Tasting local history

Dissemination of the cultural history of food through cooking and dining

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Abstract: This article discusses how museums can disseminate the cultural history of food by cooking, tasting, and sharing meals. The article builds on vast data from a food culture project (SPIS Ma/eD) conducted in Lolland-Falster, the southeastern part of Denmark, between 2020 and 2023. The analysis centres on three key findings: the social aspect of sharing experiences and meals, the dialogical dissemination of cultural food history, and sensory engagement through cooking and tasting. The article concludes that cooking and dining together with other museum visitors enriches the museum experience and transforms it into a highly sensory and social event that links history to the present everyday life of the participants. The SPIS Ma/eD project also demonstrates the value of integrating food culture into the communication and dissemination practices of museums. This integrated approach to the local community, educational institutions, and innovative events has created a model that may inspire other museums.

Keywords: Cultural history, food history, dissemination, meal, cooking, eating, commensality, sensory experience, museum.

It stinks, but it’s pretty cool to know how to do this, removing the bones, and it’s awesome that the bones are green. (Pupil cutting up a garfish in a school workshop on coastal food)

Food heritage, culinary traditions and food-related artefacts are displayed in natural and history museums, science museums, agriculture museums and even art museums (Garibaldi & Pozzi 2021; Grøn 2022). However, food plays very different and variously explicit roles in different museum contexts. Museums entirely devoted to food and drink are increasingly common: in 1985, the first food museum, the Alimentarium, opened in Switzerland, and
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motivations for visiting museum restaurants and trying out a menu that complements a specific display (Park, Kim & Xu 2022; Kim, Park & Xu 2020; Mihalache 2016).

The aim of this article is to examine what happens when cooking and eating make up the key part of the dissemination of cultural history during the visit to a museum. Taking as our point of departure a food culture project (SPIS Ma/eD) carried out over a three-year period in Lolland-Falster, in southeastern Denmark, we discuss the benefits of disseminating cultural history by inviting visitors to cook, taste, and dine together with other museum visitors.

Fig. 1. In the educational programmes, school students had to prepare their lunch using local ingredients. One of the programmes was about maritime cuisine and the menu was ‘fish & chips’ with locally caught garfish. Photo: Museum Lolland-Falster.

ever since, many have followed worldwide (Elliott 2017). Some are dedicated to one food item, such as the Canadian Potato Museum (O’Leary, Prince Edward Island) or the Currywurst Museum (Berlin), and some have a more general scope, engaging with political and cultural issues to teach about agricultural practices, production, and consumption (Mihalache 2018).

Therefore, food and museums are not a new combination. However, the growing interest towards food heritage in the museum field is not represented in the low volume of research on the topic, and much of the academic attention centres around food museums as tourist attractions (Garibaldi & Pozzi 2021) or tourists’ motivations for visiting museum restaurants and trying out a menu that complements a specific display (Park, Kim & Xu 2022; Kim, Park & Xu 2020; Mihalache 2016).

The aim of this article is to examine what happens when cooking and eating make up the key part of the dissemination of cultural history during the visit to a museum. Taking as our point of departure a food culture project (SPIS Ma/eD) carried out over a three-year period in Lolland-Falster, in southeastern Denmark, we discuss the benefits of disseminating cultural history by inviting visitors to cook, taste, and dine together with other museum visitors.

Based on a mixed methods design that involves gathering data through observations,
interviews, and questionnaires at five different types of workshops for school children and 13 different types of events for general museum visitors, we aim to answer the following research question:

Which influence do dialogical dissemination, sensory engagement, and social gatherings have on the audience experience?

First, we present developments in the use and integration of food in museum practices as well as the existing research within this field. Following a section describing the project and the design of our study, we present an analysis focusing on three themes that, according to our findings, constitute the cornerstones of the food-centred museum experience: the social aspect of sharing experiences and meals with family and friends as well as other visitors, the dialogical dissemination of cultural history and the dialogue among guests and museum professionals and finally, the sensory engagement through cooking, tasting and dining. In the discussion, we raise some more critical questions about inclusion and exclusion using the concept of nostalgia to build a more complex relationship between the past, present and future. In the conclusion, we summarize our findings and address the transferability of the findings from the project and the limitations of the study.

