

# Chapter 1

## European Consumers' Definition and Perception of Traditional Foods

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### 1.1 Introduction

Traditional food products (TFPs) constitute an important element of European culture, identity, and culinary heritage (European Commission 2007). They contribute to the development and sustainability of rural areas; protect them from depopulation; entail substantial product differentiation potential for food producers, processors, and retailers (Avermaete et al. 2004); and provide variety and choice for food consumers. The production of TFPs in Europe is mainly realized by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and these products are for an important part sold under collective trademarks. For SMEs, which in general are not equipped with a separate and specialized marketing and communication business unit, a good understanding of consumers' beliefs, perceptions, and expectations is essential for further product development and innovation, for the implementation of successful marketing actions, and for the communication of targeted and tailor-made messages. The tendency of growing consumer opposition to an increasing globalization and industrialization of the food sector has also fuelled consumer interest in TFPs as a food product category (Jordana 2000).

To date, existing definitions for TFPs have been designed mainly from a food scientist or food technologist perspective (Table 1.1). These efforts have proven to be challengeable for some reasons. First, traditional food is a relative rather than

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**Table 1.1** Overview of published definitions of the concept of traditional food products (TFPs) prior to the Truefood consumer studies of 2006–2007

Definition of the concept of TFPs	Source
A TFP is a representation of a group, it belongs to a defined space, and it is part of a culture that implies the cooperation of the individuals operating in that territory	Bertozzi (1998)
In order to be traditional, a product must be linked to a territory, and it must also be part of a set of traditions, which will necessarily ensure its continuity over time	Jordana (2000)
Traditional means proven usage in the community market for a time period showing transmission between generations; this time period should be the one generally ascribed as one human generation, at least 25 years	EU (2006)
Traditional food is a food of a specific feature or features, which distinguish it clearly from other similar products of the same category in terms of the use of traditional ingredients (raw materials or primary products) or traditional composition or traditional type of production and/or processing method	EuroFIR (2007)
TFPs are agri-food products whose methods of processing, storage, and ripening are consolidated with time according to uniform and constant local use	Ministero Agricoltura (1999)

absolute concept (Nosi and Zanni 2004), whose spectrum of foods continually evolves and grows. Concomitantly, the boundaries of what is or what is not a TFP are rather faint (Wycherley et al. 2008). This is illustrated by the diversity of food product examples of traditional foods discussed in literature. Kuznesof and others (1997) referred to regional foods as “products with a protected designation of origin (PDO)” as well as to “poorer people’s food” and “old-fashioned food” as examples of traditional foods. In a similar vein, Cayot (2007) mentioned bread, cheese, and wine as typical examples of TFPs.

Second, a wide variety of terms or designations are applied for specific food product categories, which show clear interfaces with characteristics of traditional food. Examples pertain to “local food” (e.g., Chambers et al. 2007; Lobb and Mazzocchi 2007; Roininen et al. 2006), “original food” (Cembalo et al. 2008), “regional food” (e.g., Kuznesof et al. 1997), “typical food” (e.g., Caporale et al. 2006; Iaccarino et al. 2006; Nosi and Zanni 2004; Platania and Privitera 2006), “specialty food” (e.g., Guinard et al. 1999; Schamel 2007; Stefani et al. 2006; Wycherley et al. 2008), and “traditional (agri-)food” (e.g., Cayot 2007; Jordana 2000; Sanzo et al. 2003).

Third, it can be reasonably expected that different motivations to purchase and consume TFPs will exist among consumers (Platania and Privitera 2006). Differences in motivations may associate with different perceptions and conceptions of what consumers perceive to be traditional foods. As a consequence, insights in consumers’ perceptions and conceptualizations of TFPs are crucial for future product development, market positioning, and marketing communication related to this food category.

