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BREAD-BAKING TRADITIONS INCORPORATED IN A RURAL TOURISM PRODUCT IN LATVIA

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Abstract

Nowadays, enjoying national dishes is considered an essential component of any kind of tourism, as it gives experiences specific to the nation. In tourism, dishes are important to any target audience. There are many nationalities in the world, and they differ from one another in their specific culture and national cuisine. Since ancient times, rye bread has been the main food for Latvians. Today too, rye bread is one of the symbols of Latvian identity and a treat for everyone wishing to get introduced to Latvian culture. Cultural heritage and cultural values are, to some extent, stagnant if not revived and cultivated. Cultural and historical heritage could be learnt through upbringing and education as well as its incorporation in a tourism product. Rye bread, the traditions of baking it, organic and natural foods and the setting – a rural farmstead, a festivity and a bakery where to taste the foods and participate in preparing the foods – could be referred to as the most significant resources with potential for development. Gastronomic tourism is promoted in rural areas, and small enterprises and local governments, considering the economic development of their administrative territories, are particularly interested in the growth of it. The research employed content analysis to analyse the incorporation of bread-baking traditions in rural tourism products in Latvia. An analysis of information available on the websites of municipalities and tourism associations give insight into the awareness and the ways of popularisation of gastronomic tourism. The research aim is to examine the ways how bread-baking traditions are incorporated in rural tourism products in Latvia.

Bread baking traditions-related tourism services are created by entrepreneurs, while local governments and the national government and the non-governmental sector are involved in popularising the offers in the Internet environment. Activities of the private and public sectors aimed at popularising gastronomic tourism involve cooperation, as many websites are interlinked.

Keywords: Bread-Baking Traditions, Rural Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Cooperation, Latvia.

1. Introduction

For centuries, bread has been considered the key food and the main component of nutrition in Latvia. In national folklore, food production is associated with bread. Latvians have identified themselves in their culture and ideology with farmers, a people of ploughmen, and considered countryside the key depository of Latvianness, national stability and traditions. The transition to a market economy in the early 1990s very negatively affected the rural areas of Latvia. Collective farms were liquidated, resulting in high unemployment. Private property ownership was restored, and it was necessary to seek new occupations in rural areas and change the current understanding of rural areas, namely, the rural areas would not represent only the environment for farming and an agricultural upturn would also lead to the overall revitalisation of rural areas. As the share of income from agricultural activity in the total net income of households decreased in Latvia, new mechanisms for generating income from alternative economic activities had to be created (Eglite, 2004). One of such economic activities was rural tourism. In Latvia, rural tourism has developed dynamically for almost 20 years, and the generation of entrepreneurs engaged in this activity changes and so does the rural tourism.

The new EU rural policy is based on the Cork Declaration (1986) and Salzburg Conference (2003) decisions that envisage balanced rural development, the application of an integrated rural approach and economic diversification in rural areas. In recent decades in Latvia, rural areas have become more attractive and offer various kinds of natural landscapes, thereby turning rural tourism into a serious source of economic diversification that is integrated into agricultural activities.

The food produced by farmers in Latvia could be characterised as follows: domestic, chemical-free, organic, tasty, healthy etc. Latvians have always given a place of honour on the table to bread, which symbolises prosperity. A cultural canon – a set of the most outstanding and important cultural values – has been created both in European countries and in Latvia, which represents the most significant cultural achievements. Its section National Traditions refers to a cultural value such as rye bread. To meet the market demand for bread, large industrial-scale bakeries are used, yet former food recipes and traditions are kept and passed on from generation to generation in families and at school, and bread-baking traditions are incorporated in rural tourism products, thus familiarising tourists with the traditions. Content analysis was employed to analyse the ways bread-baking traditions are incorporated in rural tourism products in Latvia. An analysis of publications and studies placed on the websites of municipalities and tourism associations give insight into the awareness and the ways of popularisation of the relevant issue. The research aims to identify the ways how bread-baking traditions are incorporated in rural tourism products in Latvia.

