

Haute cuisine system and its cultural dimension: when chefs are the new artists.

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Abstract

What does the term Haute Cuisine mean? Why is it considered haute? What characteristics and treats give it Hauteness? Is it only the quality of raw materials or should the chef have that creative component, sometimes called “genius”, to make the haute cuisine another declination of arts?

A Chef should be able to draw, compose, imagine and present a great succession of taste sensations which should provoke a fascination comparable to the sensations you feel when you read Shakespeare’s literary masterpiece or you admire a Michelangelo painting.

A lot of controversy exists on whether or not to consider Haute Cuisine an Art, but despite all the critics who believe chefs to be artists, the aim of this article is to demonstrate that Haute Cuisine in Italy is becoming, thanks to Italian culture devoted to quality, more and more refined and an important tool for communication. Haute Cuisine could easily become a great vehicle through which convey the cultural value of a Nation¹. Haute Cuisine turns a dish into a cultural symbol by strengthening the link between gastronomy and other aspects of culture.

Keywords

Haute Cuisine, Creative industry, New arts

1 Introduction

Assuming that eating out is starting to be considered a new way of explore new cultures, starting a sensorial journey with cultural valence, the article analyzes Haute cuisine system in Italy, investigating whether it could be considered a cultural one. The main actors involved in the system have been analyzed and related to each other in order to understand what nature the system has and what kind of values stand at its basis.

The “*superstar*” chef phenomenon is traditionally presented as the brightest sign that something is changing around a field which, during the last five years, is gaining more and more attention by the media in Italy. Chefs are starting to be considered like artist, genius of a world that has its own rules, boundaries and gatekeepers. Haute Cuisine Chefs are considered part of an autonomous category whose peculiarity consists in considering the act of cooking as a personal way of expressing themselves.

Restaurant, conceived as the entrepreneurial expression of what chefs consider valuable in Haute Cuisine, will be analyzed trying to understand if they could be compared to creative industries.

The script wants to investigate what valid motivations the actors involved have in investing a large amount of economical and intellectual resources in an unprofitable restaurant, basing on the supposition that an Haute Cuisine Restaurant, on average, make little to no profit.

The script then finally focuses on examining the critics’ perspective: as they do in the artistic field, which is traditionally considered a cultural system, they represent the “guardians” of the

¹ Amy B.Trubek *Haute Cuisine, how French invented the culinary profession* ,2000, Philadelphia, University of Philadelphia press

boundaries of Haute Cuisine, declaring what is valuable enough to enter the narrow edges of Haute Cuisine, and what is not.

2 Research question

The inquiry consists of some questions: What type of food has to be examined? What sort of person consumes it? What sort of people produce it? Who gives you the possibility to enter the field and under which conditions?

3 Methods

The principal characters involved in the field have been isolated and for each evaluated what characteristics and what value capital they should have to be part of the field.

The term “haute cuisine” has been used to differentiate it from the term “cuisine”. *Haute Cuisine* indicates the field that includes all the chefs working in restaurants awarded with a minimum of one star on the Michelin guide and all the people involved around this system (Critics, Chefs, Experts).

Interviews have been conducted involving 5 chefs, 2 critics and 2 experts to gain a contextual understanding of the Haute Cuisine field in Italy. Every interview lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Some of them were recorded, some others filmed. Some chefs had one star, others had two stars, one of them had three stars.

The Michelin Guide has been used as a benchmark because of its reputation worldwide, where it is considered to be the most reliable and objective guide available.

In depth Interviews

Berg (1989) defined interviewing as “a conversation with a purpose”. Malhotra (1996) defined the in-depth interview as “an unstructured, direct personal interview in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic”. The purpose is to seek the interviewee’s thoughts (Patton, 1990). The in-depth interview is advantageous even though it has some disadvantages (Creswell, 1994; Hessler, 1992). Nachmias and Nachmias (1987) propose four advantages: great flexibility, control of the interview situation, high response rate, and collection of supplementary information; and three disadvantages: high cost, interviewer bias, and lack of anonymity.