Finally, Europe cannot be regarded as a homogeneous food consumption area (Askegaard and Madsen 1998). According to Jordana (2000), southern European

countries have a more traditional food character due to a greater market share of small-sized companies and a warmer climate, which supports a more widespread availability of TFPs. Differences are apparent not only at the national level but also at a more regional level in terms of food-related preferences, food purchasing and eating habits, and food-related behavior and attitudes. Montanari (1994), for example, indicated that urban consumers might be more prone to reconnect with rural roots, while according to Weatherell et al. (2003), rural-based consumers tend to give a higher priority to “civic” issues (i.e., a set of collective principles and collective commitments) in food choice, to exhibit higher levels of concern over food provisioning issues, and to show a greater interest in local foods. This type of variability is particularly pronounced when dealing with TFPs and traditional cuisine that are based mainly on the natural resources available in the specific area.

This chapter will present findings with respect to the consumers' definition and perception of TFPs, based on consumer research performed within the European Union (EU)-funded project Truefood (Traditional United Europe Food). Truefood was an integrated research project financed by the European Commission as part of its sixth Framework Program for Research, Technology Development, and Demonstration. In order to account for expected cross-cultural differences, several European countries were included in the study. These countries vary in their geographical location, market presence of TFPs, and familiarity with EU food quality certification labels, like geographic origin or traditional specialty labels. With the selection of Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, and Spain as countries covered by the study, this research covered both the North–South and the East–West axis in Europe. Moreover these countries differ substantially in terms of the presence of EU certification labels and in food quality orientations (Becker 2009; Verbeke et al. 2012). Italy, France, and Spain had 227, 183, and 148 European Commission (EC)-registered products with geographical indications (protected designation of origin [PDO], protected geographical indication [PGI], and traditional specialty guaranteed [TSG]), respectively, while this number was no more than a dozen in Belgium and Poland in May 2011 (EU DOOR 2011). By May 2015, these numbers had increased to 273, 220, and 182 in Italy, France, and Spain, respectively, versus 17 in Belgium and 36 in Poland (EU DOOR 2015), herewith illustrating the persisting divide between these countries' food quality policy orientation. The chapter is organized as follows: First, a brief overview of the research methods is presented. Second, key findings are reported. Finally, conclusions and implications are set forth.

## 1.2 Research on Consumers and Traditional Foods

The Truefood consumer research consisted of both a qualitative and a quantitative research phase. The qualitative research phase combined focus group discussions with free word association tests and served as input for the development of a formal questionnaire that was used and analyzed in the cross-sectional quantitative research phase.

### ***1.2.1 Focus Group Discussions***

Focus group discussion is a method in which a small number of individuals are selected and interviewed in group with the goal to obtain information about their reaction to products and/or concepts (Resurreccion 1998). It is an efficient way to obtain preliminary insights into the concept of TFPs, for example (Krueger 1988). In order to safeguard the objective interpretation of the results, textual statistical analyses using the software ALCESTE were applied. A total of 12 focus group discussions (with  $7 \pm 2$  participants in each group) were carried out between June and September 2006, i.e., two group discussions in each of the six countries involved in the study. In each country, one group discussion was held with rural consumers and the other with urban consumers. All selected participants were involved in deciding what food to buy and in food preparation at home. Participants' age ranged from 29 to 55 years. The focus group discussions had the objective to obtain a qualitative exploratory consumer-driven definition for the concept of TFPs and to compare the components of this definition across six different European countries.

