

Cosmopolitans of regionalism

Gerosa, Alessandro

DOI:

[10.1080/10253866.2020.1731483](https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2020.1731483)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Gerosa, A 2020, 'Cosmopolitans of regionalism: dealers of omnivorous taste under Italian food truck economic imaginary', *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 30-53.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2020.1731483>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Cosmopolitans of Regionalism: production and consumption of omnivorous taste under Italian food truck imaginary

Alessandro Gerosa ^a

^a Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Milano, Italy

ARTICLE HISTORY

Compiled October 24, 2021

ABSTRACT

Cultural omnivorousness has gained relevance as suitable theory to explain contemporary patterns of consumption, but the actual dealing of omnivorous taste by economic actors and businesses has been mostly overlooked. Through an ethnographic research, this article explores how Italian gourmet food truckers concretely produce claims of authenticity for omnivorous seekers. First, the adoption of the perspective of food truckers allows to uncover the reflexive and market-bounded nature of the omnivorous taste reproduction. Moreover, to be authentic becomes an imperative for tastemakers, imposed by the economic imaginary. Finally, the centrality of regionalism in the Italian production of authenticity suggests that localism, too, has been subsumed by global food imaginaries and that regionalism expresses a cosmopolitan attitude. Taken together, these findings allow the integration of an existing theory of food cultural omnivorousness: gourmet food must be authentic to be recognized by omnivores and distinctive to be successful on markets.

KEYWORDS

food; regionalism; authenticity; cultural omnivorousness; economic imaginary;

1. Introduction

It's an ordinary evening with friends outside the usual pub in my city, until I see a food truck stopping at the other side of the road. I quickly convince my friends to go and get acquainted with them. Behind the counter there are two men in their sixties. They look as dirty as their truck, and they talk a broken Italian with heavy dialect accent. We order a classical sandwich with horseshoe-shaped salami [a typical popular street food from Lombardy] while we continue to talk, giving them pieces of advice about the best days for them to come and park their truck by the pub. They decide to thank us by offering some very bad looking greasy deep fried pork rinds: I volunteer to eat the course. Then I notice that, on the right corner of the truck, a piece of cardboard was attached with a scotch tape: on it they wrote with a marking pen "The real Arccia porchetta [Ariccia is an Italian town renowned for porchetta]". Luckily, the sandwiches are delicious and we greet them.

(Ethnographic notes)

The protagonists of this short experience are a good example of the Italian traditional 'scuzzy', a street food vendor characterized by low-quality but abundant courses

CONTACT Alessandro Gerosa. Email: alessandro.gerosa@unimi.it; Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1291-2923>.

cooked in precarious hygienic conditions. Being the Italian equivalent of American 'roach coaches', people usually refer to them using the word 'scuzzo' in their own regional dialect ('*zozzone*', '*svunch*', '*caddozzone*', '*zuzzuso*', etc.).

The striking feature about this episode was that, albeit very far from the gourmet food truck model, these men were still striving in their own way to label their food as 'authentic'. Their popular wisdom and intuition for business were enough to make them clearly understand that a trend was ongoing, and to label their product as the 'real' *porchetta* from Ariccia was an important attractive factor for customers. In other words, although the accuracy of the label was undermined by both the gaze (Ariccia was wrongly spelled and written on a cardboard) and the taste (the greasy fried pork rinds being definitely outside the canons of 'gourmet food') they were influenced by and tried to incorporate what we define as the 'economic imaginary' (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008) of gourmet food trucks, and the related 'culinary imaginary'.

Food trucks are an economic trend that is spreading quickly in the United States and worldwide as well. In a recent report in which America is defined as the 'Food Truck Nation', the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation states that the revenues of the sector grew from a 'relative nonexistence in 2008' to \$650 million of revenues in 2014 and \$2.6 billion of revenues in 2017 (Hendrix and Bodwish 2018).

The rise of a 'gourmet food truck' scene relying on the concept of authenticity (Irvin 2017) can be related to the rise of a cultural omnivorous predisposition also in food consumption (Emontspool and Georgi 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2015, 2007; Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999), close to the corresponding consumption trends observed in music (Peterson 2013), literature (Purhonen, Gronow, and Rahkonen 2010), art (López-Sintas and Katz-Gerro 2005), television (Lizardo and Skiles 2009) and consumption in digital spheres (Airoldi, Beraldo, and Gandini 2016).

Italy, a country with a historically rooted and recognized food culture (Heltosky 2004), is no exception neither regarding the observed shift toward a culturally omnivore appetite, nor toward the growing diffusion of a relevant 'gourmet food truck' economic imaginary: according to a report recently published by the Italian Union of the Chambers of Commerce, the number of registered mobile street food businesses has grown from 1717 to 2729 businesses from 2013 to 2018, with a growth of 58,9% (Unioncamere and InfoCamere 2018). Remarkably, and unlike the American and global trend, companies owned by foreigners constitute just a scarce minority of the total, only 12%.

This trend, to which corresponds a similar growth of 'food gourmet festivals' and a mixed audience of middle-class curious seekers of typical delicacies, confirms the relevance of Italy as an interesting case study to further explore contemporary production and consumption of taste in the age of cultural omnivorousness: the great variety of the Italian food culture and the marginal penetration of ethnic and foreign food cultures, together with the corresponding relevance of regional and typical products, made it possible for the imaginary of 'gourmet food truck' to graft itself on the historic Italian peculiarities, generating specific outcomes.

In fact, although omnivorous patterns of consumption in Italy are still an almost unexplored academic topic with rare exceptions (Zanchini 2012), Italy as culinary landscape currently seems to fit very well with cultural omnivorousness theory, but at the same time shows interesting variations. If exoticism has been generally observed as a symbolic marker of omnivorous taste (Johnston and Baumann 2007), in the Italian culinary landscape its influence is much limited by a difficult penetration of foreign food (if compared to other countries) and its role is mainly taken up by other concepts as typicality, as we will develop in the research. Therefore in this context the omnivorous

palate is satiated by the rehabilitation of a vast variety of recipes and ingredients belonging to city and local traditions, largely disregarded from the second half of the twentieth century, resulting in the production of a regionally-oriented authenticity.

This article, thus, aims to contribute both empirically and theoretically to the studies on food tasting production and consumption through an ethnography of the Italian gourmet food truck scene, principally composed of interviews with micro-entrepreneurs and participant observation of street-food festivals and public events organized by food trucks.

Firstly we will concentrate on food truckers as dealers of taste, contributing to the understanding of what their self-perceived boundaries of the gourmet food trucks scene are, to the analysis of the processes through which authenticity is concretely claimed and labeled as gourmet through taste. Second, the difficult task of making a sense of taste (Korsmeyer 2002) will be addressed in its literal meaning, assessing the role of taste and other senses in the production of a proper promise of taste, performed by food truckers through a vast array of tactics, to sell their own food during public events and festivals in order to reach economic viability.

From these findings a series of empirical and theoretical contributions can be formulated. The double identity of food truckers as economic as well as cultural actors enables to assert the reflexive and market-bounded nature of omnivorous taste production, and to lay the foundations of a 'cultural political economy' of omnivorous taste production. The analysis of the economic imaginary in its dimension of a normative system makes it possible to interpret authenticity also as an imperative, to 'be authentic', similarly to the 'be creative' (McRobbie 2014) imperative existing in the broader creative economy. Finally we call to integrate and strengthen food consumption theories under the cultural omnivorousness paradigm. On the basis of our empirical findings, we contend that the food truck economic imaginary under the Italian taste regime (Arsel and Bean 2013) shows a marginalization of exotic and ethnic food (more so of whatever is foreign in general) but a great relevance of regionalism, without a backward modification of the cosmopolitan attitude of the actors involved in the imaginary. From this evidence we advance a contribution on the analysis of the labels through which food becomes 'gourmet' and pleasing for the omnivorous palate.

2. Context and literature review

2.1. *Cultural omnivorous food consumption and cosmopolitan attitude*

The renowned core concept of cultural omnivorousness theory is that in contemporary forms of consumption the high and middle class preferences shifted from a highbrow taste for a unique elitist category to an omnivorous appetite for a plurality of tastes, through the appropriation of precedent lowbrow (sub-)cultures (Peterson and Kern 1996). Further evidence suggested that the cultural omnivorous attitude of people should not be valued on the basis of the quantitative breadth of their tastes, but rather on a combination of their taste schemes, or discourses (van Eijck and Lievens 2008).

As already exposed in the introduction, the concept of cultural omnivorousness has been inspected in various and most different spheres, suggesting its broad validity as a general model fitted to explain contemporary consumption, although significantly Rossman and Peterson (2015) replicating Peterson's seminal research ten years later found that the omnivorous attitude of consumers, measured with the same scales

of ten that was used before, decreased rather than increased. Besides, (Katz-Gerro 2002) comparing different national omnivorous consumers showed great variances in the explicit labels used: these two empirical contributions call to the assessment of its fluid and iridescent nature, looking for variations and the evolution of the phenomenon so as to integrate and strengthen the theory. Moreover, a study from Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal (2007) questioned the self-consciousness and commitment of cultural omnivores with empirical evidence of more bland schemes of adherence to the model, suggesting further attention to the parterre of customers.

Cultural omnivorousness is not the end of the distinction processes through cultural tastes (Bourdieu 2013), it is, instead, a cultural disposition (Lizardo and Skiles 2012) through which the continuation of the same aspiration, that is modified to adapt to a different cultural and economic context, is aimed.

The omnivorous taste in food consumption has been contended firstly by Warde, Martens, and Olsen (1999) through an exploration of the variety of restaurant cuisines searched by patrons in England. Since then, a little attention has been dedicated to this consumption realm with regards to taste and the omnivorous attitude, following a general disinterest in sociological studies for the topic of food consumption (Warde and Martens 2000).

Further attention to the topic has been devoted by Johnston and Baumann in an influential paper on the new gourmet food scene in the US (Johnston and Baumann 2007), in which the authors first expose how the new food cultural consumption is characterized by tensions between democracy and distinction, then analyze authenticity and exoticism as the two frames through which American gourmet food is legitimized as such based on the discourse and content analysis on gourmet food media and magazines. The thesis of the paper has then been expanded in a monograph on Foodies (Johnston and Baumann 2015) with the same core assumptions.

Authenticity, described as the product of a continuous interaction between tradition and originality, can be broken down into a wide array of dimensions: Geographic Specificity, Simplicity, Personal Connection, History and Tradition, and Ethnic Connection (Johnston and Baumann 2015). Exoticism is more generally defined as a frame based on the 'culinary other', relying on concepts of unusualness and foreignness (Johnston and Baumann 2007). It has to be noted that, for the authors, the two frames 'often represent significantly different, distinctive qualities [...] often in ways that are mutually exclusive' (Johnston and Baumann 2015, p.87).

Cosmopolitanism in this context is first conceptualized by Johnston and Baumann (2007) as a concept very similar to omnivorousness, while it becomes one of the two phenomena (the other being neo-colonialism) from which the exotic label derives in the monograph (Johnston and Baumann 2015). More recently, another research exploring New Nordic Food consumption and cosmopolitanism argued that the concept of cosmopolitan consumption has a broader validity to indicate foodies attitudes toward distinction (Emontspool and Georgi 2017).

The strict link of cosmopolitanism with omnivorous consumption is deducible from the birth of the latter concept: Peterson himself wrote that he took into consideration cosmopolitanism as a 'useful alternative' way to define the phenomenon before opting for cultural omnivorousness (Peterson 2005b). To better assess cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan attitude becomes then necessary for the aims of our research, especially since its success led to its use in a vast and heterogeneous variety of meanings (Vertovec and Cohen 2003).