NAME	POSITION	TYPE OF INTERVIEW	TYPE OF RECORDING	DURATION OF THE INTERVIEW	FAULTS
Massimiliano Alajmo	Chef at “Le Calandre”	Telephonic interview	Recording	30 minutes	Lack of time
Raffaele Alajmo	Restaurant Manager at “Le Calandre”	Telephonic interview	Recording	30 minutes	Lack of time
Marcello Trentini	Chef at “Magorabin”	Telephonic interview	Recording	20 minutes	
Fiammetta Fadda	Critic for “Panorama”	De Visu interview	Recording	1 h 30 minutes	
Claudio Sadler	Chef at “Sadler”	De Visu interview	Video recording	About 1 hour	Lack of memory in my camera
Davide Cassi	Physics scientist	De Visu interview	Recording	1 h 40 min	
John Mariani	Journalist	e-mail interview			

Moreno Cerdoni	Chef at “La Madonnina del Pescatore	Telephonic interview/e-mail interview	Recording	30 minutes	
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Career patterns of 70 chefs awarded with Michelin stars in the past 2 years were analyzed taking into consideration all Chefs with 3 and 2 stars, and 33 with just 1 star Michelin. All the information has been collected through mini-questionnaires proposed through telephone interviews.

4 Findings - The Haute Cuisine System in Italy

The analysis was structured considering all the main figures that compose the field of Haute Cuisine in Italy.

- A. Chefs
- B. Restaurants
- C. Critics and Guides

4.A) Chefs

“The cuisinier loses his reputation when he becomes indifferent to his work”

Fernand Point

Chef, from Latin *caput*, is the abbreviated form of the French term *chef de cuisine*, meaning the "chief" or "head" of a kitchen. He or she is traditionally the person in charge of all things related to the kitchen including menu creation, management, scheduling, payroll of the entire kitchen staff, ordering, and plating design. At the pinnacle of the professional kitchen hierarchy, the *chefs de cuisine* ruled over a vast number of other workers.

The term will be used here in its more unofficial meaning, including all the professionals who do their job with particular attention to the shared values of the field, and who were awarded at least 1 Michelin Star in the last 2 years.

All the professionals included have quite a similar background and set of aspirations. They all consider cooking a profession and have portrayed themselves as professionals in the art of cooking.

Sociologists of the professions cast a wary eye on many groups that purport or purported to be professions². They affirm that scholars only concentrate on economic capital as the major dividing force between the bourgeois and working class, while not considering the existence others form of capital.

The modern capitalist society allows only a few occupations to become acknowledged as legitimate professions, even if many groups have found the professional model desirable and have aspired to it.

According to Magali Sarfatti Larson’s *Occupation and Professions in the Culture Industries*³, in modern capitalist societies, a group’s success or failure in the professionalizing process lies in the ability to organize a protected market for its services. According to her theory, higher education is the method to obtain the appropriate expert knowledge that defines professional status by arguing that a primary function of professions is to organize mechanisms to control membership, using certain educational credentials to ascertain the attainment of mastery.

Therefore, in order to create a sort of structure and exclusivity, some associations have begun to form in Italy.

All these associations have their own dogma and shared values awarding while members as bearers and protectors of exclusive traits. In Italy, the most recognized and popular associations are:

² Perkin, H *The Rise of professional society* 1989, Routledge, London

³ M.S.Larson *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*,2004, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA

Le Soste The *Le Soste* was found in 1982, by Antonio Santini of “Dal Pescatore” in Canneto sull’Oglio, Roberto Ferrari of “Al Bersagliere” in Goito, Gaetano Martini of the “Il Cigno” in Mantova, Andreas Hallrigh of “Andrea” in Merano and Rinaldo Krcivoj of “Antica Trattoria Boschetti” in Tricesimo.

Relaix and Chateaux *Relais & Châteaux* is an exclusive collection of 475 of the finest hotels and gourmet restaurants spread across 55 countries.

Established in France in 1954, the association’s mission is to spread its unique *art de vivre* across the globe by selecting outstanding establishments with truly unique character.

Jeunes Restaurateurs d’Europe – Italian division *Jeunes Restaurateurs d’Europe* (JRE) appeared for the first time in France in 1974. In 1992, it began to spread all over Europe, establishing 10 different divisions: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

The chefs of JRE combine high-quality culinary craftsmanship with a passion for European gastronomy and local traditions and produce.

Le Grandes Tables du Monde In 1954, five Parisian restaurateurs, aware of the universality of the values they defended, decided to create the association *Traditions & Qualité*. Since 1957, the association created by Jean Barnagaud of “Prunier,” André Vrinat of “Taillevent,” René Lasserre of “Restaurant Lasserre,” Claude Terrail of “La Tour d’Argent,” Raymond Oliver of “Le Grand Véfour” and Louis Vaudable of “Maxim’s” began to grow and introduce new members, and then finally growing to international levels.