### ***1.2.2 Free Word Associations***

Focus group discussions provide a rational and cognitive approach to a specific topic and can be affected, in some cases, by stereotype response behavior. The use of projective techniques might provide complementary information since these techniques allow to reveal the internal thoughts and feelings of a person and to record more spontaneous and affective responses. Free word association is one such projective technique, in which the participant projects his or her personality, attitudes, and opinions as a response to a keyword, in this case the word "traditional" in a food-related context. In this test, an interviewer verbally presents the word "traditional" to the participants and registers the verbal responses that were mentioned. Participants were asked to elicit up to three different words, within a maximum time interval of 30 s for each valid association. The analyses were performed using the software XLSTAT 2006 v.4. The goal was to identify European consumers' associations to the concept of "traditional" in a food context. The findings will be compared with the qualitative definition of TFPs obtained via the focus group interviews. About 120 participants were recruited in each of the six countries (total  $n=721$ ). Participants were involved in deciding about food shopping and preparation of food at home. Further selection criteria were age (a minimum of 15 % of participants in each decade from 20 to 60 years old) and gender (a minimum of 25 % of participants of each gender within each age group).

### ***1.2.3 Cross-Sectional Consumer Survey***

A questionnaire was developed based on the findings from the focus group discussions and the free word association tests. Cross-sectional data were collected from consumer samples representative for age, gender, and regions in Belgium, France,

Italy, Norway, Poland, and Spain. Participants were recruited from the TNS European Online Access Panel, which is a large-scale and representative panel of individual consumers who agreed to take part in market research. Participants were selected from this panel using stratified random sampling and proportionate stratification in line with the national population distributions for age and region. All contact and questionnaire administration procedures were electronic. Data were collected during October–November 2007. The total sample size was 4828 participants, i.e., around 800 participants in each of the six countries involved in the study. The questionnaire was developed to allow constructing a consumer-driven definition for the concept of TFPs, to elaborate on cross-cultural differences and country specificities, and to map consumers' image, perceptions, and overall evaluation of TFPs on the European food market.

### 1.3 How Consumers Define and Perceive TFP

#### 1.3.1 *Exploratory Definition of TFPs Along Four Dimensions*

Four main dimensions were distinguished in the way consumers define the concept of TFPs based on the focus group discussions (Guerrero et al. 2009). Despite obvious cultural differences between the countries, the overall results were very similar. The first dimension of the definition of TFPs was defined as “*habits and natural*.” TFPs were perceived as food products that are eaten every day or quite frequently and as foods that are part of daily life and that are commonly used. It seems that most consumers associate TFPs with habits. Some TFPs were also defined as seasonal or consumed at special occasions such as Christmas and Easter. The concept of being a traditional food was associated with something anchored in the past to the present, transmitted from one generation to another, that has been consumed and is consumed from the past, has existed for a long time, and has “always” been part of the consumers' life. The TFP concept included aspects related to health, to naturalness, to homemade or made on the farm, to an artisan production method, without excessive industrial processing or handling and without additives.

A second dimension was called “*origin and locality*.” Tradition in relation to food was linked to food origin, and in this sense all the country samples agreed that traditions cannot be exported or transferred to other regions. Local products outside their area of influence, outside their locality, region, or country, will simply be perceived as regular products, thus losing all or at least an important part of the additional values and feelings that may be conferred on consumers in their original place of manufacturing and/or distribution. However, some consumers participating in focus groups stated that in certain cases traditions may be created or taken over from other regions or countries (e.g., couscous in France), because information, fashions, or globalization may spread traditions and TFPs all over the world and may convert even a seemingly nontraditional product into a traditional one over time.

A third dimension pertained to *processing and elaboration*. There was general agreement across countries regarding the importance of the elaboration of the food. It seemed more appropriate to talk about traditional cuisine than to talk about TFPs.

Normally, it is the elaboration that makes the difference between a traditional and a nontraditional food product. In this context, the gastronomic heritage and artisan character of the elaboration method received great importance. When dealing with food, the transfer of the know-how or culinary arts among generations constitutes the gastronomic heritage. To be traditional a food product not only has to contain traditional ingredients, but it also has to be processed in a traditional way, according to traditional recipes. TFPs were perceived, in general, as relatively simple products, with a rather low complexity. TFPs tend to be basic, natural, and pure, often in the sense that little or no processing or manipulation has occurred after the primary production of the food and its ingredients.