2. Value of Bread in Latvian Culture

Culture and the system of human values are inextricably linked. The values recognised by the civilised society as classical serve as a guide. Each era brings its own views and values. Any cultural environment formed as a result of the economic and social activities of individuals and keeps the traces of the activities. N.L.Gage and D.C.Berliner associate a cultural environment with a group of individuals sharing similar views and symbols and interpreting things and phenomena in a similar way (Geidžs, Berliners, 1999). Knowledge of the cultural environment is maintained and passed on to next generations through communication. It is the tangible and intangible heritage that attracts individuals and could be the basis for effective marketing and economic and social development. Tangible cultural heritage represents all the evidence that is, to some extent, a physical embodiment of cultural values. Intangible cultural heritage represents traditional culture and folklore or the popular culture that is created or practised; it is directly linked with the “place” – the individuals, their traditions and their knowledge.

Along with other elements, intangible cultural heritage encompasses the native language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, crafts, architecture and other arts. The mentioned elements should be complemented by the traditional forms of communication and information. The concept of traditional culture refers to the part of national cultural heritage that is associated with inheriting collective traditions within society (or some social group). It encompasses the native language, mythology, rituals, customs, national festivities, oral folklore, music, dance, gesticulation, crafts, gastronomy, traditional medicine etc. Traditional culture is the “invisible”, intangible part of national cultural heritage that is preserved through being passed on to next generations, yet nowadays it is converted into a tangible form – written records, descriptions, sound records, books etc. This gives an opportunity to revitalise the traditional culture in society, thus strengthening the cultural identity of the nation (Kaufmane, Paula, 2007).

Cultural heritage, cultural values are to some extent frozen if not being revitalised and nurtured. Cultural and historical heritage is learnt through upbringing, education or cultural or cognitive tourism. The scientific value of it is determined by how much information about an environment, activity or object could be acquired through getting familiarised with it (Kaufmane, Eglīte, 2017). National dishes are part of the unique cultural and historical heritage and different identity of any nation. National dishes are prepared from the foods available in the local area and have specific names that often could not be translated into another language. In Latvia, the nation’s values in relation to national dishes are identified and nurtured, without denying other potential values. National dishes and beverages are represented in the code of sacral values in many nations, including Latvia, yet the value most often referred to is rye bread, which is raised above the everyday food, granting it a special status and placing it in first position in the register of symbolic dishes (Kursīte, s.a.).

For Latvians, bread is life, and it is a value in our culture, pertaining to both the secular and the spiritual realms. Rye bread has always been one of the main dishes in Latvian homes, and today it is also one of the symbols of Latvian culture. Rye bread is included in the canon of Latvian culture, section National Traditions, giving the following explanation: "In Latvian cuisine, bread has always been the main dish giving satiety. Bread is also an object of culture: so much folklore – beliefs, magic, and prophecies – pertains to preparing no dish other than it. Step by step – from dough mixing to placing the loaf on the table and slicing the loaf. Special rituals of respect and blessing are dedicated to bread. Nowadays, rye bread is one of the symbols of Latvian culture – a treat for everyone who wants to get introduced to Latvian culture and a souvenir to be taken home by foreigners –, and Latvians themselves take it with themselves in order to have a sense of home while being abroad (Canon of Latvian Culture). Just like in other European countries, in Latvia too a canon of culture represents a set of the most outstanding and important works of art and cultural values that reflects the most important achievements of the nation in the field of culture. In Latvia, sweetened rye bread is a kind of naturally fermented bread baked of coarse rye flour; the bread-making technology involves parboiling the flour and preparing the sourdough starter. This kind of bread is baked on a hot floor oven; the loaf is of elongated shape, it weighs a kilogram or several kilograms and its crust is smooth and dark, which is coated with starch paste or water after baking it (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013).

Former Latvians paid a lot of attention to everyone involved in bread-baking: sowers, ploughmen, millers and bakers. At present in Latvia, only small local bakeries keep this bread-baking tradition alive. The bakeries produce genuine rye bread according to various recipes having different nuances. In Latvia, there are still families that have preserved the tradition of baking bread at home, as well as some cafes and restaurants serve guests our special rye bread in small quantities with the main course. The fact that bread played an important role in the lives of people is indicated by various customs related to baking, preparing and eating the bread. For example, in former times it was advised to start slicing a loaf of bread from its thicker side in order for rye ears to grow larger. Former people also tried not to drop bread crumbs because it was considered to be a sin. If bread fell on the ground, it was picked up and kissed, thus giving respect and thanks to it.