Of the 70 chefs and restaurants analyzed 17 belonged to the Jeunes Restaurateurs d’Europe, 27 to Le Soste, 8 to Le Grande Table du Mond and 10 belonged to Relaix and Chateaux.

Although it’s been ten years since chefs in Italy have tried to elevate their social status by creating standards for the trade, they are still considered a marginal group. Because cooking has traditionally been a domestic task associated to women, creating a framework around the profession has been at times difficult and delicate in Italy. Laying this framework in order to try to socially elevate the profession has been the focus of Italian chefs where they understand that knowledge and expertise in their field is considered it as the best obtain social, political and economical status.

Chefs’ Educational Pattern

"In all professions without doubt, but certainly in cooking one is a student all his life."

Fernand Point

Almost all the chefs analyzed during the research attended a vocational school before entering beginning their career. Only a few attended college after deciding to invest their time and efforts in Haute Cuisine. This led me to conclude that almost every chef had consistent scholastic training. Figure 6 depicts the educational patterns of the chefs chosen:

Interviewed Chefs' educational pattern

Educational Pattern	*	**	***	Total
Not Found	4	2		6
Other	4	7		11
University	2	2	2	6
Vocational School	23	20	4	47
Total	33	31	6	70

Focusing on the sum in the last column of the Figure 5 we can notice that the majority of the chefs awarded with at least 1 Michelin star attended a vocational school before the began working in professional restaurants.

Interviewed Chefs' educational pattern before practicing

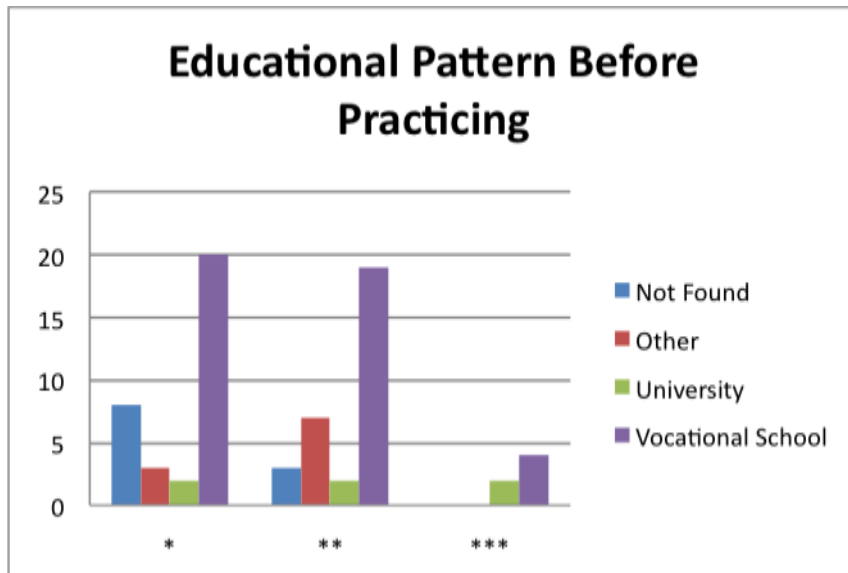


Figure 7 shows the most popular educational pattern the chefs considered before entering Haute Cuisine . Once again vocational school the most common, although it is worth mentioning that some of the chefs had previous achievements in other fields. Some of them went to college and graduated before deciding to make Haute Cuisine their career.

Interviewed chefs' experiences



In Figure 8 we can notice how the vast majority of them did study abroad. Then the focus was on understanding whether the restaurant where they are employed belongs to their family and whether profession of being a chef runs in the family.

Interviewed Chefs' restaurant belonging



Figure 9 represents the number of chefs employed by their family's restaurants divided by the number of Michelin stars they have been awarded. It is quite interesting to point out that, despite my expectations, very few of the 1 or 2 star chefs were employed by their family's restaurants. And after multiple interviews, I concluded that they preferred to open their own restaurant in order to express their own view on Haute Cuisine. Another aspect considered worth analyzing is the family influence on the chef's career.