**Food in museums and museum research**

Over the years, museums have evolved in their approach to the subjects of historical foods, recipes and food culture within their exhibitions and dissemination strategies. In the early years of museum curation, from the mid-1800s until 1940, the emphasis was largely on significant events, famous personalities, and traditional artefacts (Yoshida 2004). Culinary history and people’s everyday practices were often overlooked, as museums focused on preserving grand narratives (Sandell 2002). Food-related items were occasionally included but without a comprehensive exploration of their cultural and historical significance. As societal interests diversified and the concept of cultural heritage broadened, museums began to acknowledge the importance of displaying everyday life, including culinary practices (Falk & Dierking 2000). The inclusion of kitchen tools and traditional cooking methods in exhibits marked a shift towards recognizing the cultural richness embedded in culinary history (Schrempp 2011). Museums have started to explore the historical significance of ingredients and regional food traditions (Haaland 2007, Jones 2007), and as Eckersley (2019) argues, food is increasingly also used to address and engage audiences with so-called difficult pasts and political issues.

Within the last 30 years, it has become common practice to create immersive exhibits that engage multiple senses. Museums recognize that culinary history is not just about displaying historical artefacts but also about a sensory experience. Interactive displays, tastings, and multimedia presentations bring historical recipes and food culture to life, allowing visitors to connect more deeply with the past (Silverstone, Hirsch & Morley 1992; Matalas, Crystalleni & Chrysanthou 2013; Winter 2013). This approach enhances accessibility and encourages a broader understanding of culinary history (Matalas, Crystalleni & Chrysanthou 2013; Internet source 1; Internet source 2).

In addition, modern museums are increasingly aware of the importance of representing diverse food cultures. Exhibitions highlight, for instance, the global exchange of culinary traditions, the impact of migration on food,
and the interconnectedness of different cultures through trade and exploration. This approach reflects a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of culinary history than before (Sandell 2002).

Furthermore, museums have evolved into playing a more active role in education in relation to food culture. Within this area, programs, workshops, and collaborations with chefs and culinary experts contribute to a deepened understanding and appreciation of historical foods. These participatory and multi-sensory initiatives aim to bridge the gap between the past and present, fostering a connection between museum visitors and the rich tapestry of culinary history.

The above-mentioned inclusion of food and its potential in the interactive, sensory, and diverse dissemination of cultural history has not received much attention in museum research. In 2014, the special issue Sensory Museology – a dynamic field of inquiry brought together a series of articles “that delve[d] into the history of display and the rising tide of sensory experimentation in contemporary curatorial practice” (Howes 2014:259). While using touch in a museum context “to feel a physical and emotional connection with the past was common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Clasen 2014:269), this sensory experience more or less disappeared in the 20th century only to make a return in the 21st century. That is, the role of the museum has expanded from pure spectatorship to a kind of sensory gymnasion (Howes 2014). The experimentation includes touching and hearing in addition to conventional ocular-centric forms of display (Binter 2014). More recently, taste has been added to the sensory experience as museums have started integrating food displays and eating in their exhibition practices (Levent & Mihalache 2017). Steinberg describes how food can become a vehicle for engaging visitors in historical and contemporary issues: “through encountering food, and talking about food, people are really talking about themselves” (Steinberg 2012:89). In this way, museums link what Deutsch (2017:163) labels the more static nature of a museum with vitality and dynamism. Today, “history museums are realizing that the surge in food conversations represents a fresh opportunity to engage audiences on a topic of vital relevance. Food interpretation has the potential to bring historical thinking into public dialogue.” (Moon 2016:1.)

We will return to Deutsch’s and Moon’s points in the analysis, as they capture core elements of the museum experience at Museum Lolland-Falster: the engagement in the shared meal, the dialogue, and the sensory experience. While tasting, and thus eating and drinking, have been integrated into certain types of events in museums and in some types of museum exhibitions, cooking and dining are rarely the primary museum experience. This was the case in the project SPIS Ma/eD at Lolland-Falster, making it a suitable case for research into how the experience of cultural history is influenced by the integration of food in the dissemination of cultural history.

Based on the analysis, we present a more critical discussion of the potential implications of the use of food as a means for dissemination of cultural heritage. The concept of nostalgia as presented by Eckersley (2019) can be used to discuss how the use of food and its ability to evoke emotions needs to be linked to questions of inclusion and exclusion. She analyses food as a proxy for difficult political themes in present and past and problematises the implications hereof depending on the way in which the past is linked to the present and the future. We will return to this point in the analysis as well as the discussion addressing some of the
specific grips used in SPIS Ma/eD that engaged difference target groups and their cultural and personal backgrounds.