First at all, we shall adopt Becks distinction between a 'philosophical cosmopolitanism', existing just as an intellectual speculation and ideological assertion, and 'really

existing cosmopolitanism', that is being always embedded in the real world and is a mix between cosmopolitan and national culture (Beck 2006). In this sense, cosmopolitan and national culture are clearly conflicting but not irreconcilable: cosmopolitanism itself can be thought of as globalization internal to the national state (Beck 2002), which has been also observed while analyzing the interrelations between cosmopolitan food culture and the American national one (Johnston, Baumann, and Cairns 2010). Cosmopolitanism can be indeed defined as a 'third culture' (Featherstone 1995) that enables the individual to seek cultural variety and identify himself as belonging to transnational values and ideals.

In any case, Cosmopolitanism does not equate with concrete transnational life habits, but it must rather be conceived as an outlook (Roudometof 2005). This specification is necessary not to negate the existing connection between cosmopolitanism and middle-class and high-class status (Featherstone 2002), but to assess the fact that it concerns an ampler number of people than the narrow minority that actually travels globally. To reach the conclusions of our review of cosmopolitanism, we can broadly identify 'cosmopolitans' as people with a cosmopolitan attitude, defined as the ensemble of peoples opinions, attitudes, values and orientation (Mau, Mewes, and Zimmermann 2008), also if under some specific conditions: they still need to be members of the middle-class or of lower-middle class, and they must be in such a condition that adherence to cosmopolitan values is an active choice and not a passive constraint.

Lastly our empirical main standing point, the one of micro-entrepreneurs dealing taste through gourmet food trucks, calls us to pay attention to the economic regimes of accumulation and market structures in which the cultural omnivorous taste is produced. DiMaggio (1977), reviewing its contemporary studies on mass culture and mass society, suggested that they were mostly underestimating the fact that cultural items were produced by economic actors posited in specific markets, and that therefore core characteristics of mass culture could have been analyzed (and should have been) as attributes of industries as well as of societies. This same consideration can be applied to contemporary studies on cultural omnivorousness.

If mass culture and mass consumption were the complementary counterparts of Fordism, which promoted the consumption of standardized, mass-produced commodities (Jessop 1992), since the eighties, a 'New Spirit of Capitalism' emerged and tactically incorporated the criticism of massification, standardization and commodification of society, while promoting individual autonomy, singularity, and authenticity (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) through consumption.

To define this 'new spirit of capitalism' regime of accumulation is definitely beyond the intentions and the possibilities of this article. What is relevant to the aims of the paragraph is, however, to point out how the values promoted by this 'post-fordist' new capitalistic spirit are well fitting with the omnivorous disposition for a singular and authentic (as opposed to a mass-produced and standardized) combination of plural tastes. Peterson and Kern (1996) ignored economic processes when they listed the factors that contributed to the shift, and, as far as it is known by the author, no other research has given much attention to this dimension. If precedent researches have been devoted to the role of media, demonstrating their centrality in the production and circulation of omnivorous taste (Johnston and Baumann 2007), this analysis is meant to fill the exposed gap and to address the relevance of the economic actors (food-truckers) and the markets in which they are posited (the 'gourmet food-truck' economic imaginary) for the reproduction and dealing of cultural omnivorous taste for people with cosmopolitan attitudes.

2.2. *The context: Italian food culture and taste*

Italy is by 2017 the EU member with most PDO, PGI and TSG certificated food products: they are precisely 818 on a total of 2979, followed by France (681) and Spain (327) (Ismea-Qualivita 2018). These certifications are granted by EU to specific food or wine products the quality of which depends on the production in a specific local territory. Although the importance of these certifications on customers choices has been questioned, the labels are associated with the high quality and genuineness or authenticity of the product (Grunert and Aachmann 2016). Italy is indeed a country with a recognized food variety and diversity, and seems capable to build a link between its food and local territories. It becomes then fundamental to understand the origins of Italian food peculiarities, its history, and connect it with the developments in tastes and food service economy.

Italian culinary diversity is indeed a phenomenon rooted in its history, with a myth of the 'Arcadian dream of domestic self-sufficiency' that is present since the Roman times (Capatti and Montanari 2003, pp.1-2) and modern Italian food culture, dominated by regionalism and typical dishes varying from town to town, delineated from Renaissance books like *Opera* by Scappi, in which three different gastronomic Italies did exist, each associated with a city that incarnates its gastronomic culture (namely Milan, Rome and Naples), surrounded by a vast array of other minor food cultures represented by other important cities such as Venice, Florence, Genoa and other ones (Capatti and Montanari 2003, pp.11-16). Scappi's book is a continuous play of gastronomic similarities and variations that show the great diversity in the food landscape of the peninsula, in which cities and towns are the units and the process is led by the North-South as well as the West-East differences, the first due to the different climate and the second to the different characteristics of the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic Sea.

Then, we can observe how the first and fundamental peculiar element of Italian food culture has yet established itself since the Renaissance: *campanilismo*, a very particular Italian phenomenon that indicates a parochial proud and vehement attachment to the unique distinctive traditions and products of a city or a town (Parasecoli 2014).

If Italian food cultures fundamental features are yet developing during Renaissance, what still distinguished the Italy and Europe of Scappi's time from ours is taste, and consequently the existing hierarchies between food cultures: Scappi's book is written in an era, that can be considered Italy's food culture apex, in which Italian cooks are the taste-makers of Europe, their hegemonic conception of taste being based on the notion of artifice and a synthetic logic of cooking, that expects different flavors (like the sweet and the sour) to be mixed, the natural flavor of the ingredients being altered and made unrecognizable by the mastery of the cook.

By the seventeenth century, this conception of taste became replaced by a very different and contrasting one from France, that called for the exaltation of the natural flavors of the ingredients and an analytical logic in food preparation: 'Cabbage soup should taste of cabbages, leeks of leeks, turnips of turnips' wrote in the middle of the seventeenth century the french Nicolas de Bonnefon, with a nowadays ordinary but for the time revolutionary statement (Capatti and Montanari 2003, p.86). The taste changed, becoming closer to contemporary principles of cooking and tasting, and the Italian cuisine was dethroned as the taste-maker of Europe by French cooks, originating a hierarchy (Ferguson 2006, 1998) that still continues until contemporaneity through *haute cuisine* as model for highbrow food taste (Trubek 2000), at least until the emergence of cultural omnivorousness.

In fact, the real development of contemporary food service economy in Italy, that is

composed of restaurants devoted to serve the Italian middle class with modern courses and procedures, happened only in the sixties and the seventies, concurrently with the economic boom that marked the rapid industrialization of Italy and the formation of the middle class, together with the *chefs*, protagonists of this process, who learned from and were heavily influenced by the French tradition and the *nouvelle cuisine* trend (Polacchi 2018).

The period after the Second World War is the one in which Italian consumption patterns were dominated by an industrial criterion in value regimes (Sassatelli, Santoro, and Semi 2015), that despise traditional Italian local products: industrial products were associated with progress, development and wealth, while traditional local products were associated with the underdeveloped past. This process, albeit common to all western countries in the same period, has been particularly intense in Italy as it made possible in two decades, the fifties and the sixties, to pass from a rural economy to a fully industrialized economy part of the global elite, to the point of being called 'the economic Italian miracle' (Ginsborg 2003; Mafai 1997). Capatti and Montanari (2003, pp.81-82) from a comparative analysis of Touring Club culinary guides estimate that between 1931 and 1969, 30% of Italian cured meats disappeared, and the trend continued in the next fifteen years.

Starting from the middle of the eighties, and more intensely from the nineties, two phenomena brought to the recovery and the revaluation of Italian food diversity and regionalism. On the one hand, active movements that are devoted to the conservation and the promotion of the peculiar Italian food and wine products, such as the Slow Food network (Miele and Murdoch 2002) as to food and the work of Luigi Veronelli, recently converged in 'la Terra Trema' network, as far as wine is concerned. On the other hand, the already developed shift to a cultural omnivorous taste in food consumption as well, that marked the crisis of the French *haute cuisine* highbrow taste predominance (Kuh 2001).

The mix of *campanilismo*, food diversity and the relatively short life span of industrialization of the food system (compared to other countries) helped Italian products to position themselves very well to satisfy the demands for authenticity in the new age of cultural omnivorousness, marking a new period of popularity for Italian courses (Parasecoli 2014). Italy found within itself the sources to mine for omnivorous food, in a transformation that involved both domestic and commercial eating, naturally with significant variations due to class and geographical membership. It is in this recent context that regionalism took relevance as a frame through which Italian food would be presented as 'authentic', 'typical' and 'traditional'. Its function has been to reduce the complexity and variance of Italian local productions, often varying from town to town, in a clear-cut categorization useful for customers and patrons.

Naturally, the appeal to the traditional aspect and the typicality of products implied some process of 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012), producing what we would describe through the words of Jesi (2014) as a 'technicized myth' of regionalism: the complex ensemble of local traditions has been technicized in a regional framing that would make that corpus of traditions functional to the omnivorous taste of contemporary consumers and therefore to contemporary markets.

Comparing Italian with Austrian and English food trust regimes, Sassatelli and Scott (2001) contend that Italians use an 'embedded trust regime' in which regional peasant tradition is crucial to the point that 'it would be very difficult to understand the dynamics of trust in the Italian food market without taking into account regional variation. Conversely, such variation delineates the specificity of the Italian case.' (Sassatelli and Scott 2001, p.230).

So, the Italian food culture can be interpreted and stated as a specific taste regime, defined as 'a discursively constructed normative system that orchestrates practice in an aesthetically oriented culture of consumption' (Arsel and Bean 2013), characterized by regionalism, typicality, tradition, authenticity.

2.3. The economic imaginary of gourmet food trucks in Italy and globally

The gourmet food trucks economic trend is quite recent. It originated in the US: the afore-mentioned 'Food Truck Nation' report by US Chambers of Commerce Foundation narrates its birth and spread following a mythical tale: all started with the birth of the progenitor, 'Kogi Korean BBQ', and thanks to its incredible success (two million dollars of revenues reported in the first year), he founded a new dynasty of gourmet food trucks which 'operate in Kogi's innovative spirit', 'Appealing to younger, cosmopolitan urbanites with novel takes on casual cuisine' (Hendrix and Bodwish 2018, p.6).

Certainly, this is also a technicized myth (Jesi 2014) rather than a historical analysis, but it is nevertheless relevant to introduce gourmet food truck as an economic imaginary that rapidly gained influence and diffusion in the US first and globally afterwards.

We take the concept of economic imaginary from the Cultural Political Economy approach, developed mainly by Bob Jessop (Jessop 2009; Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008). An economic imaginary 'is a semiotic order, i.e., a specific configuration of genres, discourses and styles' that are 'always selectively defined - due to limited cognitive capacities and to the discursive and material biases of specific epistemes and economic paradigms' (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008, p.1158). Through a co-evolutionary process of semiosis and structuration shaped by mechanisms of variation, selection and retention, economic imaginaries that managed to become highly resonant do emerge and spread in the markets, denoting the most important implication in CPE approach: that economic imaginaries are not only descriptive labels we use to address a certain trend, but are semiotic systems that give meaning to and shape the 'real existing economies' (Jessop 2009).

To transfer the definition in our case, the success of the gourmet food truck economic niche numerically illustrated in the introduction can therefore be explained through the capacity of 'gourmet food truck' economic imaginary to diverge from the old despised imaginary of 'coach roaches', selecting discourses of authenticity and distinctiveness, and being able to retain them in the market thanks to their resonance with the cultural omnivorous consumption trend and cosmopolitan attitude of contemporary food consumers. Gourmet food truck imaginary can be thus interestingly considered as one peculiar outcome of these phenomena. Also, it can be considered part of a connected trend by which humble economic professions and businesses are being upscaled into cultural and creative professions in a revaluation of craftsmanship (Ocejo 2017, 2014).

It is easy to observe that there is a complex interaction between concrete vendors and the imaginary. The imaginary would not exist if the economic actor does not act as a pioneer that understands the changes that are taking place at the level of markets and consumer tastes so as to open a new business or adapt his already existing one, doing what in classical economic terms would be labeled as a process of 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter 1939). At the same time, it is only when forming discourses

manage to become resonant, and are then selected and retained, that the imaginary acquires the semiotic power to shape the economy, generating a market niche that allows a great increase in the numbers of economic actors.