Chefs' family involved in restaurant business



Figure 10 shows how the majority of the chefs interviewed do not have a family tradition in the restaurant industry. That could be symptomatic of a new collocation of the profession in the social background, where now a career path to become a chef could be despite the careers of the individual's family. This analysis does not take into consideration any culinary activities done within a familiar context.

Apprenticeship

Having had an apprenticeship as a method of hands-on and practical education, this is an aspect that remained remarkably constant for all the chefs interviewed. Italian vocational schools give students the possibility of internships in Italy and abroad by offering many hands-on opportunities during the academic year following the French Haute Cuisine educational model. In Italy apprenticeship opportunities are given by renowned chefs with a vast experience in Haute Cuisine whose culinary techniques have also reached a high level of standardization. There has been a long tradition of apprenticeship, where Master Chefs replicate the training and experience they once themselves received.

One of the most famous and credited Master Chefs in the Italy is Guatiero Marchesi, who contributed greatly to Italian Haute Cuisine during the last 35 years. Many of his apprentices have had a great deal of success opening their own restaurants and have now become themselves Master Chefs, responsible for training a new generation of students, while always maintaining the teachings once provided by Master Chef Marchesi.

Chefs' profession

In all the cases taken into consideration the apprentice does not remain a subordinate for all his life.

Some of them want to open a new restaurant in Italy, some others start careers in important kitchen all over the world, some others prefer to work for a magazine or a TV channel.

In order to understand what happen a sort of psychological analysis has been conducted on the Chefs interviewed.

Four different declinations of the Chef's profession have been isolated, for every of which was attempted to associate the reasons and motivations standing behind the decision to undertake the career of Chef basing suppositions on what they declared during interviews and what is written about them in magazines and newspapers articles:

Cook for cooking's sake Chef – The sense of Art: the category has been made for people who do this job just to accomplish artistic and creative attitudes. The *cook for cooking's sake chefs'* first aim is anything but their self-expression, they cook because they do it well and is the best way to express their self. *Cook for cooking's sake Chefs* do not accept suggestions or critics about choices they made on the menu, because what they do belongs deeply to them and criticize the menu would be like go against the Chef.

The most suitable example of this category of chefs in Italy is Fulvio Pierangelini. Pierangelini has a peculiar background for being a chef. He attended University, graduated in Political Science in 1978 and then started to work for his University as a teaching fellow.

In 1980 opened his pluri-awarded restaurant "Il Gambero Rosso" in Livorno, closed mysteriously last year. Nobody knows why he decided to close his Restaurant, which was actually in the crest of the wave, and to go cooking for Roccoforte, the famous Scottish Hotel Chain.

In one of his rare interviews declared :

....I cook because I entertain myself in cooking, I cook because I like to cook, I cook because is the only way to express myself in this moment.

Fulvio Pierangelini

He then says that he does not know why he create dishes, he is not able to describe his creative process, because he does not plan anything:

.....I do not know why I create dishes... they suddenly arrive and here they are... they are what I feel in that moment and they are free from superstructures.... Cooking for me does not correspond with the act of eating.... I do not really care about my dish, I do not eat it, after cooking it, it does no longer exist for me.

Fulvio Pierangelini

Cook for Cooking's sake Chefs' scale of values are organized around the concept of cultural capital. Their major currency is the prestige they can get among their colleagues and among who they consider to be experts of the field.

Restaurant Chef – The self-emancipation through restaurant: Restaurant chefs are those, according to the classification, who conceive their job as an opportunity to self-emancipate themselves from the personal and economical perspective. They are always developing new ideas and looking for new techniques and ingredients all over the world, they are extremely good in matching tastes and in creating dishes considering Haute Cuisine as an art, although having a particular attention for the market.

They care a lot about their restaurant which they consider to be the entrepreneurial transposition of their creative vision.

Massimiliano Alajmo supported by his brother Raffaele could represent one of the best examples in Italy.

Raffaele considers his brother Massimiliano as a pure artist, comparable to a painter or an actor. Raffaele's talent, instead, consists in the capability to "read" the market and create a product which can combine together his brother's art with the market requests. He indeed declared:

...my brother is an artist. At the Opera theatre you can enjoy of a musician's or an actor's art, at my restaurant you can enjoy my great Chef's concert. My task is concerned with transmitting my brother's art to the public in the simplest way possible. My position require to have great feeling with the market in order to better understand trends and fashion and a great feeling with the Chef as well, in order to be able to discuss with him about choices he made for the menu and adapt it to the public...