**Presentation of the SPIS Ma/eD project**

The SPIS Ma/eD at Lolland-Falster (hereafter referred to as SPIS Ma/eD) was a comprehensive food culture project at Museum Lolland-Falster that ran from 2020 to 2023 and aimed to utilize the ability of food to bring people together and to support and strengthen communities (Siiger 2022; Symons 1994; Sobal & Nelson 2003). The project was inspired by the rich food culture of Lolland-Falster and was anchored in the past, present, and future. The project was led by the museum and developed and carried out in partnership with KOST, a Danish food development studio. With SPIS Ma/eD, Museum Lolland-Falster aimed to create a focal point for the local community and visitors through exploration, celebration, and communication related to the region’s rich food culture. This was not only a journey through history but also an attempt to strengthen the existing community in a part of Denmark facing some of the challenges that rural societies globally are encountering: depopulation, a low level of education, a high level of unemployment and other social challenges. During the project, the museum actively engaged with the challenges in the region, among others, by proactively involving local chefs, ingredients, and products. This supported the goal of contributing to the positive development of the local area, especially in terms of high-end food production and tourist destination development. By employing various communication methods, the project reached an audience that included both locals and tourists. In many ways the project is an example of the contemporary conditions for museums expected to increase visit numbers and contribute to the local development (Gradén and O’Dell 2024).

The project events took several different formats, with the aim of engaging all age groups and social classes. The two main formats, which recurred throughout the entire project period, were an educational programme for school children and a series of “Dining with…” events hosted for a primarily adult audience.

The educational programme consisted of workshops for elementary school children covering topics titled *Coastal Foods, The Land of Fruits, Wild Foods, The Taste of Christmas, and The Richness of the Soil.* Here, the pupils not only learned about old dishes and traditional local ingredients but also gained practical experience in the kitchen. For all workshops, KOST developed recipes that connected to the past but also appeared modern and appealing, as well as challenging to the taste buds of the age group.

At the “Dining with…” events, guests were invited to a meal based on historical ingredients and old recipes, which the project partner, KOST, also adapted to modern tastes. All events took place at museum sites that created an authentic setting for the experience, whether it was a mansion, an old farmhouse or a stone age exhibition at the museum. An intimate atmosphere was achieved by keeping the event small and involving several museum staff members who generated a lively dialogue with the audience. Thus, the uniqueness lay not only in historical meals but also in the way the venues, settings and history were united in communication and enhanced through scent and taste, creating a tactile connection between the past and present. Although all events appeared to be exclusive, the price varied to
provide events for a broad audience across socioeconomic levels.

In total, thirteen different “Dining with…” events were held, with a total audience of just over 500 visitors. An equivalent number of visitors participated in Open Food Laboratories, which were publicly accessible versions of the workshops developed for the educational programme. The five different types of workshops that were part of the educational programme were attended by 40 elementary school classes.

**Methods and Research Design**

Both the workshops for elementary school children and the “Dining with…” events for public audiences were studied through mixed methods research combining qualitative observations and interviews with quantitative questionnaires. At the beginning of each event, one or two individuals, couples, or groups were chosen and asked if an observer could follow them throughout the event. Thus, these participants’ experiences, responses, interactions, and dialogue were observed based on a scheme with preselected themes for observation. A few times during the event, these participants were also asked to describe their experiences and learning. A total of ten groups of pupils from the workshops and 24 individuals, couples, or groups from the “Dining with…” events were observed and interviewed. During the observations, the observer took extensive fieldnotes as well as photos, and immediately after the observation that ended with an interview, the interviewer/observer elaborated on the fieldnotes and noted down what was said in the interview. Thus, the interviews were not recorded, however the systematic scheme with preselected themes for both observation and interview ensured a systematic rendering of data. This data was first analysed with open coding grounded in the data material and then categorised, informed by existing concepts and theories (Kristiansen & Krogstrup 1999; Halikier 2016). The data reduction process resulted in three overall categories: 1) the social aspect of sharing experiences and meals, 2) the dialogical dissemination of cultural history, and 3) sensory engagement through cooking and tasting.