Furthermore, the gourmet food truck imaginary formation process also depends on related cultural tastes, in this case on the American food taste regime. As the imaginary spreads globally, in each country it will have encountered other food taste regimes, with peculiar outcomes. In Italy a very similar trend in street food from traditional 'coach roaches' to 'gourmet food trucks' has yet been argued (Alfiero, Giudice, and Bonadonna 2017) - and the current research will add new empirical material in support of it - but we also contend the existence of a strong and valued Italian taste regime, which we expect to interact with the general food truck imaginary.

To have a descriptive depiction of the US food truck imaginary, the global one and ultimately the Italian one, we will use the compared search frequency of 'food truck' and 'street food' topics (a topic is defined as a groups of terms that share the same concept in any language) in Google web search, obtained from Google Trends data. Google Trends Search Interest is a normalized index of search frequency of a term, and has been already used in scientific papers as proxy of attention by economic actors to firms with significant outcomes (Da, Engelberg, and Gao 2011). Very far from such ambitious goals, our end is much more modest and exclusively descriptive: interpreting 'food truck' topic as a proxy of food truck imaginary and 'street food' as proxy of a distinct, and possibly antecedent, way of framing street food in a way that is more resonant with national tradition, we aim to better delineate the influence of American food truck imaginary globally and then in Italy, taking data from January 2004 (the first available date) to September 2018.

We can observe that both topics in all the three figures have a 'mountain range' shape, with the peaks corresponding to summer months and the cliffs to winter months, evidencing the seasonal nature of food truck and street food businesses. More generally, we can see that the research interest in the two topics has a similar pattern over time, and a simple non-parametric test of correlation (Spearman's test) between the two topics shows a very strong and significant monotonic correlation in all the three cases (see Table A1).

Looking at the research interest in US (Figure B1), we can observe how both topics are almost ignored until 2010, when a first peak of interest for 'Food Truck' emerged, with an explosion of interest from 2011 that has crescently grown from then. The 'Street Food' topic, however, never emerged if compared to the first one. Looking at the global scenario (Figure B2), the comparison between the two topics is particularly interesting: the interest for the 'Food Truck' topic started to increase with a first peak in 2010, although with less intensity than in the US. But the real outbreak of interest for the topic happens 5 years later, in 2015, suggesting a 5 year-time-span in which the 'food truck' topic became a real 'global phenomenon' beyond its diffusion in the US. Interest in 'Street food' is, significantly, almost completely absent before 2013, and seems to emerge, with a lower but nevertheless growing intensity, only after the beginning of 'Food Truck' steady growth, with some years of delay.

Finally, looking at the Italian case (Figure B3) we can firstly observe that the spikes are double-headed, with a first peak in May and June, a decline during July and August and then a second peak during September and October. More interestingly, we can observe that the ratio between the topics is inverted: the interest for 'Street Food' topic is much higher than the one for 'Food Truck', with a first significant growth of the first in 2013 and a real outburst in 2015, in correspondence to the observed global boom. Instead, the interest for 'Food Truck' topic has a first sensible increase in 2015,

then remaining far lower. If we look at the compared 'search interest' percentages of the two topics in countries with high search volume (Table A2), we indeed find that Italy is the country that, from 2004 to September 2018, has the highest imbalance in favor of 'Street Food' (followed by other south-Asian and European countries).

The interest for the 'Street Food' topic is essentially absent before 2012 for Italy, albeit a small exception in 2008, and emerges only after the food truck phenomenon in America. It is also observable that, as in the American case, the gourmet food truck phenomenon starts to grow in 2008 and the interest in web searches for 'Food Truck' topic starts two years after in 2010. In Italy, similarly, there is a two-year-delay between the beginning of food truck gourmet phenomenon in 2011/2012, the date indicated by many truckers interviewed, and the rise of interest toward 'Street Food' on Google Trends.

From these data we can summarize an insightful description of the development of food truck economic imaginary in the US, globally and in Italy: food truck gourmet is indeed a phenomenon born at first in the U.S.A., that has spread globally in the following years, with a subsequent diffusion with minor frequency of a correlated 'Street Food' topic, almost nonexistent before. Italy too seems to undergo the influence of the food truck gourmet imaginary from the U.S. similarly to the rest of the world, devoting no interest to food trucks or street food before 2013, but it is the one country where, from the beginning of its emergence, the imaginary is most framed and embedded as 'street food' rather than as 'food truck', denoting a highly peculiar national implementation.

3. Methods

This study is an ethnography of gourmet food truckers in the city of Milan, Italy, composed of semi-structured interviews to food truckers, field notes from one year of participant observation at street food festivals and events organized by individual food trucks, together with archival and secondary sources on the topic on specialized magazines and newspapers.

3.1. *The fieldwork*

The relevance of Italy as a case study for our research has already been extensively discussed in previous sections. Now we will argue the choice of focusing on Milan as a city.

First at all, Milan is the city with most active food trucks together with Rome, both having 181 itinerant street food businesses. Regionally, the Milanese region (Lombardy) leads the ranking with 389 businesses, significantly exceeding the 271 businesses in the Roman region (Lazio) that is only the third (Unioncamere and InfoCamere 2018). So, taking into account the fact that the main street food festivals gather truckers at least on a regional level, Milan can be considered as a collector of the richest and most numerous regional landscapes of gourmet food-trucks. The data from the Italian Chamber of Commerce have a limitation indeed: they do include all the street food businesses, regardless of their adherence to the 'scuzzy' model or the 'gourmet' one. So there are some qualitative reasons too that lead us to the selection of Milan as a fieldwork.

Milan, historically considered the 'economic and financial capital' of Italy and the most cosmopolitan one, has become, since the beginning of the new century, a global

city with regards to fashion, media and design industries (Dell’agnese and Anzoise 2011; Guerrini 2017), being used as fieldwork for various empirical researches on these industries (Arvidsson, Malossi, and Naro 2010; McRobbie 2016). More recently, contemporaneously to its hosting of EXPO 2015s ‘Feeding the Planet’ big event, it has started to massively invest in urban food policies, linking them with the idea of a creative and innovative city (Deakin, Borrelli, and Diamantini 2016). This led to the formulation, in 2017, of a call for tender to select 50 sustainable food trucks that could operate also in the historic center, the urban area most visited by tourists but otherwise forbidden for itinerant businesses.

So the choice to select Milan as a fieldwork has been decided for two orders of reasons: it is the leading Italian city and district in numbers of street food businesses. Furthermore, it is an optimal field for the development of a gourmet food truck niche and an appropriate audience of consumers, being considered the cosmopolitan capital of Italy, as well as for investing a lot in urban policies for the food sector.

3.2. *Techniques and selection criteria*

As stated before, our ethnography is composed of semi-structured interviews to gourmet food truckers, participant observation together with archival and secondary material, conducted between 2017 and 2018.

The sampling strategy for the interviews can be defined as a non-probabilistic ‘purposive homogeneous sample’ (Etikan 2016): we identified food truckers that seemed to clearly pertain to the ‘gourmet food truck’ economic imaginary from an ensemble of the visual appearance of the truck, products offered and the way they were labeled, mainly encountered during our participant observation to street food festivals. To a lesser extent, we also contacted for an interview some pertinent food trucks found while we were analyzing secondary material, as magazine or newspaper articles. This means that, albeit all the interviewed trucks participate with a certain frequency at events or festivals in Milan, also trucks based in other cities and regions were included.

The final corpus of interviews is thus composed of twenty formal, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Almost all the interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and seventy-five minutes, with limited exceptions (in two cases, the interviewee had only half an hour of time). The interview has been conducted with the founder or one of the founding members, with only one exception constituted by an employee, chosen because the business owner did not work effectively on the truck. All the people have been guaranteed to be anonymized for the aims of the research.

To enrich the representativeness of the sample, two encountered trucks selling self-produced craft beer have been included, as two trucks serving foreign cuisine, one Italian serving American smoked meat and one Venezuelan serving Venezuelan ethnic food.

We decided purposely to not include a table with individual biographical information for anonymity, as otherwise the information obtainable combining the table with the quotations would have compromised it. We will instead include an overall summarizing of their background.

The twenty trucks all have a different flagship product and represent eight different Italian regional typical cuisines, in addition to two foreign ones; five of them already had a restaurant, a food company or a pub when they decided to start a food truck, one managed to open a restaurant after starting as food truck and another one started as a worker in a ‘scuzzy’ truck owned by the family before opening his own gourmet

food truck. With regards to age, half of the sample is in his thirties, four interviewees are in their twenties while the remaining six are over forty years old. Fifteen of them now live in Lombardy, of which eleven in Milan, two in Marche, one in Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. Another interesting element is the one related to their working background: six of them had formal experience as cook in restaurants or pubs, seven interviewees had experience in broader food sector (agri-food industry, commerce, etcetera), another six had no formal experience in food sector, apart from domestic cooking; one notably attended a vocational course devoted to street food for unemployed.

Participant observation has been conducted in several street food festivals during the year, principally during autumn and spring when, as the descriptive analysis has shown, most festivals and public events take place. We have both attended street food gourmet festivals and public events with a different focus (parties, concerts, cultural or social events) in which one or more food trucks were attending on request by the organizer. More rarely, we attended public events directly organized by one food truck. Field notes as visual material were collected.

Finally, secondary material on the topic of food trucks and street food in Italy through newspapers, magazine articles and television programs were collected to stay up to date as to the trends and the development of Italian food truck scene.

3.3. Approaches

The aim of the research as stated in the introduction is to bring empirical and theoretical contributions to the theory of production and consumption of taste in omnivorous cultural consumption, extending them on the basis of our ethnography. In other words, we follow Burawoy argument that 'theory is not discovered but revised, not induced but improved, not deconstructed but reconstructed [...] theory exists to be extended in the face of external anomalies and internal contradictions' (Burawoy 2009), adopting extended case method (Burawoy 1998). Also, if the nature of the phenomenon studied impeded the realization of a long time, prolonged and fully immersed ethnography as required to completely adhere to the approach, we assume it as perspective, with regard to the ethnographer as a reflexive actor and the consequent continuation process of triangulation between the field, the theory and the social structures that derive from it (Tavory and Timmermans 2009).

Furthermore, existing researches about cultural omnivorousness in general have relied mainly on quantitative analysis of consumers behaviours, to the point of it being defined as 'statistics-based thesis' against which a 'qualitative counter-attack' was necessary (Atkinson 2011). In the specific field of food consumption, in addition to statistical researches on consumers preferences, (Warde, Martens, and Olsen 1999) discourse and content analysis of articles in food magazine was used (Johnston and Baumann 2007; Johnston, Baumann, and Cairns 2010) together with qualitative in-depth interviews of foodies (Emontspool and Georgi 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2015) or participant observation with customers Teil and Hennion (2004). Analyses focusing on the micro-entrepreneurs that are concretely producing the food seem to be almost absent, with some exceptions notably on food trucks phenomenon (Irvin 2017), but with just a secondary interest in omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism.

This study then aims to, at least partially, fill this gap, highlighting the role of micro-entrepreneurs and the relevance of their gaze in theories of cultural omnivorous production and consumption. The first implication of according the due space to

micro-entrepreneurs gazes and practices is to highlight the otherwise overlooked influence of markets and the economic field. To employ cultural political economy approach and its core concept of economic imaginary, developed and clarified in literature review, means to include the food trucker, acting at a micro-socioeconomic level, in a broader socioeconomic structure that is also needed to perform the reflexive tripartite elaboration process between field, structure and theory requested by extended case method perspective.