“*Sensory properties*” constituted the fourth dimension. Taste was an important dimension for TFPs, with a distinct taste emerging as one of the strongest characteristics of TFPs. The importance of sensory characteristics as a quality dimension in determining consumers’ acceptance or rejection has been pointed out in a large amount of previous studies and is widely accepted. Sensory characteristics were mentioned as one of the simplest and easiest ways to recognize and identify the authenticity and traditional character of a food product.

### ***1.3.2 Words Associated with Tradition in the Food Context***

*Family, Old, Habit, Christmas, and Grandmother* were among the most frequently elicited words in the Truefood word association study (Guerrero et al. 2010). Frequency of elicitation has been related with the strength or importance of a concept in the consumers’ minds (Guerrero et al. 2000). Accordingly, consumers related the concept of traditional in a food context to their family and familial situation (*Family* and *Grandmother*) and with repeated practice (*Habit*), although it was also linked to special occasions such as *Christmas*. Family and traditions are closely related. Family is the most natural and common way of transmitting norms and values from one generation to another and to build a cultural identity (Abad and Sheldon 2008). According to Nelms (2005), habit is also an important element of traditions because it may create new ones such as special foods, different activities, bedtime, or mealtime routines. The meaning of the word *Old* is not so obvious. *Old* may have a neutral, a positive, or a negative connotation, positive as something authentic, well established and proven to be wholesome, and that has to be preserved versus negative as something outdated, old-fashioned, and not very useful or attractive anymore nowadays.

Comparing the results from the different countries indicated some similarities and differences. Gastronomic associations (*Restaurant, Cooking, Meal, Recipe, and Dish*) were positioned closer to France in a simple correspondence analysis. For Polish consumers, traditional seemed to be mostly linked to sensory properties (*Tasty*), *Family*, and *Dinner*. Further, *Old-fashioned, Quality, Restaurant, and Culture* were closer to Belgium; *Home, Good, and Habit* closer to Spain; *Christmas, Rural, Country, and Good* closer to Norway; and *Homemade, Natural, and Old*

closer to Italy. Notwithstanding these country specificities, in general and from a qualitative point of view, the perception of the word traditional was quite similar in all countries. Words such as *Family*, *Good*, *Grandmother*, *Healthy*, *Natural*, *Regional*, *Restaurant*, or *Simple* were frequently elicited in all countries.

The elicited words constituted ten dimensions. These dimensions were *Sensory* (includes words like *Tasty*, *Taste*, or *Flavor*), *Health* (includes words like *Healthy*, *Unhealthy*, *Heavy*, or *Nutritious*), *Elaboration* (includes words like *Handmade*, *Homemade*, *Elaboration*, or *Laborious*), *Heritage* (includes words like *Ancestors*, *Old*, *Family*, *Culture*, or *Everlasting*), *Variety* (includes words like *Variety*, *Boring*, or *Choice*), *Habit* (includes words like *Habitual/typical*), *Origin* (includes words like *Country/origin*), *Basics/simple*, *Special occasions* (includes words like *Celebration*, *Holidays*, or *Christmas*), and *Marketing* (includes words like *Expensive*, *Store/shop*, or *Distribution*). The *Sensory* and *Health* dimensions were closer to Poland and Italy; *Heritage* was closer to Spain; *Special occasions*, *Basics/simple*, and *Origin* were closer to Norway; *Elaboration* was closer to France; and *Habit*, *Marketing*, and *Variety* were closer to Belgium. These differences reflect differences in food cultures in relation to traditional food across European countries. Importantly, these dimensions corroborate well with the definition for the concept of TFPs obtained in the previous section using focus group discussions in the same six countries.