At the end of each event, all participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire. Almost all participants (across genders and age groups) did this, with a total of 603 pupils and 471 participants at “Dining with…” events completing the questionnaire. The observations, interviews, and questionnaires addressed a range of topics regarding how the participants evaluated their experience, what they learned or otherwise gained from the experience, and how the event affected their impression of local culture and food history, etc.

**Findings**

In general, the audience data demonstrate a very positive attitude towards the different types of events – with the majority feeling “Very positive” about their experience at the event.

The inclusion of food in the museum event was a catalyst for a more engaging audience experience. Looking at the words, audiences used to characterize their experiences, educational, inspiring, and interesting were the most common.

Through our analysis of the audience data, it became clear that three elements stood out to audiences, as mentioned above: the social aspect of sharing experiences and meals, the dialogical dissemination of cultural history,
and sensory engagement through cooking and tasting. These elements are analytical categories and by no means mutually exclusive. To varying extent, all three elements were present in every event, as discussed in the following analytical examples.

The data show that the events provided a more abundant museum experience than other types of events previously offered at the museum. Integrating food in atmospheric settings created sensory experiences in which visitors smelled, touched, and tasted history. Moreover, the audience members were no longer merely museum visitors; they engaged in a cooking workshop or a reenacted story where they interacted in authentic surroundings.

**SHARING EXPERIENCES AND MEALS**

Spending time with others is a primary motivation for visiting museums in general (Debenedetti 2003; Dilenschneider 2015; Djupdræt 2019), and this was also found in the audience data from this project. A school pupil formulated it in this way: “It’s nice that we can chat and have fun with each other even though we are actually in class. It’s great to be away from the school on outings.” Here, the social element comprised being together with classmates and doing something different than in the normal school setting.

At the events open to the public, participating alongside a partner or a group of friends was also a valued aspect of the experience. However, the social aspect of the experiences at SPIS Ma/eD transgressed the normal “so-

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**Fig.2.** The audiences’ evaluations of their experience at the event. Question: “How do you evaluate your overall experience at today’s event?” Sample sizes: 598 pupils at the school workshops and 461 audiences at the “Dining with…” events.
The museum staff observed that the participants, whether they were regular museum guests or rarely visited, engaged in talks across groups and contributed by sharing their own stories. As described in the initial theoretical section, when encountering and talking about food, people are often inspired to share stories about themselves through the food itself (Steinberg 2012:89). The immersive, sensory experience is particularly well suited for retrieving memories (Eckersley 2019:110), and one example of this took place at the event called Coffee with the Miller’s Wife: A middle-aged man tried a cake that he had not had since his childhood visits to his grandmother’s house. This recollection of memories was evoked by the aesthetics and the taste of the cake and took

Fig. 3. At the historical cake events, guests ate their way through the cultural history of cake. From medieval fat cakes to the more modern whipped cream cakes, all while the museum curators talked about sweet cuisine. Photo: Museum Lolland-Falster.
him completely by surprise, which inspired him to share his story about the cake and childhood memories with the entire audience and the hosts. This sharing of personal narratives induced by food also contributed to a sense of having coffee or dining with friends or family.

Many visitors also stuck around when the event was over, and the farewell to the museum staff became personal, including thanks and even hugs. This experience was not just the result of a combination of food and storytelling. The setup of these evenings added something extra to the museum experience: it was very much about being together not only with the people that the visitor came to the museum with, but also with the other guests and the staff in a social event more akin to a shared dinner than a museum visit.

At the jubilee dinner at Pederstrup Manor, a group of eight elderly locals participated and shared a table with two of the evaluators of the SPIS Ma/eD project. The conversation around the table naturally revolved around the significance of local foods both historically and today. Towards the end of the dinner, the group of eight also touched upon their perception of the event, and several times, admiration was expressed for the way in which the museum staff acted as professional waiters and hosts. The sense of sharing a meal and an experience smoothed out the differences among the different participants, museum staff and evaluators, and these experiences internalized Claude Fischler’s concept of commensality from the 1970s in reference to the act of eating together:

In apparently all cultures, eating the same food is equated with producing the same flesh and blood, thus making commensals more alike and bringing them closer to each other. The perception that ‘you are what you eat’ seems universal. […] If eating a food makes one become more like that food, then those sharing the same food become more like each other. (Fischler 2011:533.)

Hence, commensality produces bonding and connection with those one shares a meal with and makes people more alike by consuming the same food.