4. Results

4.1. *Street food festivals: the Italian way to food truck economy*

The empirical findings support the descriptive data obtained through Google Trend. All the interviewed micro-entrepreneurs generally refer to their activity and the economic niche in which they work as 'street food', while they normally use 'food truck' to indicate the concrete vehicle on which they work, and more generally the singular business. Notably, everyone always uses both terms, street food and food truck, in English, with only one exception in all the ethnographic material in which one food trucker used the Italian word '*furgone*' (in English 'van'), before quickly adding '*furgone* sounds ugly, let's say 'truck' [pronounced in English] that is cooler' (Monaldo).

These elements confirm both the influence of street food concept in the Italian tradition together with the American influence, explicated in the dominant use of English words and their association with coolness, as opposed to the ugliness of the Italian terms. In other cases, this linguistic difference was applied to distinguish between traditional 'scuzzy' vendors and gourmet ones, like in this excerpt by a food trucker that is also a good definition of the fundamentals applied by gourmet food truckers in Italy:

I do not want to be discriminatory because even the 'paninari classici' [in English 'Classic burger man'] make sandwiches that are delicious, but, technically, they stick to the conventions [...] [in a food truck instead] you have to create a competitive advantage through differentiation. It's the same thing you have to apply to street food: high specialization, high territorial belonging, make few products but with the highest quality of ingredients you can find.

(Biagio)

Another very important difference between the American context and the Italian one are the places in which food trucks work. In America, both historic coach roaches and contemporary gourmet food trucks are associated with workers lunch breaks and more in general with quick meals served in the streets (Hendrix and Bodwish 2018; Irvin 2017), while in Italy, the habit of spending lunchtime sitting at the canteen or at the restaurant combined with a particularly stringent legislation on the temporary occupation of public area favored the fusion between the historic tradition of county fairs and gourmet street food imaginary into a trending scene of itinerant street food festivals: the vast majority of Italian gourmet food trucks work principally in these festivals, supplementing their revenues with banqueting and catering for private events.

The phenomenon of street food festivals has led to many relevant consequences observed during the ethnography: on the one hand food truckers have much more interaction among them and also develop a network of relations based on mutual help (especially toward newcomers) and exchange of expertise and information. On the other hand the competitive pressure to attract the wandering visitors increases the urge to be distinguished from the others.

Albeit predominant, street food festivals receive many critics by food truckers and the majority of operators consider it impossible to reach economic viability just through them: the most common complementary source of earnings are caterings for private clients, which are way more profitable but also too irregular in their frequency. In general, a common opinion expressed by nearly everyone is that 'street food' is a trend that has already reached its peak, and that the explosion in the number of trucks has led to a crisis of overproduction of supply that has cut down the margins for profits.

The lack of trucks selling foreign food has been another general remarkable feature encountered during the ethnography. During all the months of ethnography, the only foreign foodtruckers I met were the two interviewed in addition to two other food trucks, one owned by a foreign owner and one by Italian owners, whom I was unable to interview.

4.2. *Foodtruckers as taste dealers of authenticity*

I'd like to define myself as a '*taste dealer*', a pusher of taste

(Lamberto)

All food truckers have the clear feeling that creativity and authenticity are critical concepts in their business. As one foodtrucker synthesized:

What's *creative* about a bruschetta? First of all, it is a formula of food, because precisely, the bruschetta is more or less like an appetizer, which is usually served with some tomato. But we are from Altamura, the home of Italian bread, so we start from our origins, although we apply them in an innovative way [...] to take the ingredients, mix them, take what is typical of a region and mix it with others...[...] it is *creativity* that allows you to differentiate yourself. [...] The *authenticity* of what we do is what gives you this feedback [*of satisfaction by the customer*] [...] when they bite our bread they feel something different from what they usually eat.

(Muziano — Italics by the author)

Creativity is needed to differentiate yourself from the crowd and to innovate on the tradition. Authenticity emerge as a more complex concept, enunciated through a rather unconventional and less straight-forward definition from an academic perspective, from which however some fundamental elements can yet be identified: authenticity constitutes the expression of an act ('the authenticity of what we do'), that is materialized in the final product and can be concretely perceived through it ('when they bite our bread') and that allows to be appreciated by customers and recognized as a legitimate food trucker in the relative economic imaginary ('what gives you this feedback'). Food truckers are thus the makers of the dish (in this case *bruschetta*), but more importantly are the dealers of authentic taste (in this case the taste of real Altamura bread and typical elements from other regions), meaning that they aim to reproduce a taste that is recognized as authentic by their customers, as this becomes also a critical quality to possess in order to sell food in a crowded context like a street food festival.

Following the assumptions of cultural taste as an activity and not as a passive, determined state (Teil and Hennion 2004) and the socially constructed and fluid nature of authenticity (Peterson 2005a), we reconstruct this idea that food truckers are taste dealers or in other words 'claimers of authenticity'.

Almost every process of authenticity reproduction lays on the bedrocks of its own local origins and culinary traditions. We can conceptualize this in the notion of the 'typical', a quality of food that is contemporaneously rooted in a regional cuisine but also recognized at a national level as an excellence (usually through common knowledge or a food certification). So, for a food to be displayed as 'typical', a link must be produced between the food course and a local place: this goal is commonly achieved through the use of raw materials or in alternative recipes that are already considered typical to instill the same quality to the product, through a symbolic synecdoche from one component of the dish to the entire product.

However, to 'be typical' is not enough to 'be authentic'. What still lacks is the guarantee, at the eyes of the customer, that what is sold as typical of a region or a city is really so. If the proof of the authenticity of a taste is experienced by customers only when they bite the food, so as we will deeply analyze in the next paragraph at the end of the process, and we can suppose that customers normally could not have the specialized knowledge to distinguish it themselves anyway, they have then to rely on the credibility of the producer: a typical course becomes credible if the claim of authenticity expressed by the food-trucker appears credible. This is generally reached through a personal connection between the producer and the place on which the notion of typicality is tailored. In other words, the connection between the producer and the product must be 'genuine', almost in its etymological meaning of recognition of a kinship between two elements. In the Italian context, where culinary tradition varies from city to city, individual origins or, otherwise, the origins of the family are the most common way to build this kinship between the typical product and the vendor. In the few cases in which this ancestral relationship is absent, like in the case of Italian food truckers selling foreign dishes, the strength of the genuineness is safeguarded by a similar intimate connection between the producer and the product, built on notions of experience, passion and expertise in the specific food culture and cuisine.

The exposed definition can appear restrictive and high demanding, but has naturally to be contextualized in the food truck economic niche, where the threshold of credibility expected by customers is higher than in other commercial contexts. Moreover, genuineness is a bond that is not only used in its symbolic dimension, but that can also imply some more practical and economical advantages: experience in the correct processing of ingredients, ability to better assess their quality, knowledge of the most reliable sellers and/or preferential supply lanes.

The combination of the two elements, typicality and genuineness, can be seen in the excerpt below, where it is illustrated in the process of formation of an 'authenticity claim':

We started with where we live, with what our traditions were, then my partner with Piedmonts sausage of Bra and the Piedmontese meat Fassona and I in Veneto with the products of the park of the Dolomites. So we started with two important ingredients. All our recipes are not created for the recipe, i.e. I'm not inventing a recipe or a dish because it came to my mind but [...] I start from the product. [...] I like to say that we are assemblers of quality raw material [...] In general, therefore, the originality in my opinion is to narrate your land, your traditions and who you are.

(Brando)

So the co-existence of both 'typicality' and 'genuineness' can be considered as the bedrock for the reproduction of 'authenticity' to establish the quality of the product. The example above, in which food truckers consider themselves 'assemblers of quality raw materials', relying almost exclusively on them to build their claim, usefully stress

the function of genuineness: if their role is just to assemble raw materials that are already 'typical' by themselves, in theory any individual with any geographical belonging could perform the same claim with the same efficacy. What instead reinforces the credibility of their claim, distinguishing them from potential competitors, is precisely the genuineness, the kinship between the typical ingredients and the individual that allow them to 'narrate their land and traditions'. Another food-trucker that similarly relied much on raw ingredients to build an authenticity claim, discussing about his advantage over other competitors selling the same product, buffalo *mozzarella* typical of Campania, emphasized more the economical advantages explaining that 'I have an advantage in the supply chain, as my father raises buffaloes in Campania' (Biagio).

The majority of the interviewed food truckers nevertheless employed a more hybrid combination of factors in which they innovate on the tradition. In particular, the choice to innovate often depended on the necessity to be more distinctive in the market or on practical reasons because the typical ingredient or recipe, the constitutive element of the authentic food, was unfit for a mobile food vendor and for itinerant eating, like in the two examples below:

But the classic polenta is demanding, keeping it soft on the truck is challenging [...] So we decided to use the good old method of our grandma, who when the polenta was made, she left it to cool, then fried it, and combined it with various products, one is the raspadura that is just a classic of Lodi, the other could be gorgonzola, sausage, [...].

(Tamara)

We wanted to make a purely homemade Italian cuisine. From there, started the idea of fresh pasta, but going around with a truck cooking spaghetti rather than penne was not comfortable so we invented the concept of enclosing sauces inside homemade ravioli. We started with carbonara and then with other sauces.

(Bonifacio)

The grade of innovation and differentiation from the original is variable (the first example being an innovation closer to tradition, the second a more 'brave' gourmet one) and the typical element, the ingredient or the recipe, must always remain clearly identifiable to enable the symbolic synecdoche to take place. But a conceptual contradiction inevitably happens in the exposed process: to innovate on typicality signifies to stray away from the original, 'authentic' tradition creating 'inauthenticity', but the consequences of this assumption entail that 'authenticity claims' made by food-truckers then are also built upon inauthenticity.

This contradiction can be properly understood only if the right relevance is conferred to the existing tensions between the two co-existing identities of the food-truckers, that already surfaced in our analysis: they are contemporaneously cultural actors who, through the production of food, passionately promote the values of local, typical and genuine food in a new cosmopolitan context and micro-entrepreneurs well aware of the necessity to be in tune with the discourses of the economic imaginary in which they are embedded to successfully compete in the market.

The coexistence of the two identities can, and many times does, find a more or less precarious equilibrium, resulting in a reflexive economic and cultural actor not dissimilar to the 'self-interested theorists' analyzed by Rinallo and Golfetto (2006) in fashion markets, that operates following their own beliefs and passions that are nevertheless finalized to a personal economic interest, and contribute to shape, in turn, the economic imaginary and trends. In other cases, the tension between the contrasting aims becomes evident, as can be observed in the thoughts of an interviewee about the

choice to sell '*olive ascolane*' (typical Italian stuffed olives) also in a non-historic variant made with truffle:

Yes, that is something I'm a bit regretful for, but we had to do it because customers demanded it, whatever it takes...there is a little bit of truffle in the middle but there is also aroma, because, unfortunately, customers like the aroma of truffles, which is something that I do not conceive...I care about raw materials and to make a product with an aroma does not give me that satisfaction. [...] Therefore, at some point, I said to myself: 'Ok, we have to sell big volumes of products, but basically when one is economically stable, he should think first about the territory', so I repented and I started to focus on the D.O.P. Ascolan olives only.

(Michele)

In this case, the tension between the two aims becomes explicit as the trucker explains how he temporarily decided to consciously prepare and sell 'inauthenticity' because the authenticity-seeking omnivores, so to say 'the market needs', demanded this 'inauthentic authenticity'. Anyway, compromises in the genuineness of the product to reach customers satisfaction are seen as a 'necessary evil' to accept to stay on the market, but are also perceived as something that should be avoided as soon as possible: the compromise at the expense of authenticity seems to always remain a sin to expiate.