Raffaele Alajmo

They are conscious and aware of what is going on in the market, how the market is structured and what are the best moves to do.

Raffaele compares his family's restaurant with a fashion company, like Armani: they have the "Haute Couture line" which is represented by the three-Michelin-star restaurant "Le Calandre", the "second line" which could be represented by the lower-level restaurant "Il Calandrino" and all the "accessories-business" represented by their food-product line called "In.gredienti", by their Hotels conceived for hosting the diners of the restaurant and by the publication of books.

.. we can compare, for example Haute Couture to Le Calandre Restaurant and Pret à Porter to Al Calandrino Restaurant where everything studied and conceived at le Caladre is proposed in a simpler way and for an higher number of people.

These days I talked to a guy from Milan whose job will deal with the assessment of the immaterial assets of my restaurant. I want to understand how much my restaurant worth in terms of brand image and know-how. I want to understand, for example, what would have happened if a small restaurant was purchased by my brother instead of a mediocre Chef. There are a lot of good Chef that are not known just because they have not found their manager yet...

Raffaele Alajmo

The Restaurant Chefs, therefore, have a scale of value which is comparable with any other cultural entrepreneur (an art gallery curator or the executive producer of an opera theatre). They are concerned with the Cultural Capital embedded in what they do, although maintaining the attention on the profitability of their company.

Media Chef – Love for the public: Media Chef are not interested in experimenting and in finding new cooking techniques for Haute Cuisine, their aspiration is to become amateurs' and housewives' favorites.

This category of professionals wasn't considered to be part of Haute Cuisine, although underlining differences between Cook for cooking's sake Chefs, Restaurant Chef, Media Chef and Restaurateurs can help understanding how those categories of Chefs see each other and how they are settled in the field.

One perfect example of Media Chef could be represented by Alessandro Borghese and Maurizio Santin.

Alessandro Borghese is the son of the famous French actress Barbara Bouchet. He started his career on TV in 2004 when the Italian network Magnolia proposed him a new format called "Cortesie per gli Ospiti" which is still having a fairly good success. He then subscribed contracts with other and more important networks such as La7 for which he is participating to the format "Chef per un giorno".

Maurizio Santin (son of Ezio Santin, owner of the two-Michelin-star restaurant "Antica Osteria del ponte") also started with a TV Show.

He worked for Gambero Rosso Channel where he wore the shoes of the Cuoco Nero (The black Chef) because he was considered particularly strict. He recently opened his own restaurant where he decided to exploit his fame calling it "Ristorante il Cuoco Nero".

This kind of Chef have their scale of values arranged on the Social Capital they gain from being famous among common people, the more fan they have the easier is for them to build a career in every direction they like.

Restaurateurs – The businessmen: Restaurateurs, as Media Chefs, do not belong to the Haute Cuisine sphere. Their business is based on completely different values. They do not care a lot about fine haute cuisine techniques or research and conception of revolutionary menus. Their customers are not fine food experts, but common people.

One would say that they care a lot about money and about the profit they can gain through their business, although keeping their attention on the relationship with their customers. They do not have the same intellectual understanding about food that *Cook for Cooking's sake Chefs* have.

Fulvio Pierangelini, for example, lastly declared that he loves to provoke his customers. He very much enjoys cooking for someone whenever he can feel a connection with him/her and whenever he can feel his/her passion about food and wines. He also admits that he does not have interest in cooking for someone who does not know anything about food.

Fernand Point used to say that "*La grande cuisine must not wait for the guest; it is the guest who must wait for la grande cuisine.*" which gives the idea of Pierangelini's attitude about diners.

Pierangelini's thoughts are an extreme example, *Restaurateurs* do not have the same approach for sure, they do care about having fresh and good food, a nice welcoming and faithful customers at their restaurant, but they are more concerned about revenues and cost without a doubt, not sharing the strongest values of Haute Cuisine field in general.

4.B) Restaurants

"When one thinks of la grande cuisine one cannot think of money; the two are incompatible."

Fernand Point

Restaurants business in Italy

The 2010 Michelin guide lists 2392 restaurants in Italy among which 6 were awarded with 3 Michelin stars, 37 with 2 Michelin Stars and 229 with 1 Michelin star.