### 1.3.3 Quantitative Consumer-Driven Definition of TFPs

Based on the insights from the qualitative exploratory research, 13 statements reflecting different elements of the consumers' conception of TFP were included in the quantitative consumer study (Vanhonacker et al. 2010a). The list of statements is presented in Table 1.2. Survey participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement on a seven-point Likert scale, where a score of "1" corresponded with *totally disagree*, "4" corresponded with *neither agree nor disagree*, and "7" corresponded to *totally agree*. Each of the 13 statements received a mean score significantly higher than the scale's midpoint. This indicates that, on average, all elements were relevant for a consumer-driven definition of TFPs. The highest mean score was obtained for "grandparents already ate it" and the lowest score for "natural, low processed."

Based on the scores given by the study participants, the following consumer-driven definition for the concept of TFPs was set forth: "A traditional food product is a product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, transmitted from one generation to another, made in a specific way according to gastronomic heritage, naturally processed, and distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country" (Vanhonacker et al. 2010a).

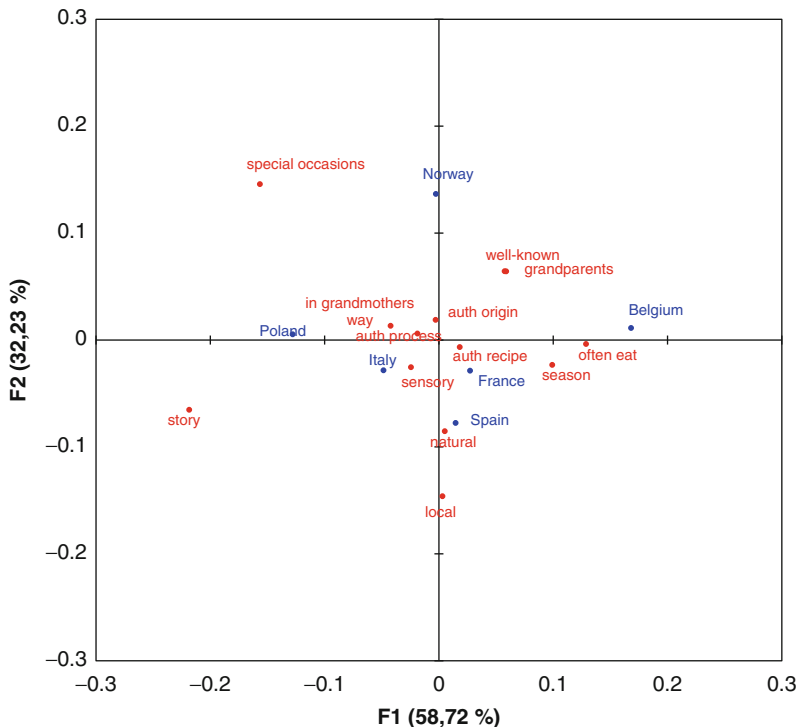
Cross-country differences were analyzed through performing simple correspondence analysis (Fig. 1.1). This analysis takes into account the frequency of occurrence of the answers on the positive side of the seven-point scale (response categories

**Table 1.2** Consumers' agreement with statements reflecting the concept of TFPs

Statement	Mean value	SD
When I think about traditional food, I think about food products that my parents and <i>grandparents already ate</i> , i.e., food that has been available for a long time	5.93	1.17
I consider traditional food as <i>well-known</i> food	5.66	1.25
Traditional food has an <i>authentic recipe</i> , i.e., an original, since long known recipe	5.54	1.33
To me, a traditional food product is associated with <i>specific sensory properties</i>	5.51	1.31
The availability of traditional food is strongly <i>dependent on the season</i>	5.50	1.42
A traditional food product is typically produced <i>in grandmothers' way</i>	5.34	1.42
Traditional food has an <i>authentic origin of raw material</i> , i.e., use of the same kind of raw material as originally used when the product was developed	5.30	1.37
According to me, traditional food is typically something one <i>can eat very often</i>	5.22	1.45
Traditional food has an <i>authentic production process</i> , i.e., following the original production process, established when the product was developed	5.11	1.40
A traditional food product must <i>contain a story</i>	5.07	1.60
The key steps of the production of traditional food must be <i>local</i>	4.85	1.57
When I think about traditional food, I think about <i>special occasions</i> and/or celebrations	4.70	1.68
When it comes to food products, for me traditional food means <i>natural, low processed</i>	4.66	1.68