It then becomes not surprising that one recurrent way used by the interviewed food truckers to define themselves by opposition is to take distance from the ones that buy from wholesale distribution, excluding them from the circle of 'real' gourmet food truckers with the accusation of being just interested in the maximization of profits. In this context, from the boundaries that they reciprocally draw between food-truckers, considered 'similar' and 'distant' to their own attitude and activism, their above described two-faced nature emerges more clearly: opposed to the cynic food trucker that buys from wholesale distribution to maximize profits without pursuing some values, the real gourmet food trucker is the one that 'has a soul', as is stated in the description of this embryonic project of a formalized network of gourmet food truckers advanced by one of them:

We want to create this network to try to distinguish ourselves through an ethical code, a series of guidelines related to prices, product origin, traceability, and the authenticity of the product [...] in the sense that...I do not know how to say it...You see, the kind of people who decide that they want to make fried fish because they think it will make them earn a lot of money, I do not want that kind of person in the network. I want the one who cooks and sells fish because it comes from Lake Garda, and prepares you this lake fish, in five thousand different versions, but all deriving from that fish there [...] we want everyone who has a soul.

(Lamberto)

The image of the soul is conceptually useful, even if it could be easily considered simplistic and *naïve*, because it stresses the immaterial and ethical dimension of gourmet street food, opposed to the 'soulless' nature of the just economy-oriented street food vendors. The latter ones are generally considered almost like free-riders because, unlike traditional street food vendors, they participate in the street food gourmet festivals and often use the same visual strategies and terms to frame themselves. However, by maximizing the earnings at the expense of the refinement and quality of the product, they are thought of as not playing fairly in the competition to gain the customers.

Due to the evanescent and immaterial quality of possessing 'a soul', there are no clear-cut borders between the categories, and obviously no one would ever define himself an impostor or a cheater. So, mutually drawn boundaries are often conflicting

one with the other. Some of the sampled food truckers buy products from wholesale distribution and, for one of them, the marketplace was actually the entry point to the gourmet food sector, thanks to cooking courses held by a renowned *chef*. In these cases the choice to buy raw materials from wholesale distribution was not considered a critical issue. The production of authenticity relied mainly on recipes rather than on raw materials. Identity by opposition was more easily expressed in contrast to those who used exaggerated, polished materials but are not able to properly cook them, ending up with 'deplorable products'.

The same structure does apply to foreign food. In a landscape dominated by regional food, truckers of foreign food do not seem to invest much on the exoticism of the product, instead they appear to be willing to shorten the cultural distances, preferring to serve courses in a familiar and reassuring way, like, for example, a sandwich. A food trucker of Venezuelan food commented the choice to add to their original flagship product, a typical Venezuelan food called *tequenos*, another typical course as *patacones*, a sandwich prepared with plantains instead of bread, stating that people seemed more willing to pay the price of gourmet street food for something that is nourishing and has a usual semblance:

You know, everyone sells sandwiches, bread with this or that...More or less they all sell the same. We are happy anyway, but our problem is that we have to educate people, there are people who do not even know what a *patacones* is. [...] There are people who told me 'I thought *patacones* is a fish'. [...] I have to spend too much time making people understand what I sell. But it's an effort that pays off in the long run.

(Luz)

The product is still legitimized as authentic through the already illustrated scheme involving injecting typicality and genuineness to the product served. The raw materials are of quality also if there is no such painstaking and meticulous attention payed to them, which we have generally seen in other food trucks, suggesting that the 'exoticism' of the final product, the allure that the product possesses just for being foreign, is a quality sufficient to make it reach an adequate distinctiveness on the market without the need to resort to exceptional raw materials or to innovate the recipe.

The difference in panache regarding raw materials between national and foreign food trucks can also be explained by recalling the literal meaning of exotic as something that is distant to the point of being unknown and therefore extraordinary. As such, an 'exotic' ingredient or recipe is one on which the knowledge of the customers is normally quite limited and the degree of precision needed for being recognized as 'typical' by them drops: what has to be framed at a regional or urban level in the case of local food can be framed at a national level in case of foreign food.

4.3. *The construction of a proper 'promise of taste'*

In the previous paragraph the focus has been on how food truckers concretely produce gourmet street food dishes and confer them properties of authenticity and distinctiveness. To be able to perform that is indeed the defining skill required to be a recognized member of gourmet-food-truck economic imaginary: as workers, their pride relies on the taste their customers experience when eating their dishes, their fulfillment lies in their praises when they return after finishing the meal.

The conferment of authenticity and distinctiveness to the course, nevertheless, does not end with its material production. Food truckers are not contestants preparing food for a jury of experts that will try each course, but are street vendors that have to

convince people walking on the sidewalk or wandering around the festival to stop and choose them instead of the one two meters further. The intensity of the competition can vary upon many factors such as the success of a festival or the fees payed to participate in it, but it is an unavoidable feature.

In this paragraph therefore the analysis will focus on street food festivals as the main places where food trucks operate, the practises enacted by the food truckers to succeed in the competition for patrons and the combined role of taste and other senses in them.

In other words, if in the previous paragraph it has been exposed how food truckers build an 'authenticity claim' assembling taste in the process of production of the dish to meet the 'authenticity demand' made by customers, here we analyze how the claimers of authentic taste and the seekers of it physically meet each other, interact and come to an agreement.

Street food festivals can be defined as a cosmopolitan canopy (Anderson 2004) where families, young couples, groups of friends or lone foodies wander at the search of the perfect gourmet meal, eating it while sitting on shared benches or improvised seats one near the other. It is not uncommon that the organizers structure the festival like an itinerary to traverse. In other times, when the space allows it, the trucks are more simply arranged in a circle. In these cases they normally surround the benches on which the wanderer is eating, at the center of everything.

Street food festivals are also places where hours of hectic paces alternate with hours of almost complete inactivity and calm. During lunch and dinner time, the wanderers become swarms of people calculating the best equilibrium between their own preferences and the length of the queue, while workers on the truck take ordinations and serve the products as fast as they can, trying to fully satisfy everyone and to drain the queue at the same time. Food truckers often describe the work during street food festivals as extremely chaotic and physically tiring: this is the moment when their labor maintains more similarities with the one of traditional 'scuzzy' and street vendors and uncovers its more material and 'humble' dimension, normally concealed by the predominant discourses of the economic imaginary.

It is in this cosmopolitan canopy, in particular during its moments of hectic pace, that the competition takes place. The truckers have prepared or are cooking their food with an authentic and distinctive taste, but everything will be wasted and the course not savoured if the customers will not be convinced to buy it. A paradox of taste can thus be observed in gourmet street food: its assemblage is the defining feature of the food trucker, but its consumption only happens lastly, after the choice is already made by the customer. Therefore, the actual taste of the course (and the related pure skill of the trucker as gourmet cook) cannot directly influence the choices of the patrons and the economic success of the truck. In the words of one interviewee, 'first comes the eye' (Bernardo).

If the ability to attain a taste suited for the omnivorous palate of a cosmopolitan audience is what defines a gourmet food trucker, to be able to assemble a fascinating 'promise of taste' is the pivotal ability needed to become a successful micro-entrepreneur, and also what enables him to be publicly recognized as both. Food truckers develop complex and multi-sensorial strategies to build consistent promises of taste. The strategy can be separately analyzed on the basis of two different aims: the first includes the development of a corporate branding to visually and symbolically communicate the membership to the food trucker gourmet imaginary, the second is composed of performances or behaviours acted by the truckers during the event to build the actual 'promise of taste'.

The relevance of branding to gain consumer attention and build a sense of community through shared identities in contemporary economies is a long established phenomenon (Arvidsson 2006), and is similarly practised in food truck imaginary. The first and central element of the corporate branding, is, naturally, the design of the truck itself. The trucks are the dominant visual elements in a street food festival, their succession marks the rhythm of the space. Trucks, caravans, apecars (peculiar Italian vehicles with three wheels) and cargo-bikes are the most common vehicles to be encountered, each one relying on a unique style with a 'hip' look and charm.

I was in love aesthetically with the apecar but I realized that it did not have the necessary practical features [...] I discarded the American style food truck because I did not like its aesthetics in any case and it requires the support of another vehicle. Then, I opted for a caravan, a trailer vehicle, which can be hooked and latched.

(Lara)

When they happen to be explicitly associated with values, these are normally the ones of ecology and sustainable transports, applied through a 'food bike'. Apart from these exceptions, they are not normally related to the specific product served: their function seems to be primarily to match the style of the owner and to generally be as original and recognizable as possible, catching the sight of the wanderers among the plethora of competitors. In one notable case, the truck was given a name of a person by the micro-entrepreneur, starting from her own nickname:

I've always been told to have the **** [*adjective removed for privacy, is a dialectal expression*], a permanent state of restlessness. So I immediately opted for the name **** [*idem, same word as the adjective above*], because I liked the idea, so first there was the name, then we built the idea for the truck around it.

(Veronica)

The truck is the visual element to which it is most demanded to demonstrate, at first glance, the membership to the gourmet food truck economic imaginary and the separation from the category and the imaginary of 'scuzzy' trucks. A hip and refined look is used to achieve this aim, counting on the fact that a 'scuzzy' is normally characterized by a very kitsch appearance, with flashy colors and fonts and generic names.

Other than the truck, other elements that constitute the core of the corporate branding and the visual 'business card' to customers are the logo and the name. The name is quite anomalous from other ones because it is the only element that is usually chosen by the micro-entrepreneur or the group of associates alone, without professional help. However, both the design of the truck and of the logo are normally entrusted to professionals with a varying degree of participation of the trucker, finalized to the same aim of upscaling the truck to distinguish it from the others:

I invented the name, while the graphic form was created by the graphic studio. [...] It is a nice logo because it is different from the others in street food business, it is a logo that is perhaps more of a restaurant, a brand of a certain level.

(Pierluigi)

The practises and behaviours acted by the truckers represent the core of the strategy to build an effective 'promise of taste', what we could define in material and visceral terms the goal to make customers literally drool at the truck, to the point they decide that their wandering is over. This is obtained through an 'offensive' strategy that exalts

the typicality and the genuineness of the products but also an eventual 'defensive' strategy that tries to reassure people by educating them to the unknown and possibly frightening properties of the typical food. A varied array of tactics is developed based on different senses, that could be well differentiated on the base of distance: long-range tactics are principally based on sight, while at short-range taste, together with hearing and more rarely smell, comes into play.

At the visual level, both graphic elements on accessories and performances acted by truckers are used. The general goal is to capture the attention among the crowd and, supposed that the course was correctly prepared to be tasty to the palate of cosmopolitan omnivore as illustrated in the previous paragraph, to start making the promise of taste credible. Performances include, for example, cooking demos on the spot, in a visible space on or next to the truck, to reaffirm the genuineness of the product and that aforementioned tie of 'kinship' between the trucker and the food served.

Through communication we try to make it clear that we are artisans, sometimes doing live show-cooking [*written in English in the original*] on the truck, thus giving a perception of the craftsmanship of the production.

(Lara)

Another very common visual tactic to create a proper promise of food is the presentation of the menu. Far from being a neutral act, presenting the courses is a critical act to stimulate the appetite and promise a pleasuring experience:

I have a colleague who made a very good sandwich but the name was simply 'sandwich with pork strips'. In the sandwich with pork strips there was also *burrata* [*a peculiar Italian cheese similar to mozzarella*]. The *burrata* is very trendy lately, so I convinced him to change the name of the sandwich in 'sandwich with *burrata*', and now the sales of it are skyrocketing, just because there is '*burrata*' written there.

(Carmelo)

After the customer has wandered around the festival and made his mind on the most promising truck, he usually starts to line up waiting his turn. Alternatively, he could be intrigued by a course but at the same time dubious for some reasons about it, and could approach the truck next to the line to investigate and judge more closely the validity of the promise. It is here that tactics involving other senses come into play. The smell is rarely used because the majority of times the food is prepared in advance, and the open space makes it perceivable only at a very short range. More commonly, tasting and talking are used. Their function differs from sight because they are used in a second further step, to confirm and reinforce the interest raised by the visual stimuli. For example, a common, heavily used tactic is to reserve some food to be picked up, to let people try the taste and have a 'free demo' of the experience they will get if they pay for the entire course:

and then we let people pick up a big part of our product, I do not say a 15% but a 5/10% of the sausage we have is dedicated to be tried to attire the customer; when they decide to taste it, you have already conquered them.