Earlier, on 25 July people celebrated St Jacob's Day, which was traditionally dedicated to new bread. In this way, people marked the end of haymaking, which was followed by rye and barley harvest. St Jacob's Day was also marked as the day of bread when a loaf of new rye bread was put on the table and everyone had to eat a small piece of bread in silence in order to feel the joy about the new harvest, rethink of the long way to go from sowing a seed to having bread. The newly-baked bread was, first of all, tasted by the host and afterwards all the others tasted it (History of Bread in Latvia, 2015). A mark was made on the loaf of elongated shape by use of fingers or the side of the palm. Most often, it was a cross, an oblique cross or stripes. The entire loaf was never taken out of home in order not to lend someone else the blessing. The loaf was sliced by the host or hostess, making a cross under the loaf with the knife before it. Answering a question "What is more valuable than gold?" by saying "bread", we think of food in general. Bread is respected in Latvian oral folklore – in proverbs, sayings and folksongs.

Rye and barley in particular are the most ancient cereals suited to local natural conditions. Being the best sower, harvester, baker and the one who plies with bread was a matter of honour. Today, Bread Day as a meeting with bakers is celebrated around this time in various places in Latvia – in Araisi, Rucava and elsewhere.

3. Bread in Consumption Today

Latvia has ancient bread-baking traditions and a very broad assortment of bread. In Latvia, bread is very tasty, and its quality has been appreciated beyond the national borders. Latvia is a country that is proud of strong bread-baking traditions and an enviable broad assortment. The specifics of the bread market could be characterised by the general public's awareness of bread as an important food, and most of the population perceive it as the most important food. Latvian traditional bread is baked today in the same way as it was baked in former times, using the recipes of our ancestors. Rye bread is often taken abroad to Latvian nationals so that they do not forget the "taste of fatherland" or taken with oneself when traveling.

The bread market gradually changes (Eglīte, Kunkulberga, Vilciņa, 2007). The bread market could be used as an indicator of life quality across various social groups. As the standard of living rises, bread consumption declines. In recent years, bread consumption tended to stabilise, and bread was not a necessity because of a higher standard of living. The population have a greater choice to choose the product that fits their perception of life quality and a healthy lifestyle.

According to surveys, rye bread consumption across all the socio-demographic respondent groups rose in recent ten years. According to the respondents, they tended to consume more rye bread because the quality and assortment of rye bread increased. The statistics, however, reported an opposite trend.

According to studies, wheat bread is chosen by consumers based on price, while a creation for the choice of rye bread was the manufacturer. Many consumers are in search of their bread as a source of healthy nutrition. Consumers are loyal to their chosen kind of bread and producer even if the quality (temporarily) has not been high (Eglīte, Kunkulberga, 2015).

Rye bread is an excellent source of energy. Its components enhance the health of teeth, optimise the performance of the digestive tract, normalise the levels of cholesterol and sugar in blood, protect against cardiovascular diseases. In Latvia, rye bread is both a traditional countryside bread and a bread of excellent quality, as climatic conditions in Latvia are suited to produce rye of excellent quality (Eglīte, Freytag-Leyer, 2015).

To contribute to the preservation of rye bread consumption traditions for next generations, bread producers, for whom national values are important, popularise rye bread at schools and preschool education institutions through a free rye bread programme. The Latvian Association of Bakers declared 2005 a year of Rye Bread. Latvian bakers actively participate in various public events – city festivals, symposiums as well as exhibitions where they popularise rye bread.

A survey conducted by the authors revealed that the respondents' spontaneous associations with rye bread were as follows: tasty, good bread, national, patriarchal and traditional values, healthiness, dark brown colour, smell (Table 1).

Table 1. Consumer Opinions about Rye Bread

Typical expressions	Situation/ meal	Consumed together with	Target audience
Rye bread is a Latvian/national product; Rye bread is a traditional product; Rye bread is a healthy product; Rye bread is a bread for the entire family.	Dessert – in lunch, supper; It is similar to sweet-and-sour bread, as it is difficult to use rye bread with other foods because of the specific taste of it; It is similar to the main course, as it gives satiety; It is strong, you can consume a lot of it; 1-2 slices a day are enough. One loaf of wheat bread = 2 slices of rye bread.	- bacon; - honey; - cheese; - sugar; - main courses; with nothing else or with butter, margarine.	-There is a notion from Soviet times that rye bread is a bread consumed by the rural population; - bread for those doing physical work; - bread for 30-60 years old men; - Bread with fruits and other additives – for elegant women and wealthy female gourmets.

