and frameworks [51-57] bring cognitive capabilities into the spotlight of educational processes and policies, thereby further improving educational practices and outcomes, particularly in training new entrepreneurs [58-64].

7. Conclusions

The case of Sicily highlights the potential of gastronomic heritage as a key axis of cultural management and sustainable tourism development. Through initiatives such as the Strade del Vino e dei Sapori di Sicilia, gastronomy is part of a wider network of thematic cultural itineraries, combining wine, food and cultural experiences. These organized itineraries, which are often enhanced by the use of alternative means of transport such as railways, act as tools for promoting local identity and as vehicles for the sustainable management of the tourist load.

The case of Andrea Camilleri's literary and television narrative of Montalbano is illustrative, where gastronomy goes beyond its function as an everyday practice and takes on a symbolic dimension. The Sicilian foods described in the author's works function as cultural markers, bringing to the fore the historical interactions, social changes and political contradictions that characterize Sicilian society. Gastronomy thus becomes a means of narrating and interpreting the cultural identity of the place.

Overall, the Sicilian experience shows how the link between gastronomic tradition and cultural tourism can contribute to the creation of sustainable tourism products, while strengthening the local economy and cultural cohesion. This case

can serve as a model for other Mediterranean regions, including Greece, where gastronomy is an integral part of the cultural heritage.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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