(Brando)

If 'the eye comes first' as stated by the aforementioned trucker, the taste comes last: if they decide to pick up the food, it is because they have already been convinced by the promise of taste, and just want to have a confirmation that there are no unpleas-

ant surprises, or reassurance about some potentially dangerous properties of the raw materials (in the case of the above quotation, the raw sausage).

Other common tactics are to start talking and chitchatting with patrons that come close to the truck, using humor and verbal communication to tighten the bond or to temper the boredom caused by a long wait in queue. Asked how they made customers comfortable while waiting, a foodtrucker answered that their tactic was:

Making mess, making jokes, entertaining them...on the back of our shirt is written 'in two minutes it's ready', expressing just the soul of Campania [...]

(Lara)

The building of a proper promise can continue also after the customer has been convinced and has bought the product. This can happen when a satisfied patron returns to compliment the trucker for the tasty experience and the trucker tries to capitalize on the esteem, but more interestingly it also happens when a patron returns to complain for a bad taste experience, and the trucker needs effective tactics to remedy, to avoid the loss of a potential attached patron and more importantly a loss of reputation among the customers in queue and the colleagues. The solution is often to prevent the possible complains by explaining everything about raw materials and the preparation before the eating takes place and 'educating' the patron about the course. But this is not always possible, as explained in the following excerpt in which a trucker talks about the problems caused by a particular way of cooking, which is smoking, that makes food appear as if it were raw:

When people open the chicken and find the red in the outside, they do not understand that the red is out, not inside, then they come back saying the meat is raw [...] In addition to selling my food I have to continuously give explanations, it is unnerving because it often happens that I give an explanation to the customer in front of me, the one behind who is, like, thirty centimeters away, but when it is his turn he asks me exactly the same thing, so I have to start again from the beginning.

(Pierluigi)

Through the illustrated vast array of tactics food truckers, besides the creation of a proper 'promise of taste', also mention many times the aim to literally 'educate' patrons and wanderers by the festivals about the values that raw ingredients or recipes possess. Here the bicephalous nature of the food trucker and the commingling of economic and cultural interests in his practices resurface: the education of the patron is a necessary performance to fill in the knowledge gap that exists between the two individuals in the most efficient way, given the narrow time available.

Through this labor, the worker fulfills his identity as a cultural actor transmitting his values and ethics to the patron: the actual moment of transmission should be the one in which the subject bites and taste the food, but this cannot happen if the eating is not accompanied by an education that provides him a sufficient specialized cultural capital to be effectively conscious about the food and the values associated to it. At the same time, this process is also economically finalized because the explication of values and the ethics involved in the production of the course is functional to the explanation of its high costs for a mobile street food vendor: they need to counterbalance the consistent expense for the customers making them understand the reasons behind it. So the credibility of the specific promise of taste and the education performed by the vendor is essential to the recognition of selling prices as fair, and consequently to the earnings of the business.

The attention of this paragraph has been devoted to street food festivals only, that are the main working places for truckers and also the main field of the conducted participant observation. It is nevertheless interesting to mention catering events. In fact, it is in private events for enterprises quite far from the imaginary of street food, that the satisfaction measured by the interviewees is generally very high: according to their accounts it is in these occasions that they can most truly express their creativity and authenticity and feel that their mastery and professionalism is fully recognized without the need to laboriously educate customers and come to terms with 'inauthentic' authenticity seekers.

5. Discussion

5.1. *Toward a cultural political economy of omnivorous taste production*

This research constitutes arguably one of the first attempts to look at cultural omnivorousness with a focus on its concrete dealing on the marketplaces, following a very recent developing literature that devotes attention to markets in taste consumption (Arsel and Bean 2018). To achieve this aim, the growing trend and economic niche of gourmet food trucks has been considered an economic imaginary, following Cultural Political Economy approach (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008), and food truckers the dealers of this imaginary, cultural claimers of authenticity and micro-entrepreneurs seeking economic viability.

This goal has been motivated by the conviction of the usefulness to take the first steps toward a cultural political economy of omnivorous taste production. If the conception of cultural political economy has been motivated by the need of 'putting culture in its place' in political economy (Sum and Jessop 2013), the need that moves this research could otherwise be considered one of putting economy in its place in analyzes of cultural omnivorous production and consumption.

First, results stress that authenticity is a relational quality: it takes form only in the mutual relation and agreement reached between an authenticity claim made by economic actors, that are the dealers of omnivorous taste shaped by the economic imaginary, and an authenticity demand advanced by omnivore-seeking customers influenced by the same imaginary. This process also includes an innovation and deviation from the constitutive elements of authenticity on which food truckers rely, typicality and genuineness, to meet market requirements, that implies that authenticity claims are built also on a partial 'inauthenticity'.

Also, results have shown the reflexive and market-bounded nature of the process of reproduction and assemblage of omnivorous taste. Reflexive because, as it has been exposed, food truckers are actors who are conscious of their double identity, and who try to reach both cultural and economic objectives and to mediate the intrinsic contradictions between them. They are active authenticity claimers that compose the food, producing the gourmet food trucks imaginary and, at the same time, powerless spectators of the norms and the 'ground rules' to be followed to be a competitor in the economic imaginary itself. They are market-bounded because the results have uncovered the pretty intuitive but normally concealed fact that, although the values and frames enhanced by gourmet food are apparently intrinsic to the duty of the artisan to offer an excellent course to the consumer, the process of assemblage of taste is not a detached act made (only) in the name of food quality and personal ethics, but is (also) a self-interested act pushed by the necessity to win the harsh competition and

to be a successful micro-entrepreneur.

These properties have been exposed by giving the same attention in the ethnography to the processes of production of the actual course, that happen in an exclusive relationship between the subject and the object, the artisan and the product, and the production of a promise of taste during festivals finalized to sell prepared food that puts in direct connections the producer, the goods and the customers. Festivals have been a very useful case study because they allow to materialize and reproduce in a confined space and time the competitive mechanisms that relatively every business has to face in a broader market niche.

In this scenario, the plate becomes the central material and symbolic node that connects this complex entanglement of relations between places and people: what emerges is a 'tastescape', a concept already variously used by Pavoni et al. (2018) and Haden (2011), that we define as the ecology of people, values and places involved in the reproduction of taste in the 'environment' of an economic imaginary. Therefore gourmet food trucks constitute an economic imaginary and a tastescape: the first is the set of discourses that enabled gourmet food trucks to become a trend, to attract micro-entrepreneurs and to grow as economic niche; the second is the network of actors and factors that produce an appetizing taste for the consumers in the context of the imaginary (in this specific case, an omnivorous taste for consumers with a cosmopolitan attitude). It follows that an efficient tastescape is a requirement for the success and resonance of its economic imaginary. Taken together, they mark the ambivalence of consumption as a cultural and economic process.

Another valuable contribution made possible by analyzing gourmet taste production as a market-bounded process is to partially reconsider its consumers. Existing literature on omnivorous food consumption has concentrated on the figure of the 'foodie' (Emontspool and Georgi 2017; Johnston and Baumann 2007), the enthusiastic hobbyist of food 'who devotes considerable time and energy to eating and learning about good food' (Johnston and Baumann 2015). This contribution does not challenge the usefulness of foodies as relevant case study but propose, similarly to what Warde, Wright, and Gayo-Cal (2007) observed with regards to the general figure of the omnivore, to reassess the consciousness of and the commitment to 'foodie' ethos of the common omnivore-seeking consumer. Through participant observation and from the relevance dedicated by food truckers to the education of the consumer to gourmet taste, the patron of street food festivals and of gourmet food trucks in general seems to correspond more to the *flâneur*, a middle-class wanderer in the crowd (Tester 2014) driven by curiosity and the fascination of the economic imaginary, rather than a highly-competent and committed foodie. After all, for an economic imaginary to rapidly grow as a trend and to multiply the related micro-entrepreneurs involved in it, a vast, varying and quite indistinct community of consumers is a prerequisite.

5.2. 'Be authentic' as the imperative of omnivorous taste producers

During the ethnography, every interviewee reported authenticity and creativity as fundamental qualities to possess to be successful in this job. A clear similarity of this common view among operators is identifiable with the constriction of 'Being creative' observed by McRobbie (2014) in the broader field of creative economies, a means that is imposed by recent political and economic doctrines on workers.

According to the results, authenticity is not only a quality to be possessed by the plate, but also by the producer: this gets explicit in the demarcation of the boundaries

of the 'real' gourmet food truckers by each one. Starting from the assumption that every food trucker considers himself 'authentic', everyone draws up a network of other truckers that are considered 'authentic' on the basis of the resemblance to themselves. Authenticity becomes clearly the most basilar prerequisite to be considered a member of the clique of gourmet food producers. Given the centrality of authenticity for the formation of omnivorous taste regardless of the sector, the imperative disposition of 'being authentic' can be considered, as it is aspiring for further empirical evidence, extensible to the broader category of omnivorous taste producers.

To address the imperative of 'being authentic' as the specific variant of the general imperative of 'being creative' (McRobbie 2014) then means to explore the normative dimension of economic imaginaries, in which dealers of taste are like sailors on the high sea: they can set the route and choose the vessel, but, if they will not strictly follow the navigation rules of the sea, they will soon end up being shipwrecked. Similarly, food truckers have the power to design their gourmet plates as they want and to shape their appearance and distinctiveness in the market, but must adhere and conform to the most resonant discourses that compose the imaginary to proceed without failing in the economic niche.

5.3. *Regionalism as a cosmopolitan attitude: Integrating theories about food cultural omnivorousness*

The idea of promoting and re-discovering local food mainly as an act of resistance to globalized trends through alternative value systems of belief has been contended in literature, either with a positive or negative connotation of 'reflexive' against 'un-reflexive' or 'defensive' localism (Feagan 2007; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Winter 2003), and more in general the idea of a decline of place-based localism in the age of cosmopolitanism (Haller and Roudometof 2010). This contribution, far from rejecting the existence and relevance of a movements promoting local food chains against globalization and/or capitalism, suggests that global economic imaginaries on food have also subsumed, at least in the Italian context, localism and regionalism as constitutive elements of a cultural omnivorous taste for cosmopolitan palates: regionalism, defined as a recognized system of values connected to the promotion of typical products and raw materials of a region or a local tradition, also if intimately connected with Italian '*campanilismo*' in contemporary gourmet food production and consumption, does not express a parochial attitude, but rather a cosmopolitan one.

According to the results, regionalism and exoticism, the latter in the marginal number of cases in which it was employed, seem to be two equivalent qualities used to assemble 'authentic' food, both with the necessity to add genuineness to be credible as such. They fundamentally serve the same scope: they help to bond the course to a specific place, be it a region, a city or a foreign country, and they lay the foundations for the distinctiveness of the food truck, that is pivotal to its success in the street food economic niche, together with innovation enabled by the creativity of the trucker. The typicality infused by regionalism is therefore similar to exoticism as they are both ways to link a food to a geographic place, but is at the same time very different in how it operates. Indeed the act of tasting the typical could be interpreted as the contrary of the act of tasting the exotic: you seek the very familiar rather than the unusual, the 'true typical' regional food you know well rather than the 'exciting unknown' exotic food.

The results on the role of typicality and its predominance observed through the

ethnography can lead us to partially integrate the theories about the frames of taste under food cultural omnivorousness. First, without challenging the relevance of exoticism in gourmet food production already observed in the literature, in particular in the American context (Johnston and Baumann 2015, 2007), this contribution contends that this relevance cannot be automatically extended to the global scale. In other contexts, the 'exotic' frame can be replaced, for example, by the 'typical' frame, serving the same function but being substantially different in the ways it is achieved. Further researches will be naturally needed to assess if this is an Italian exceptionalism or if the prevalence of typicality over exoticism is a feature that occurs also in other contexts characterized by a diversified and rooted food and street food culture, or even if other new frames could emerge from other contexts.