**DIALOGICAL DISSEMINATION OF CULTURAL HISTORY**

Describing their motivation for attending the events, several guests emphasized that it was not just about a museum visit with new inputs and learning, and it was not just a different way to dine out; they came because this was a combination of both learning and eating experiences. Thus, the historical meal was a central part of the motivation for many of the visitors:

It sounded interesting that we could have ‘ancient food’. We didn’t get that of course, as the girls told us, they have no recipes. But still, the food is made with the remains that were found in Lola’s gum, and they really did a good job of that… It was really delicious. (visitor at The Stone Age exhibition Lola.)

At both the school workshops and the “Dining with...” events, the guests had a multisensory experience of cultural history. Through the combination of everyday practices such as cooking and dining and the dissemination of history, the link between the past and the present became clear and personal.

With food at the centre, small moments from the past were recreated. At Pederstrup Manor, a person portraying the historical figure of Count Reventlow welcomed guests, and the beautiful, high-ceiling rooms formed the setting for an imperial-style dinner consisting of 21 dishes prepared on the manor’s original 19th-century...
Soil, in which the pupils cooked dishes based on various historic local legumes. These ingredients transgressed the notion of “traditional Danish food” (which is known primarily for potatoes, gravy, and pork) and were clearly linked to contemporary issues of sustainability and, through the recipes, to a global kitchen. This generated a discussion between two of the pupils who prepared hummus during the workshop. They disagreed about the pronunciation of the word *hummus*. One student who had a migrant background and was very familiar with the dish insisted on a more Middle Eastern pronunciation, while the other pupil insisted on a Danish pronunciation. In this way, the local cultural history of legumes revealed a connection to the diverse everyday experiences and cultural backgrounds of the wood-burning stove. The dishes were prepared based on original recipes used in that specific kitchen, such as a thyme-roasted guinea fowl with chanterelle sauce, a venison ragout and a rose parfait. To complete the immersive experience, dishes were served by staff in historical costumes.

The integration of local foodstuffs and local history with modern cooking changed the visitors’ perceptions of the local area. The questionnaire data demonstrate that both local and nonlocal visitors at “Dining with...” events and school workshops left the event with a more positive attitude towards local food culture. The ways in which cultural history and the everyday lives of the guests merged, opened for diverse and inclusive ways of connecting the past and present. One example was the school workshop titled *The Richness of the* Fig.4. At the museum’s manor Pederstrup, an Empire dinner was served with 21 courses, divided into 3 servings. The food was served on period crockery and by candlelight. During the dinner, the curators talked about the food, the period and the inspiration that influenced them. Photo: Museum Lolland-Falster.
pupils and thus also to the exchange and interconnectness of culinary traditions and the influence of migration on food culture and culinary history (Sandell 2002). This example embodies the dialogical dissemination of cultural history: the cooking sparked an exchange that carried on the dissemination from museum professionals to discussions and exchanges of experiences among pupils participating in a school workshop. It can be seen as an example of using food as a proxy of difficult political issues (such as migration and multiculturalism). An interesting aspect of the way it was done at the museum, was that the categories of belonging and familiarity as well as the link between the past, present and future was complex. This complexity enabled the pupils to engage in an open-ended dialogue about belonging.

Another recurring observation also supports the dialogical element of dissemination. At the “Dining with...” events, a host always opened with stories framing the meal, and soon after a ceaseless humming accompanied the eating. For example, the guests expressed eye-opening insights such as finally understanding that meals once were opened with a pancake dish to ensure that people did not eat too much of the subsequent, more expensive foods such as meats. Other guests shared experiences and knowledge that continued the host’s historical narrative. This highlights the development towards more vitality and dynamism in the static museum experience (Deutsch 2017) and Moon’s (2016) point on the potential of food for bringing historical thinking into public dialogue.

Fig.5. Changes in the audience’s impression of the local food culture. Question: How did your experience today change your impression of the food culture in Lolland-Falster? Sample sizes: 579 pupils at the school workshops and 451 attendees at the “Dining with...” events.
Sensory engagement through cooking and tasting

In the Stone Age exhibition titled *Lola*, the challenge was that the host character, Lola, was not an actual person but rather a reconstruction of a past person based on DNA material and finds from the period. She was portrayed as a girl or a young woman, and analyses have shown that she ate eel, hazelnuts, and duck, among other things. Inspired by these findings, the chef prepared a menu that included these elements. A menu that, unlike the jubilee dinner, for example, did not have much source material to build on, as only individual elements of her diet were known. With the museum exhibition dedicated to Lola being a rather atmospheric setting, the audience had their stone-age meals surrounded by original artefacts, such as tools and hunting weapons, from a time when a girl like Lola may have lived. This event was seasoned with stories from the period, and the menu was adapted to modern palates and adjusted so that dishes were both visually appealing and tasteful. In addition, by using the outdoor museum’s original half-timbered houses and the atmospheric Stone Age exhibition for Lola as a backdrop for the meal, the aim was to transform the experience into an unconventional museum visit from which the guests would depart with more than they expected, including a feeling of connection to the events of the past.