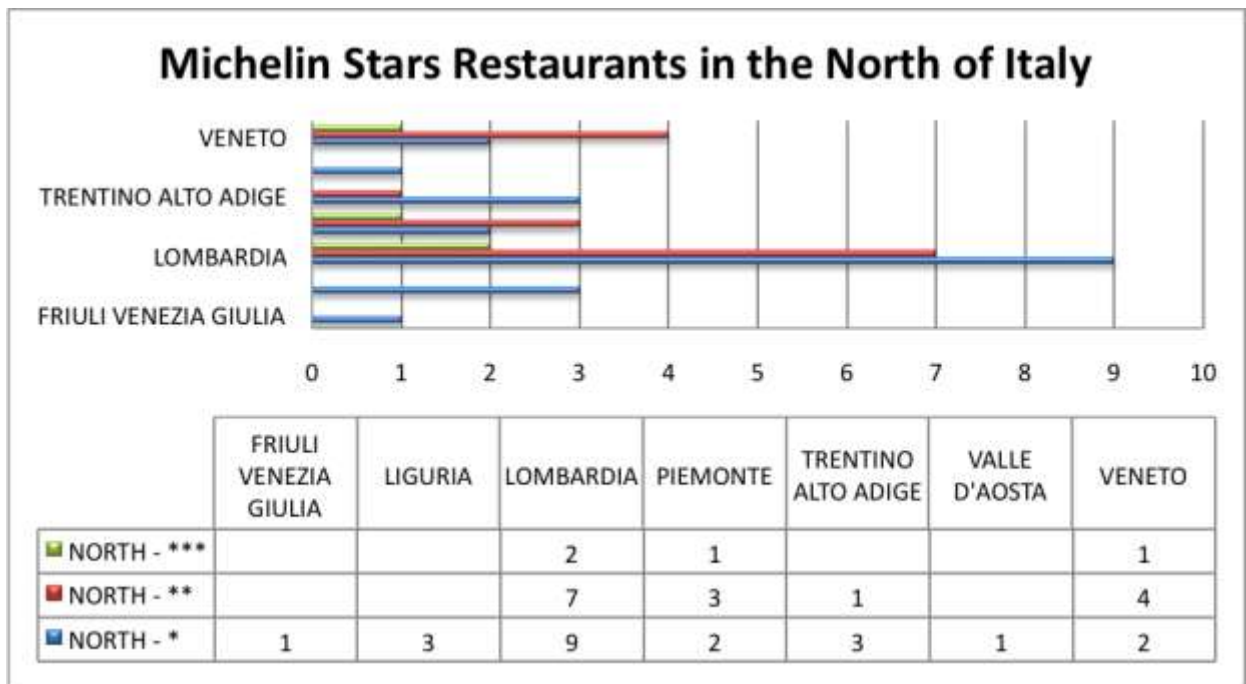
From the analysis of the sample mentioned before come out that Haute Cuisine restaurant are concentrated mostly in the area North of Italy.

Number of Michelin stars awarded Restaurants per area



Lombardia is the most Michelin-star-awarded-restaurant crowded area. This data could be quite interesting considering what kind of tourism characterize this Region. Being a strongly industrialized region, Lombardia hosts every year businessmen all over the world. Dinner meeting, business lunches are on the agenda every day and this kind of Restaurant could easily survive. This kind of restaurant are very hard to run and manage from the economical perspective.

Number of Haute Cuisine Restaurants per Region in the North of Italy



A lot of the Haute Cuisine restaurants analyzed are, indeed, unprofitable because of the high cost of the raw materials and labor.

...Michelin star awarded restaurant is not profitable, to reach the break-even could be challenging for it. Such a restaurant has to consider a great number of fixed costs, encompassing labor costs, wine cellar, raw material research etc..

Some French Chefs even decided not to care about the "mise en place" and restaurant's style and started to propose haute cuisine dishes in a non-haute cuisine venue..

Fiammetta Fadda

Haute Cuisine restaurant's mission consists in offer its guests the best in terms of raw materials, service, preparation of food, wine cellar etc. everything must be impeccable, every dish very well prepared and excellent in terms of quality and freshness. All those issues are extremely expensive but extremely important at the same time. Giving up one of those could compromise the membership in Haute Cuisine field. It is clear, thus, that this kind of businesses survive because their owners have other kinds of interest beyond the economic one.