Mean values and standard deviations (SD) on seven-point Likert scales

Statements are ranked according to their mean value ( $n = 4828$ )



**Fig. 1.1** Simple correspondence analysis plot for the frequency of occurrence of positive associations with TFPs (agreement or scores 5, 6, or 7 on seven-point scale). *Source:* Vanhonacker et al. (2010a)



“5,” “6,” and “7”). Elements of the definition that are located close to a country in the correspondence analysis plot indicate a strong association of the element with TFPs in that particular country; a large distance indicates a weak(er) association. A country that is located close to the plot's center indicates a broader conceptualization of the concept of TFPs, i.e., an association of TFPs with multiple elements, without particular elements being dominant. A central location of an element in the map suggests less between-country variation in the association scores. A remote position of a country in the map points to dominance of a particular element, whereas for an element a remote position suggests a higher degree of between-country variation.

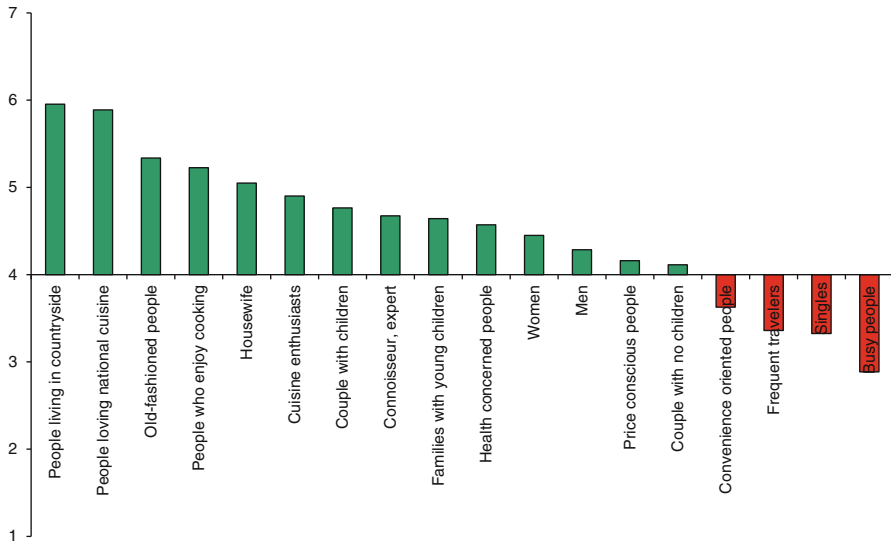
In Belgium—a country with a rather remote location in the correspondence plot—TFPs were strongly associated with food that exists for a very long time, that is consumed very regularly, and that depends on the season. France, Italy, and Spain were more centrally located in the correspondence plot, which indicates that TFPs are perceived as a very broad concept in these countries, without a strong emphasis on specific elements. Differentiation between these countries can be found in the way that French and Spanish consumers emphasized the long existence and the daily character of TFPs, whereas Italian consumers tended to value authenticity and specialty relatively higher.

Regarding the Norwegian results, a very strong focus was placed on the long existence and knowledge of TFPs, which seems to decrease the relative importance of other elements. For Poland, gastronomic heritage received much emphasis. Further, the high association with the long existence as opposed to the low association with frequent consumption was striking in Poland. This suggests an association with products that used to be daily food products in the past, but that have evolved to products with a special character and that are consumed mainly at special occasions in more recent times. These results indicate that the use of the term “traditional food” should be handled carefully across countries or in an international context, given the observed differences in the meaning of TFPs and its associations across countries.