Combining this contribution with the others already discussed in the previous paragraphs, it becomes possible to advance a more overall integration to theories of production of gourmet food in the age of cultural omnivorousness: food must 'be authentic' (as well as the micro-entrepreneur) to be recognized as gourmet and become appetizing for the cosmopolitan and omnivorous palate, and must be at the same time distinctive to stand out and be successful in the market competition. It is rendered as 'typical' or 'exotic' to produce authenticity and reach distinctiveness, with genuineness that allows typicality or exoticism to be publicly recognized as such. Innovation on the tradition of typical or exotic recipes and raw materials boosts and reinforces its distinctiveness among the crowd of competitors.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored the various phases of taste assemblage in the growing economic niche of street food as a relevant case study of the phenomenon of cultural omnivorousness, carrying it out in such a peculiar context as the Italian one. Looking to integrate existing theories of taste from collected ethnographic material, the article has advanced both empirical and theoretical contributions.

From an empirical point of view, the article aims to partially fill a gap in literature about the concrete modes of assemblage of omnivorous taste, and gourmet street food in particular, with the eyes and the perspective of the producers of the food, highlighting the complex and conflicting co-presence of their identities as cultural actors and micro-entrepreneurs and distinguishing the different phases of the formation of an omnivorous taste for cosmopolitan palates: the complex and often contradictory building of an authenticity claim through the craft of a culinary product, trying to match the preferences of omnivore-seeking customers, and then the strategies used to build a proper 'promise of taste' in the actual market where demanders and dealers of 'authenticity claimed food' meet. With regard to specific studies on omnivorous food consumption, it contributes by performing the empirical research in a fieldwork that presents a very rooted and widespread culinary culture and a great food diversity, allowing an assessment of the peculiar observed differences in comparison with more established fieldworks characterized by different conditions.

From a theoretical point of view, the article is in line with the very recent interest in markets and the economy in taste consumption and production, laying the foundations of a cultural political economy of omnivorous taste production. Gourmet food trucks are interpreted as an economic imaginary, connected to a corresponding tastescape, that shapes the nature of omnivorous taste production as reflexive and market-bounded and bounds the actors involved in it to imperatively 'be authentic'.

The economic actors that concretely produce the goods in a similar omnivorous context are conceptualized as taste dealers: they are not the ones that directly make taste, a process that happens at the macro-level of the dominant discourses of the imaginary, but are the intermediaries that deal the taste to the customers, reproducing and assembling it through various frames and variations. Moreover, the analysis of taste production in the peculiar Italian fieldwork enables the affirmation of the subsumption of regionalism into omnivorous, cosmopolitan taste, thus, that in contemporary food consumption regionalism expresses a cosmopolitan rather than a parochial attitude. Lastly, in agreement with the combination of these theoretical assumptions, a more defined and overall integration into contemporary theory of omnivorous taste in food consumption is suggested, based on the binomial composed of authenticity and distinctiveness as necessary qualities of gourmet food, and typicality, exoticism, genuineness and innovation as frames that can variously contribute to the formation of these qualities.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Professor Adam Arvidsson, Professor Richard E. Ocejo and Professor Giovanni Semi whose insightful suggestions aided the development of the present manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

7. References

References

- Airoldi, Massimo, Davide Beraldo, and Alessandro Gandini. 2016. "Follow the algorithm: An exploratory investigation of music on YouTube." *Poetics* 57 (2015): 1–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2016.05.001>.
- Alfiero, Simona, Agata Lo Giudice, and Alessandro Bonadonna. 2017. "Street food and innovation: the food truck phenomenon." *British Food Journal* 119 (11): 2462–2476.
- Anderson, Elijah. 2004. "The cosmopolitan Canopy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 595: 14–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23218420><http://about.jstor.org/terms>.
- Arsel, Zeynep, and Jonathan Bean. 2013. "Taste Regimes and Market-Mediated Practice." *Journal of Consumer Research* 39 (5): 899–917. <https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-lookup/doi/10.1086/666595>.
- Arsel, Zeynep, and Jonathan Bean, eds. 2018. *Taste, Consumption and Markets*. New York: Routledge.
- Arvidsson, Adam. 2006. *Brands Meaning and value in media culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Arvidsson, Adam, Giannino Malossi, and Serpica Naro. 2010. "Passionate Work? Labour Conditions in the Milan Fashion Industry." *Journal for Cultural Research* 14 (3): 295–309. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14797581003791503>.
- Atkinson, Will. 2011. "The context and genesis of musical tastes: Omnivorousness debunked, Bourdieu buttressed." *Poetics* 39 (3): 169–186.

- Beck, Ulrich. 2002. "The cosmopolitan society and its enemies." *Theory, culture & society* 19 (1-2): 17–44.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2006. *Cosmopolitan vision*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. 2005. "The new spirit of capitalism." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 18 (3-4): 161–188.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2013. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Routledge.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory* 16 (1): 4–33. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/0735-2751.00040>.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2009. *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations and One Theoretical Tradition*. London: University of California Press.
- Capatti, Alberto, and Massimo Montanari. 2003. *Italian cuisine: a cultural history*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Da, Zhi, Joseph Engelberg, and Pengjie Gao. 2011. "In Search of Attention." *Journal of Finance* 66 (5): 1461–1499.
- Deakin, Mark, Nunzia Borrelli, and Davide Diamantini. 2016. "Milan's Urban Food Policies as Smart City Governance Development." In *The Governance of City Food Systems: Case Studies From Around the World*, edited by Mark Deakin, Davide Diamantini, and Nunzia Borrelli, Chap. 1, 154. Milan: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.
- Dell'agnese, Elena, and Valentina Anzoise. 2011. "Milan, the unthinking metropolis." *International Planning Studies* 16 (3): 217–235.
- DiMaggio, Paul. 1977. "Market Structure, the Creative Process, and Popular Culture." *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (2): 436–452.
- DuPuis, E. Melanie, and David Goodman. 2005. "Should we go "home" to eat?: Toward a reflexive politics of localism." *Journal of Rural Studies* 21 (3): 359–371.
- Emontspool, Julie, and Carina Georgi. 2017. "A cosmopolitan return to nature: how combining aesthetization and moralization processes expresses distinction in food consumption." *Consumption Markets and Culture* 20 (4): 306–328. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2016.1238823>.
- Etikan, Ilker. 2016. "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling." *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5 (1): 1. doi=10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11.
- Feagan, Robert. 2007. "The place of food: Mapping out the 'local' in local food systems." *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (1): 23–42.
- Featherstone, Mike. 1995. *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Featherstone, Mike. 2002. "Cosmopolis: an introduction." *Theory, Culture & Society* 19 (1-2): 1–16.
- Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 1998. "A cultural field in the making: Gastronomy in 19th-century France." *American journal of sociology* 104 (3): 597–641.
- Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. 2006. *Accounting for taste: The triumph of French cuisine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ginsborg, Paul. 2003. *A history of contemporary Italy: society and politics, 1943-1988*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grunert, Klaus G, and Kristina Aachmann. 2016. "Consumer reactions to the use of EU quality labels on food products: a review of the literature." *Food Control* 59: 178–187. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodcont.2015.05.021>.
- Guerrini, Federico. 2017. "From Self-Made Entrepreneurs to the Sharing Economy: Milan as a Laboratory for a New Collaboration-Based Approach." In *Entrepreneurial Renaissance*, edited by Piero Formica, Chap. 5, 89–99. Springer. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-52660-7>.
- Haden, Roger. 2011. "Lionizing Taste: Toward an Ecology of Contemporary Connoisseurship." *Educated Tastes: Food, Drink, and Connoisseur Culture* 237–290.
- Haller, William, and Victor Roudometof. 2010. "The cosmopolitan-local continuum in cross-national perspective." *Journal of Sociology* 46 (3): 277–297.

- Heltosky, C. 2004. *Garlic and Oil. Politics and Food in Italy*. Oxford.
- Hendrix, Michael, and Lawrence Bodwish. 2018. *Food Truck Nation*. Technical Report. U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger. 2012. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Irvin, Cate. 2017. "Constructing Hybridized Authenticities in the Gourmet Food Truck Scene." *Symbolic Interaction* 40 (1): 43–62.
- Ismea-Qualivita. 2018. *Rapporto 2017 Ismea-Qualivita*. Technical Report. Ismea-Qualivita.
- Jesi, Furio. 2014. *Spartakus: The Symbolology of Revolt*. London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books.
- Jessop, Bob. 1992. "Fordism and post-fordism." In *Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development*, edited by Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper, london ed., Chap. 3. Routledge.
- Jessop, Bob. 2009. "Cultural Political Economy." *Critical Policy Studies* 3 (4): 336–356.
- Jessop, Bob, and Stijn Oosterlynck. 2008. "Cultural political economy: On making the cultural turn without falling into soft economic sociology." *Geoforum* 39 (3): 1155–1169.
- Johnston, Josée, and Shyon Baumann. 2007. "Democracy versus Distinction: A Study of Omnivorousness in Gourmet Food Writing." *American Journal of Sociology* 113 (1): 165–204.
- Johnston, Josee, and Shyon Baumann. 2015. *Foodies*. Second ed. New York and London: Routledge.
- Johnston, Josée, Shyon Baumann, and Kate Cairns. 2010. "The national and the cosmopolitan in cuisine: constructing America through gourmet food writing." *The globalization of food* 161–185.
- Katz-Gerro, Tally. 2002. "Highbrow Cultural Consumption and Class Distinction in Italy, Israel, West Germany, Sweden, and the United States." *Social Forces* 81 (1): 207–229. <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-lookup/doi/10.1353/sof.2002.0050>.
- Kuh, Patric. 2001. *last days of haute cuisine*. Viking.
- Lizardo, Omar, and Sara Skiles. 2009. "Highbrow omnivorousness on the small screen?. Cultural industry systems and patterns of cultural choice in Europe." *Poetics* 37 (1): 1–23.
- Lizardo, Omar, and Sara Skiles. 2012. "Reconceptualizing and theorizing "omnivorousness": Genetic and relational mechanisms." *Sociological Theory* 30 (4): 263–282.
- López-Sintas, Jordi, and Tally Katz-Gerro. 2005. "From exclusive to inclusive elitists and further: Twenty years of omnivorousness and cultural diversity in arts participation in the USA." *Poetics* 33 (5): 299–319.
- Mafai, Miriam. 1997. *Il sorpasso: gli straordinari anni del miracolo economico, 1958-1963*. Mondadori.
- Mau, Steffen, Jan Mewes, and Ann Zimmermann. 2008. "Cosmopolitan attitudes through transnational social practices?" *Global Networks* 8 (1): 1–24.
- McRobbie, Angela. 2014. "Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries." .
- McRobbie, Angela. 2016. "Towards a Sociology of Fashion Micro-Enterprises: Methods for Creative Economy Research." *Sociology* 50 (5): 934–948. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0038038516650593>.
- Miele, Mara, and Jonathan Murdoch. 2002. "The practical aesthetics of traditional cuisines: slow food in Tuscany." *Sociologia ruralis* 42 (4): 312–328.
- Ocejo, Richard E. 2014. "Show the animal: Constructing and communicating new elite food tastes at upscale butcher shops." *Poetics* 47: 106–121. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2014.10.006>.
- Ocejo, Richard E. 2017. *Masters of Craft*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Parasecoli, Fabio. 2014. *Al dente: a history of food in Italy*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Pavoni, Andrea, Danilo Mandic, Nirta Caterina, and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, eds. 2018. *Taste*. First edit ed. London: University of Westminster Press.
- Peterson, Richard A. 2005a. "In Search of Authenticity." *Journal of Management Studies* 42 (5): 1083–1098.
- Peterson, Richard A. 2005b. "Problems in comparative research: The example of omnivorousness." *Poetics* 33 (5-6): 257–282.