How they can gain money, then? How they can survive? How they can economically support research and experimentation? It is to mention that, as Raffaele Alajmo said, those kind of restaurants most of the time act as "windows" for other businesses. They represent exactly what haute couture dresses and gowns represent for fashion, they are the highest expression of the craft, the most creative, expensive and selective. Two different types of restaurant have been isolated:

Main-Business Restaurants: meaning Michelin-stars awarded restaurant whose main business is related to fine dining administration. As mentioned before this kind of business is extremely expensive and difficult to run. Haute Cuisine requires a very high number of full-time expert worker, extremely expensive ingredients and fixed costs related to the maintenance of the kitchen, of the wine cellar, of the dining room etc.

High costs have great impact on the profitability of Haute Cuisine restaurants which suffers also of all the variables related to the touristic companies.

All the Main-Business restaurants analyzed face these problems with the creation of other businesses related to the restaurants. The most popular solutions consist in:

- *Opening a lower-level restaurants (Boutique Restaurants)*– Opening a “cash cow” restaurant next to the main one in which lower production costs allow to propose more affordable prices for the public seems to be one of the most popular solution. The Alajmo family support its three-Michelin star restaurant Le Calandre with the lower-level restaurant “Il Calandrino”, and Claudio Sadler did the same thing opening the modern trattoria “Quick and Chic” right next to his restaurant “Sadler” in Milan.
- *Product selling* – a lot of famous Chefs in Italy use their name for branding food products, kitchen stuff etc. Moreno Cedroni, chef at “La Madonnina del Pescatore” in Senigallia, for example, gives the possibility to purchase on his website foodstuff branded with his name. Gualtiero Marchesi collaborated with Alessi in the creation of a new pot set and Massimiliano Alajmo firms a series of plates and glasses purchasable on his website.
- *Book publishing* – there is a long list of cookery books published by Famous Chefs. Almost everyone of the star-awarded Chefs published a book of receipts or thoughts about food.
- *Consultancy* – renowned Chefs often offer their professionalism and know-how to other restaurants or catering companies. Substantially they sell their ideas and suggestions concerning food preparation , menu development, food styling etc..

Hotels Restaurants: meaning restaurants situated in Luxury Hotels. Most of the time this kind of restaurants hosts superstars Chefs with the aim of offering their guests the highest service ever. Luxury Hotels offer a 360 degrees experience in luxury and comfort, therefore having a pluri-awarded Chef to run their restaurant could be undoubtedly a matter of prestige.

It is clear that, being part of a greater business context, this kind of restaurants do not have big problems concerning profitability. Having a “big name” in the kitchen could be a brilliant marketing strategy, it can attract new guests curious to taste the famous Chef’s dishes. Thus, big luxury hotels chains could offer the Chefs a strong and stable economic situation which let them better express themselves. To prove that it's enough to think about the case of Fulvio Pierangelini. Last year, indeed, after closing his famous restaurant “Il Gambero Rosso” in Livorno, he decided to start cooking for the Hotel de Russie’s restaurant in Rome.

The best hotel restaurant in Italy, La Pergola, is a three-Michelin stars, the only restaurant in Rome to be accorded such an honor. It is situated at the Rome Cavalieri Luxury Hotel, it has a wine cellar with over 50,000 bottles, a water menu with 29 choices, olive oils and vintage balsamic vinegars from the best producers in Italy, and the finest ingredients to be sourced in the Mediterranean all hint at the pursuit of culinary excellence. La Pergola’s “big name” is Heinz Beck, executive Chef of the restaurant since 1994. He is the recipient of numerous awards for outstanding achievement throughout a long and prestigious career. His menu at La Pergola is his greatest achievement to date, innovative and exciting while maintaining a respect for Italian culinary tradition and always remembering that great cooking is about fresh ingredients handled with sensitivity and passion. In 2000 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Foyer of Artists Award, an International Award from La Sapienza University of Rome, the first time the award had been given to a chef.

Main-business Restaurants and *Hotel Restaurants* face the market with a completely different perspective. The first type is “directly” in contact with the market, it is not linked with other realities that can help the restaurant to face managing the demand and conveying a refined image of the dishes it offer. *Main-business Restaurants* have to have an excellent understanding of the market and sometimes adapt their offer to it. Therefore Chefs’ menu creations in this type

of restaurants are sometimes filtered by the strict judgment of managers who decide whether it could be suitable or not for customers' tastes. In a sense we can affirm that *Main-business Restaurant* Chefs' affirmation process in Haute Cuisine Field is more delicate and uphill than what is for *Hotel Restaurant* Chefs who, being part of a luxury hotel, are already recognized as very good.