Fig.6. Dinner at LOLA was a very intimate dining experience where guests, chefs and curators were in the exhibition at the same time. They served, ate and communicated while the participants were surrounded by amazing archaeological finds. Photo: Museum Lolland-Falster.
The fact that the menus at the Lola event and other “Dining with...” events were given a modern touch, in both preparation, taste, and expression, made them edible for the guests. Some of the local guests were sceptical of certain dishes, as they remembered them from their childhood. However, with small modern adjustments and the new setting that combined atmosphere and stories, most guests changed their attitude towards the dishes and went home with a fonder memory of an unappealing dish from their childhood. As with the previously mentioned positive food memory brought about by tasting a cake, the audience at other events talked to each other about negative and, for some, almost traumatic childhood food experiences. Food has the potential to enhance memory and prompt timely recollections of childhood. Therefore, these events engaged something deeply personal yet still social: food memory.

In his renowned essay on the sociology of the meal from 1910, Georg Simmel wrote that “of all the things that people have in common, the most common is that they must eat and drink” (Simmel 1997:243). This refers to the primitive individual and universal human need, which becomes the content of a collective act through the meal. If dining had been just about satiety, there would be no need for norms and aesthetics in relation to the meal. However, we comply with social and cultural norms that thrust the bodily and individual basics into the background, and at “Dining with...” events, strangers shared a meal and exchanged memories. By using place cards, the museum staff could deliberately place locals and tourists side by side in order to create dialogues not normally taking place.

In the school workshops, the connection between basic human inclinations and a shared social and cultural experience were also at stake. The pupils were encouraged to taste, smell, and feel the crops and meat they were cooking. The Wild Foods workshop opened with a tasting of three wild smoked meats: red deer, duck, and goose. Echoing the scepticism among the audience of the open events mentioned above, quite a few pupils looked disapprovingly at the plates being passed around, while museum staff talked about the life of the animals and the impact of wild living on the texture and taste of the meat. For some pupils, it was hard to overcome their aversion towards the novel meats that looked raw: as one pupil exclaimed, “It smells and tastes like metal!” In his work on the omnivores’ paradox, Claude Fischler (1988) described this contradictory nexus between humans’ need for variation in their diet and their natural cautiousness towards novelty caused by a necessary basic restraint to avoid poisonous foods. In the workshops, most pupils who approached foods with caution overcame their individual resistance through the experience of collective cooking, listening to stories from the museum staff, and, not least, sharing the meal that concluded the workshops.

Discussion

SPIS Ma/eD can be seen as a part of a broader development in museums: both the tendency to offer a multi-sensory experience as we described in the theory section and the tendency to engage in different ways in societal and political issues. It is clear in our findings that the food-centred dissemination of cultural history in SPIS Ma/eD is more engaging and builds a bridge between history and the everyday life of the visitors. There is no doubt that the visitors had a positive experience and the data shows plenty of examples of positive social
interactions and ways in which the past has been connected to the everyday presence of the visitors and most clearly in the example of the workshop focusing on legumes, also a potential, more sustainable future. SPIS Ma/eD has taken the approach to create what Eckersley calls “a place at the table” without necessarily engaging with the conflictual context in which differences between tourists and locals, the different generations as well as social and cultural groups play a real and important role. As documented in the analysis, sharing experiences, engaging in dialogue and engaging in sensory experiences can create a momentary experience of community. This may contribute to a broader positive development, but if it does not address or allow for differences or conflicts, it might also end up “as a means of ‘restorative nostalgia’, where the complexities and contradictions of difficult or contested pasts are smoothed out, in order to provide an entertaining learning experience for visitors.” (Eckersley 2019:118). In the case of SPIS Ma/eD, it is not so much the past, but the present that might be considered “difficult” due to the structural challenges impacting the local community. These challenges were not directly addressed in the project, though the bridging between tourists and locals and the way in which memories were shared pointed more towards a negotiation and sharing of memories than towards a restorative nostalgia.