- Peterson, Richard A. 2013. *Creating country music: Fabricating authenticity*. University of Chicago Press.
- Peterson, Richard A., and Roger M. Kern. 1996. "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore." *American Sociological Review* 61 (5): 900. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096460?origin=crossref>.
- Polacchi, Stefano. 2018. "Anni 70. Cosa succedeva in Italia mentre in Europa nasceva la Nouvelle Cuisine?" *Gambero Rosso* 69–81.
- Purhonen, Semi, Jukka Gronow, and Keijo Rahkonen. 2010. "Nordic democracy of taste? Cultural omnivorousness in musical and literary taste preferences in Finland." *Poetics* 38 (3): 266–298.
- Rinaldo, Diego, and Francesca Golfetto. 2006. "Representing markets: The shaping of fashion trends by French and Italian fabric companies." *Industrial Marketing Management* 35 (7): 856–869.
- Rossmann, Gabriel, and Richard A. Peterson. 2015. "The instability of omnivorous cultural taste over time." *Poetics* 52: 139–153. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304422X15000418>.
- Roudometof, Victor. 2005. "Transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and glocalization." *Current Sociology* 53 (1): 113–135.
- Sassatelli, Roberta, Marco Santoro, and Giovanni Semi. 2015. *Fronteggiare la crisi: come cambia lo stile di vita del ceto medio*. Bologna: Il mulino.
- Sassatelli, Roberta, and Alan Scott. 2001. "Novel Food, New Markets and Trust Regimes: Responses to the erosion of consumers' confidence in Austria, Italy and the UK." *European Societies* 3 (2): 213–144.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1939. *Business Cycles: A Theoretical, Historical, and Statistical Analysis of the Capitalist Process*. New York Toronto London: McGraw-Hill.
- Sum, Ngai-Ling, and Bob Jessop. 2013. *Towards a Cultural Political Economy: Putting Culture in its Place in Political Economy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Tavory, Iddo, and Stefan Timmermans. 2009. "Two cases of ethnography: Grounded theory and the extended case method." *Ethnography* 10 (3): 243–263.
- Teil, Genevieve, and Antoine Hennion. 2004. "Discovering quality or performing taste? A sociology of the amateur." *Qualities of Food* 19–37.
- Tester, Keith. 2014. *The Flaneur*. London: Routledge.
- Trubek, Amy B. 2000. *Haute cuisine: How the French invented the culinary profession*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Unioncamere, and InfoCamere. 2018. *Street-food: 1000 imprese in più in cinque anni*. Technical Report. Unioncamere.
- van Eijck, Koen, and John Lievens. 2008. "Cultural omnivorousness as a combination of highbrow, pop, and folk elements: The relation between taste patterns and attitudes concerning social integration." *Poetics* 36 (2-3): 217–242.
- Vertovec, Steven, and Robin Cohen. 2003. *Conceiving cosmopolitanism: Theory, context and practice*. Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Warde, Alan, and Lydia Martens. 2000. *Eating out: Social differentiation, consumption and pleasure*. Cambridge University Press.
- Warde, Alan, Lydia Martens, and Wendy Olsen. 1999. "Consumption and the problem of variety: cultural omnivorousness, social distinction and dining out." *Sociology* 33 (1): 105–127.
- Warde, Alan, David Wright, and Modesto Gayo-Cal. 2007. "Understanding cultural omnivorousness: Or, the myth of the cultural omnivore." *Cultural Sociology* 1 (2): 143–164.
- Winter, Michael. 2003. "Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism." *Journal of Rural Studies* 19 (1): 23–32.
- Zanchini, Giorgio. 2012. "Gli omnivori in Italia: l'evoluzione dei consumi culturali attraverso la lente dei supplementi culturali dei quotidiani." *Sociologia della comunicazione* 44 (2): 117–146.

Appendix A. Tables

Table A1. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients

Case	Spearman's Rho	p-value
US	0.9400	0.0000
Global	0.9673	0.0000
Italy	0.8025	0.0000

source: Author from Google Trends data

Table A2. Search interest percentages of Street Food and Food Truck topics by Country

Country	Street Food	Food Truck
Brazil	4%	96%
Chile	6%	94%
United States	7%	93%
Argentina	8%	92%
Belgium	11%	89%
Mexico	11%	89%
Colombia	14%	86%
Canada	15%	85%
France	16%	84%
Poland	23%	77%
Netherlands	24%	76%
Spain	24%	76%
New Zealand	25%	75%
Saudi Arabia	27%	73%
Japan	29%	71%
South Korea	32%	68%
Australia	33%	67%
South Africa	33%	67%
Sweden	39%	61%
United Arab Emirates	45%	55%
Malaysia	46%	54%
Indonesia	58%	42%
Germany	60%	40%
Switzerland	67%	33%
Thailand	67%	33%
India	71%	29%
Hungary	75%	25%
Austria	77%	23%
Philippines	78%	22%
United Kingdom	80%	20%
Singapore	83%	17%
Italy	88%	12%

source: Author from Google Trends data

Appendix B. Figures

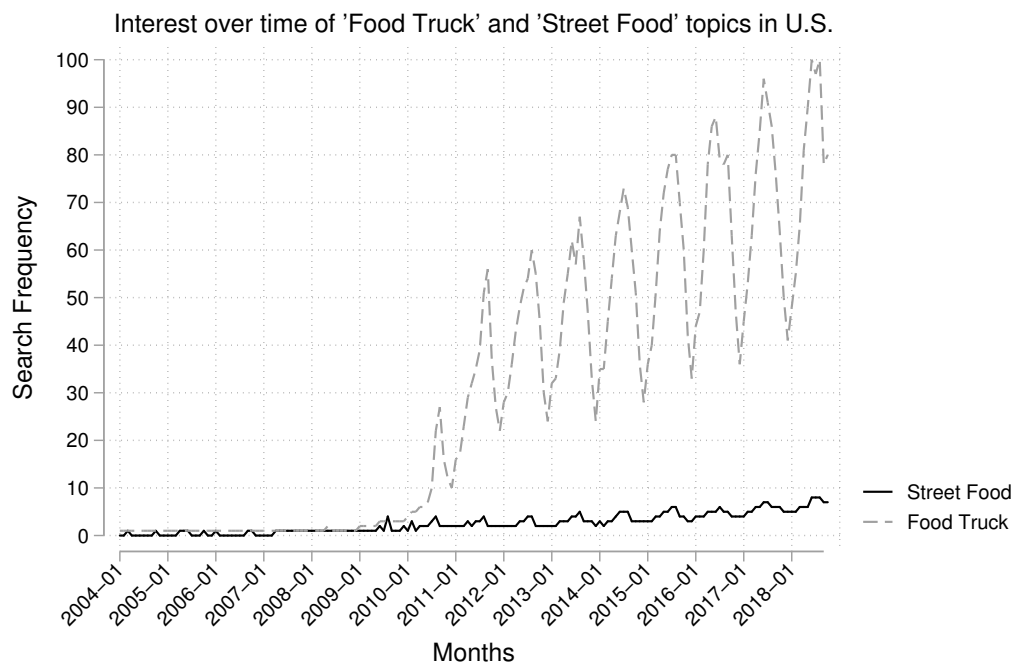


Figure B1. Interest over time of 'Food Truck' and 'Street Food' topics in US. Source: Author from Google Trends data.

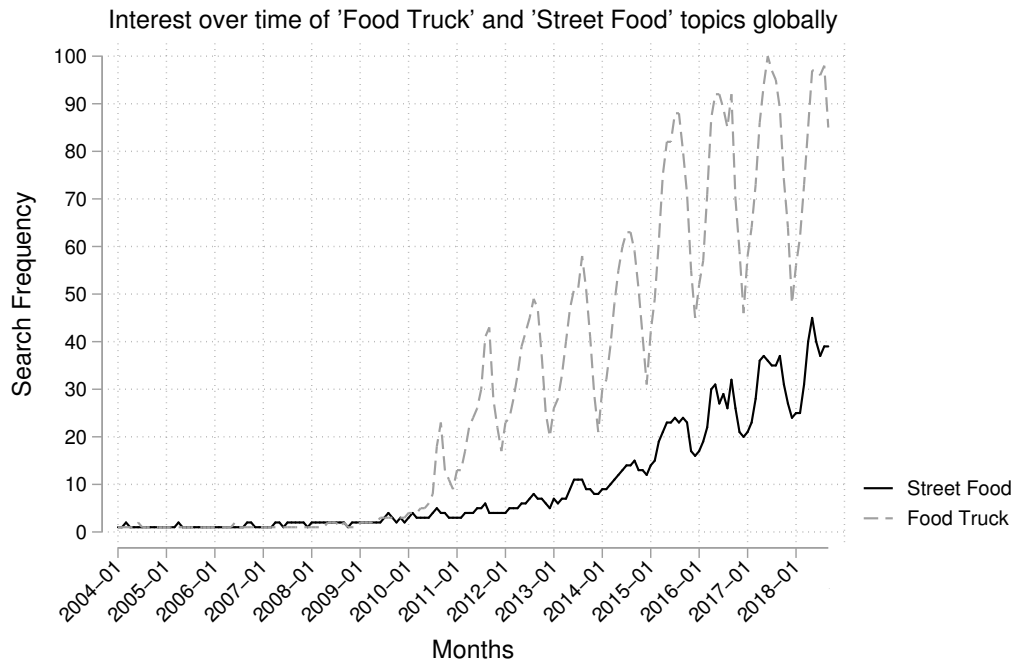


Figure B2. Interest over time of 'Food Truck' and 'Street Food' topics globally. Source: Author from Google Trends data.

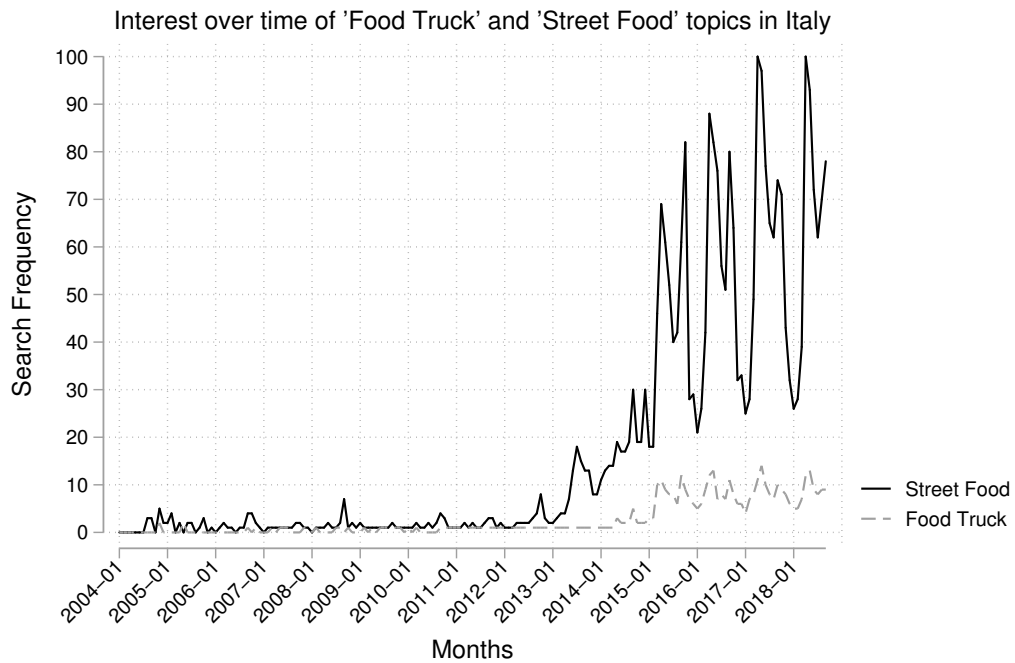


Figure B3. Interest over time of 'Food Truck' and 'Street Food' topics in Italy. Source: Author from Google Trends data.