The respondents expressed an opinion that “today it is not enough that an individual is told that rye bread is a good bread. The consumer is “more demanding and more educated, things have to be explained from the scientific perspective and it is required to stress some research findings that draw attention, and the consumer is lost in thoughts”. Several participants of the discussion had seen an advertisement for rye bread with a map of Latvia in the background. The advertisement stressed

“healthiness” rather than “Latvianness”, trademarks and a special taste: “The emphasis has to be placed on healthiness, fibre and “convincing evidence”; more stress has to be put on the advantages and functionality of the product – it should be bought not because you are a Latvian but because the product gives strength and energy to do more work – just like batteries do” (Eglīte, Kunkulberga, Vilciņa, 2007).

A survey conducted in 2007 allowed concluding that the possible reasons for the decreasing consumption of rye bread, in the opinion of the respondents, could be a lack of effective advertisements for rye bread as a product of high nutritional value and a lack of new products in the segment of rye bakery products (Kunkulberga, Straumīte, Eglīte, 2007).

At present, however, the assortment of rye bread with various additives is very broad. Rye bread with fruits and nuts has been a delicacy in demand in Latvia for a long time, while foreigners are surprised about the compatibility of rye with fruits. Familiarising German students with various kinds of rye bread – traditional rye bread and sweet-and-sour bread as well as rye bread with fruits –, surprising research findings were made. The German students rated traditional rye bread the highest. In contrast, the respondents coming from other world regions other than Europe (the Far East) rated the innovative solution – rye bread with fruits – the highest, which could be explained by that region population’s stronger sense of sweet taste (Eglīte, Freytag-Leyer, 2015).

The previous research studies focused on how to encourage the population to consume more rye bread, while a research study seeking to identify whether a foreign tourist is interested in rye bread has not been done yet. German tourists could be certainly attracted by catchwords about Latvianness and genuineness. A catchword about innovations should be reserved for tourists from the Far East who can combine their sense of fruit taste with an unusual additive – rye bread.

4. Incorporation of Bread-Baking Traditions into Rural Tourism Products

Bearers and preservers of traditional culture are needed to keep intangible cultural heritage alive. The environment is also important, as intangible cultural heritage is associated with a particular place or context. Intangible cultural heritage too could be turned into a tourism product, thereby popularising it. Usually, both tangible and intangible cultural values are incorporated in a tourism product. However, intangible cultural heritage in particular creates more challenges to the tourism industry, as it is more important to tourists. A tourist can get a deeper understanding of the tourist destination if s/he had participated in local traditions, festivals and craftsmen workshops or visited the local marketplace (Kaufmane, 2007).

In the globalised world, tourists seek ethnic, cultural and historical peculiarities – everything that is characteristic of the particular culture. Ethnic factors are usually associated with cultural and historical ones, which are among the most important geographic factors in tourism geography (Kaufmane, Eglīte, 2017).

Today in Latvia, the issue of cultural environment quality and attractiveness has become much more urgent at the municipality level and from the population perspective. When it comes to sustainable territorial development, natural environment preservation is usually strongly stressed, yet recently cultural environment preservation has become a focus as well. The perception of rural areas as a whole has also changed in the second half of the 20th century. The preservation and enhancement of the rural environment is one of the key requirements of EU policies for the Member States. The philosophical basis of rural policies is the idea of balance. Incorporating cultural heritage in a tourism product, one essential aspect has to be taken into consideration – not all cultural values have potential for tourism. Initially, the choice of cultural heritage and tourism sites and objects is done by the local public, and this choice is determined not by potential for tourism but by other considerations. These could be unusual objects of local significance, traditions, occupations characteristic of the local community, applied arts etc.

The more numerous and diverse tourism resources are, the greater the possibilities are to create new, innovative products for tourists. Under favourable conditions, culinary heritage could serve as a resource and idea generator for creative industries that directly contribute to both the national economy and tourism by designing cultural goods and services. Incorporating cultural heritage elements in tourism products fosters small and medium enterprises that particularly contribute to the

socio-economic viability of rural communities and environmental sustainability in the regions, innovation and creativity.