### ***1.3.4 Profile of Typical Traditional Food Consumers***

The Truefood consumer study participants were also provided with a list of 18 so-called character profiles to allow gauging the image that consumers have of a typical consumer of TFPs as well as of a typical nonconsumer of TFPs (Vanhonacker et al. 2010b). For each character profile, participants were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale, the type of food they thought these people would be likely to consume. The response category “1” corresponded with “*a person who almost exclusively uses nontraditional food*,” while a score of “7” indicated “*a person who almost exclusively uses traditional food*.” The midpoint of the scale represented a neutral point.

Overall, the image of a typical traditional food consumer was most strongly associated with “people living in the countryside” (mean=5.95) and “people loving national or regional cuisine” (mean=5.89) (Fig. 1.2). Additional image associations with a traditional food consumption pattern were found for “old-fashioned people,” “people who enjoy cooking,” and “housewives.” There was only a small difference



**Fig. 1.2** Image of a traditional food product consumer in Europe. Mean score on seven-point scale: “1”=“a person who almost exclusively uses nontraditional food,” “7”=“a person who almost exclusively uses traditional food.” *Based on:* Vanhonacker et al. (2010b)

in the mean value for women (mean = 4.45) versus men (mean = 4.29). Families with children were thought more likely to be TFP consumers than families without children, whereas the children’s age had only a minor impact. Similar results were obtained for “families with young children” and “couples with children at home.”

Only four character profiles from the list were perceived as more likely to be consumers of nontraditional food: “busy people” (mean = 2.89), “singles” (mean = 3.33), “frequent travelers” (mean = 3.36), and “convenience-oriented people” (mean = 3.63). Thus, the typical projected image that European consumers have of consumers of TFPs appeared to be strongly determined by notions of locality, a positive attitude toward food preparation and consumption, and a traditional way of living in which stability is preferred over change and excitement. This type of profile closely fits with the role model of a traditional family. By contrast, consumers with a typical nontraditional food consumption pattern were seen as younger people, singles, and those with less time available, who live busy lives, travel quite often, and do not prioritize time for food shopping and for cooking.

### 1.3.5 Consumer Perception and Image of Traditional Food

The general image of TFPs was assessed in the Truefood consumer study through asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement “When you think about the image you have of traditional food in general, how would you

describe your personal opinion/feelings about it?" A seven-point measurement scale was used, anchored with "1"=*very negative*, "4"=*neither positive nor negative* at the midpoint, and "7"=*very positive*. A second question is related to the consumer perception of a series of intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes of TFPs. This question was probed as: "Please indicate to what extent traditional food has the following characteristics according to you?" A set of 15 items with seven-point semantic differential scales was presented to the study participants, with a negative anchor to the left (e.g., *low in quality*) and a positive anchor to the right (e.g., *high in quality*). Attributes were quality, quality consistence, taste, ordinary versus special taste, appearance, health, ease of preparation, availability, time of preparation, safety, nutritional value, price, width of assortment, environmental friendliness, and supportiveness of local economy.

The general image of TFPs was clearly positive across the six European countries, scoring above 5.5 on average on the seven-point scale (Almli et al. 2011). The two highest mean scores were obtained in Spain (6.04) and Poland (6.01), while the lowest mean scores were observed for Belgium (5.51) and France (5.62). The mean score for the total pooled pan-European sample was 5.80, with a standard deviation of 1.06. Only 81 participants (1.7 %) out of the 4765 pan-European valid answers collected for this question utilized the negative side of the response scale, i.e., scores from "1" to "3" on the seven-point scale, when evaluating their personal image of traditional foods. An analysis of score distributions by gender and age groups showed no effect of gender, but a tendency of differences across age groups: the older the consumers were, the stronger their positivity toward TFPs was.