Quite a few of the examples point towards a reflective nostalgia that “allows a differentiated perspective on the past in relation to the construction of a new future” (Eckersley 2019:107). One example was the hummus-discussion, demonstrating that the conscious adaptation of historic recipes to modern global food culture based on locally produced ingredients supported a more reflective and open approach to culinary traditions. By rethinking what locals remembered as a terrible dish from their childhood, the project demonstrated how the local area provided high quality ingredients. In this way the project also offered a different picture of a challenged rural area and a potential future reflected also in the interest from outsiders.

The use of food and cultural history is political in the sense that the museum engages in present societal issues, as it has been the intention of Museum Lolland-Falster from the beginning. In this way, the museum understands itself much more as an active part of the community, addressing current societal and political challenges. Doing this through culinary history encompass a range of challenges including more restorative forms of nostalgia. These are definitely present in some of the conversations, for example in the reflection by one of the participants in the jubilee dinner on the severe depopulation of the area and how things were better “in the old days”. The engagement of the museum with broader societal questions like marginalisation and cultural and economic developments has the potential of creating both positive and negative societal impacts. Understanding the ways in which museums engaged in these societal issues, both in the case of SPIS Ma/eD and more generally, requires more research into the impacts of food-based dissemination of cultural heritage. It is necessary to continuously reflect in the political implications of using food as a means for the dissemination of cultural heritage not only at Museum Lolland-Falster, but also at other museums.

**Conclusion**

Coming back to our research question, our findings confirm that cooking and tasting as an integral part of the museum visit expand the audience experience. SPIS Ma/eD gathered
pupils, locals and tourists in shared experiences linking past cultural history to a diverse range of every-day experiences and backgrounds. The changed role of the museum professionals established a new, more equal and engaged relationship between the visitor and the museum. As such, the events also became a way in which the museum engaged in strengthening and building communities. While these communities were only temporary, visitors took home new stories and experiences and – at least intended to – create new practices. The pupils went home from school workshops with recipes and plans to prepare the dishes at home: “Can I take the recipe home to cook with my nachos?” (Pupil participating in The Richness of the Soil). Our questionnaire data gathered at the end of the events showed that tourists left Lolland-Falster with an understanding of the area beyond the widespread story of a marginalized and rural part of the country, and that the local guests gained a new relationship with historic local dishes, ingredients, and history. A clear limitation of the study is that no post-event data has been gathered. The question thus remains: What is the longer-term impact both regarding the perception of the region and the cooking practices of the participants?

The main lesson learned from SPIS Ma/eD is that cooking and dining enrich the museum experience and transform it into a sensory and social event that links history to the everyday lives of museum visitors. Taste and smell immediately connect to memories, and the setting of these events made it possible to share these memories and connect them to the cultural history disseminated by the museum staff.

The positive evaluation of the events by the guests was based on three main elements: the social aspect of sharing experiences and meals, the dialogical dissemination of cultural food history, and sensory engagement through cooking and tasting. The experiences are transferable to other museums, however, not as exact copies of the events or the recipes. The local anchoring in terms of history, culinary traditions and ingredients were key elements in the project’s success. In addition, the commitment of the museum staff to engage in different dissemination practices in which their ability to facilitate hospitable and socially inclusive events was crucial.

Our findings confirm existing research that food enables a more active and engaged museum experience inviting visitors to engage in a public dialogue. Compared to existing research, our analysis of SPIS Ma/eD demonstrate that the potentials of the multisensory and social museum experience are enhanced when food and the food-based activities of cooking and tasting becomes the centre of the museum experience.

Notes

1. This article builds on the evaluation report of the project (Degn, Krogager & Hansen 2023). The report is available online (in Danish only) at https://pure.au.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/335561969/Endelig_EGN_rapport.pdf

2. For a more in-depth description of the project in its entirety for especially museum practitioners wanting to work with food in museum dissemination, see Jensen, Schilling & Christensen (2024)

3. Interview guides, observation schemes, questionnaires etc. can be found in the appendixes of the evaluation report: https://pure.au.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/335561969/Endelig_EGN_rapport.pdf (Degn, Krogager & Hansen 2023).
Literature


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Tasting local history


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