Can food cultures and culinary trends for authenticity contribute to sustainable landscapes?

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Food is much brought up in the sustainability debate, but mainly from an environmental aspect. Food culture is a major determinant of landscape over the world. This paper is based on the ongoing interdisciplinary research project “The role of Food and Gastronomy for a Sustainable Landscape Heritage” financed by the Swedish National Board for Cultural Heritage, involving cultural food studies, landscape research and studies of related policies and practices. The project builds upon the assumptions that 1) gastronomic landscape heritage is not only a question of production for subsistence, as food is a vital bearer of material and immaterial cultural and aesthetic landscape values and that 2) gastronomic landscape heritage is associated with highly cultivated landscapes as well as predominantly ‘natural’ landscapes, and hence that both culture and nature generates landscape values (Olwig unpublished). But what further synergies are there? Can the new (global) culinary trends for authenticity and ‘sense of place’ (terroir) and a growing interest for from (groups of) consumers, for place based, environmentally and ethically sourced food, contribute to sustainable landscapes? For example; the use of food to create regional identity is nothing new, but currently experiencing a strong revival. In some countries where distinct regional food cultures never really have existed, such as Sweden, there are now ongoing efforts to construct regional food identities. This also excludes and draws up artificial boundaries towards other regions. In the paper, these, and further issues are problematized and the concepts are critically examined.

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