Food is a necessity of any tourist, and catering is one of the integral and key components of the tourism industry. Gastronomic tourism is one of the newest kinds of tourism, with a few-decades-long history, yet it has become one of the sub-kinds of cultural tourism. Cultural tourism specialists B.Mckercher and H.Du.Cros too consider gastronomic tourism to be a sub-kind of cultural tourism and a form of travel, the key purpose of which is to enjoy diverse, often national or local specific foods and beverages (Makkerčers, Krosa, 2007). The most important resources with potential for development are the dishes and cooking traditions that involve organic, natural produce and a specific setting – manor houses, palaces, castles, restaurants and farmsteads – where to participate in cooking and enjoy the dishes. Rye bread is one of such dishes. Small enterprises and local governments, which are interested in economic growth in their administrative territories, are particularly interested in incorporating rye bread in tourism products. Local food producers and farmers too are among those interested in it, as it gives them an extra opportunity to increase their sales owing to an increase in the number of consumers in municipalities. Rye bread is not only a food – it is also an object of culture: so much national knowledge and folklore – beliefs, magic, and prophecies – pertains to preparing no dish other than it – from dough mixing to placing the loaf on the table and slicing the loaf. The traditions might slightly vary across municipalities, which makes similar tourism products even more interesting. Analysing tourism services advertised on the websites of municipalities on Latvia, the authors sought the tourism products associated with rye bread and related traditions. The research identified several ways how rye bread-related traditions were incorporated in tourism products (Figure 1).

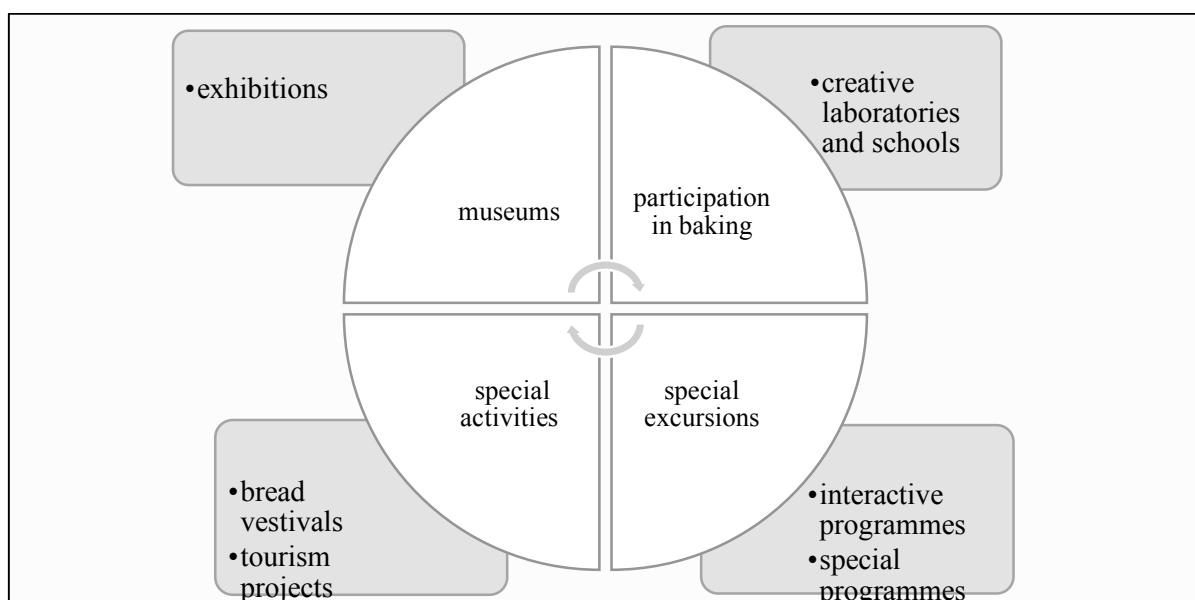


Figure 1. Ways of Incorporating Rye Bread-Related Traditions in Tourism Products

One of the ways of incorporating rye bread-related traditions in tourism products involves a museum. In Aglona, there is a museum of bread where visitors can see the way of making bread from the stage of grain to a ready loaf and can participate in this process. The museum offers bread tasting (and herbal teas) with theatrical performances for baptism, weddings, anniversaries, etc. The museum also offers freshly baked bread and works of local craftsmen. On Saturdays, the museum “Pastarins” offers an entertainment programme Saturday in the Farmstead, in which visitors are familiarised with country life and daily rural work. Visitors can also witness the bread-baking traditions of the end of the 19th century, bake a loaf themselves and participate in Latvian anniversary festivities. A special laboratory was opened in Kazdanga Palace. In the laboratory, visitors have an opportunity to participate in various workshops, acquiring new skills and knowledge. As the interest in traditional Latvian cultural values increased, the first Bread School opened its doors to visitors.