Cross-national similarities and differences in the attribute perceptions of TFPs were observed. On average, Spanish and Italian consumers gave similar attribute perception scores. To them, TFPs are characterized mainly by a good and special taste, a high and consistent quality, a good appearance, a high nutritional value, and healthiness. Belgian consumers perceived TFPs as having a good taste, a high quality, and good availability. French consumers found TFPs to be of high quality but rather expensive. Polish consumers characterized TFPs by a good and special taste, a high (though yet not highly consistent) quality, a high environmental friendliness, a good support for the local economy, a high preparation time, and rather high prices. Finally, Norwegian consumers characterized TFPs with a good taste, a high quality, a high safety, but a relatively low healthiness and a long preparation time.

A clear distinction between countries was observed for six of the attributes. First, a special taste was attributed to TFPs mostly in Italy, Spain, and Poland, but not particularly so in Norway, France, and Belgium. Polish and Belgian consumers differed substantially with regard to their perceptions of availability, ease of preparation, and time of preparation related to TFPs. This may be explained by the divergent conceptions of traditional food in the two countries and the distinct examples of traditional foods that consumers had in mind. Whereas Polish consumers defined traditional food mainly as specialty dishes consumed on festive occasions, Belgian consumers considered traditional food as familiar food with a daily character.

Furthermore, Norway demarked itself with a relatively low score on *healthy* and a relatively high score on *safety*. The low score on healthiness corroborates findings

reported by Pieniak et al. (2009), who found a negative association of weight control with the general attitude to TFPs in Norway. Also from the Truefood focus group discussions, it was concluded that traditional foods in Norway were recognized as rather fatty. As regards the attribute *safety*, the high perception of this attribute is consistent with earlier studies where it was shown that Norwegian consumers feel particularly confident that the governmental food controls secure safe food in Norway (Kjaernes et al. 2007).

Although consumers in all countries reported that traditional food is time-consuming to prepare, scoring below the midpoint in Norway and Poland, this trend was not observed in Belgium. This relates probably to the fact that Belgians defined TFPs rather as familiar food with a daily character, which are often more rapid to prepare than festive dishes.

Last but not least, TFPs were perceived as rather expensive in France, Poland, and Norway, with scores of 3.9 on the seven-point scale on average, but not in the other countries. This may reflect the wide presence of specialty products like “Produits du terroir” in France and the definition of TFPs as festive foods in Poland and Norway.

## 1.4 Conclusions

TFPs constitute an integral and growing part of European consumers' diets. This chapter presented insights obtained from the Truefood (EU FP6) exploratory and conclusive descriptive consumer research performed in 2006–2007. These studies aimed at providing a consumer-driven definition of TFPs. The presented definition is multifaceted, i.e., it consists of several dimensions in which elements relating to habit, naturalness, heritage, taste, and locality occupy a primary position. TFPs have been shown to benefit from an overall favorable image and positive attribute perceptions among European consumers. Last but not least, traditional food consumers have been profiled as people with a strong interest in locality, food, and tradition. The definitions, conceptualizations, perceptions, and consumer profiles obtained in these studies entail a large potential for further product development, segmentation, targeting, market positioning, and marketing communication in the European traditional food sector.

Cross-cultural differences have been identified, which associate with differences in the market presence of traditional foods, as well as differences in gastronomic traditions and eating habits. Despite a positive image of TFPs, there is still a potential for further image improvement and subsequent sales growth. Based on the insights from the Truefood consumer studies, the traditional food sector is encouraged to safeguard and capitalize on the current high-quality, high-value image of TFPs which satisfies quality- and specialty-seeking food consumers. An enlarged assortment and attention to convenience aspects in product development may also allow increasing sales volumes within the existing consumer segments, though notions of exclusivity are important for some market segments. Another recommendation pertains to a

focus on developing healthier TFPs, such as low-fat and/or salt-reduced products (e.g., meat or dairy products), which may be appealing to particular consumer segments and national markets, e.g., the Norwegian one. Finally, the strong environment-friendly, supportive of local economy model, as valued highly by Polish traditional food consumers, may be transferred and “exported” to other countries.

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