All the municipalities of Latvia give tourists an opportunity to visit farmsteads or small bakeries where bread is baked according to ancient traditions – dough is parboiled in a kneading trough, kneaded with love; loaves are placed on maple leaves in an oven heated with firewood. Visitors have an opportunity to make and bake a loaf and take the loaf home.

An analysis of differences in tourism products revealed two main approaches:

- small visitor groups (up to 20 people) are given an opportunity to participate in the bread-baking process;
- hostesses demonstrate the bread-baking process and offer an opportunity to taste or purchase the bread.

Some festivities are associated with bread baking, e.g. Bread Day as a meeting with bakers is celebrated in various places in Latvia – in Araisi, Rucava and elsewhere particularly on St Jacob's Day, which is celebrated in Latvia on 25 June as Host Day.

The CraftHouse of Drabesi Manor is engaged in the project Passing on Bread Baking Traditions in Cesis County. In Cesis Palace, it offers an interactive programme Bread Baking Traditions in the Middle Ages – the bread is baked in a reconstructed genuine outdoor oven in the garden of the palace.

The analysis of the tourism services advertised on various websites allows concluding that the same tourism products were marketed by several organisations, which indicated mutual cooperation among a number of persons or enterprises or a cooperation network (Figure 2) aimed at achieving interlinked goals based on information exchange.

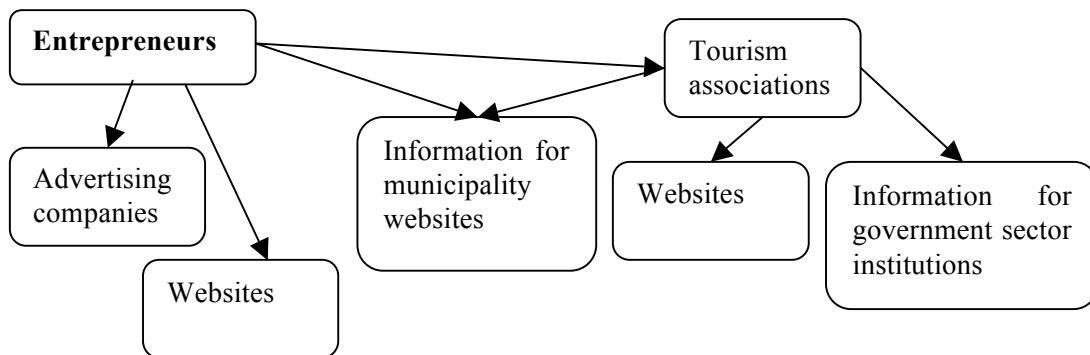


Figure 2. Cooperation Network for the Popularisation of Rye Bread through Rural Tourism Products

As shown in Figure 2, all the sectors are involved in popularising tourism products, and the target audience could be better reached if the relevant information is available on various websites. Visiting some place, tourists can find information about tourism services provided in the nearest vicinity on the website of the municipality. Government sector organisations and regional tourism associations publish relevant information on their websites and also make it available at market tourism exhibitions and in international tourism markets.

Rye bread is a unique resource, the rational exploitation of which takes the following forms:

- active cooperation aimed at preserving local cultural heritage;
- uniqueness of local cultural heritage is emphasised relative to the other regions;
- tourism development programmes are designed, stressing the role and uniqueness of local resources.

5. Conclusions

In Latvian culture, rye (black) bread is raised above everyday food, granting it a special status and placing it in first position in the register of symbolic dishes as well preserving the various traditions related to baking, preparing and eating bread and passing them on to next generations.

Today too cultural traditions are a factor affecting consumption habits. Rye bread consumption habits are associated with centuries-long cultural traditions and national mentality. Rye bread consumption is steady, and large bread producers diversify the assortment of rye bread.

Rye bread baking-related traditions are incorporated in rural tourism products in all the regions of Latvia. The entrepreneur activities could be considered to be innovative and attractive not only by national but also by foreign tourists.

In popularising rural tourism products, entrepreneurs are supported by local governments and producer associations, which indicates organised cooperation aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of rural tourism services.

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