4. C Critics and Guides

"As far as cuisine is concerned one must read everything, see everything, hear everything, try everything, observe everything, in order to retain in the end, just a little bit."

Fernand Point

Food Critics

Every time costumers make choices, they approach a potentially an infinite number of possibilities among which is not always simple to orientate.

Common costumers often rely their choices on the word of mouth created around certain restaurants. *Gourmand* and more concerned customers, instead, prefer to take into consideration gastronomic guides and to trusty trust critics' judgment.

Critics has been always considered the "guardian angels" of a cultural field permitting or not permitting someone to pass through the golden boundaries of Haute Cuisine Field. Their presence in the field is, let us say, fundamental, although being sometimes unpopular and mistreat. Their job is very hard, that is sometimes Chefs take their judgment very personally, refusing to be judged again.

Chef-critic relationship, however, has always been fundamental for the field. Critics judgment, in a sense, gives always new power to the field, every time conferring it new values and capital to fight about.

According to Fiammetta Fadda, former Executive Director of Gourmet magazine and food critic for panorama magazine, critics judgment is always conducted with extreme precision and accuracy for details. It should deal with food only, although, as Claudio Sadler said before, other details are taken into account during judgment process.

Every time a critic do his job he/she has to follow really precise rules in order to avoid discrimination and injustice: he/she must be anonymous, discrete, politically correct and must always pay the bill.

Judgment is conducted by senses, thus a dish should be analyzed in phases:

- Sight. A good dish should be pleasant to the sight, it should be harmonically colored, well disposed in the plate which should be adapt for the course served. Sight is important to the point that Gualtiero Marchesi, during his career, conceived some dishes created with the specific purpose of satisfying the sense of sight. The most famous example is given by his Golden Risotto, which is nothing but a risotto with a golden square leaf upon.
- Smell. A good dish has to give off a good smell, which should be equilibrate and appropriate. Some Chefs have "special techniques" to strengthen the smell of a dish. One of the brand new tendencies in Haute Cuisine kitchens is the use of a distillation apparatus in order to create old dishes with new smells. Alajmo and Bottura using machineries borrowed from scientific laboratories are able to create a rice which smells of soil.
- Taste. Nowadays a food critic has to be skilled and has to know how to taste. Dishes are getting more and more complex in terms of tastes, ingredients, smell etc... and among

critics some rules were stated in order to better taste the dish. You have to taste the dish in the way that the Chef have conceived it. You have to focus the attention on temperatures, thickness, texture and on the balance of the four fundamental flavors.

- Touch. Touch has a role in tasting dishes as well. Some Chefs' creations, indeed, are made to be eaten with your hands and some others made to be eaten while touching something (velvet, humid stones, leaves) .

Italian food critics do not attend particular schools or courses to become critics, they simply have to manifest a great interest for Haute Cuisine field, to know perfectly the origin of products and recognize their organoleptical characteristics. Surprisingly people without a Chef's technical and educational background could have such a great influence on the field.

Critics gained their reliability through experience and practice, they did not attend cookery schools. They are, however, the fundamental link between the public and the world of Chefs, they have the power to smooth over information asymmetry between the two spheres, avoiding imbalance of power in transactions which can sometimes cause the transactions to go awry. Thus, critics are extremely related with the positioning of a restaurant in the market, they can have a great impact on the income of a restaurant simply writing an article it.

Building on the findings of Stigler and Becker⁴ the more a person knows about the seller , the larger is the utility derived from the consumption of that seller's service, "the more you know, the more you enjoy". An individual can accumulate knowledge about a restaurant by consuming the goods offered and by discussing the restaurant's service with other costumers or relying on critic's and guide's suggestions. Restaurants guides avoid the customers to spent time and money in the search of good restaurants.

Restaurants guides

A lot of restaurants guides has been published last year. The script will consider the most famous and diffused all over the country.

Michelin guide, Gambero Rosso guide and Espresso guide are the three guides most sold in Italy. Restaurants guides have a pyramid structure, which allows control, order and severity. Michelin Guide, for example, directly elects its inspectors who have to judge restaurants of precise area of the Italian territory (there are inspectors for le Langhe are, inspectors for la Laremma area, inspectors for Milan area and inspectors for Rome etc). Inspectors' work consists in:

- 1) **Explore and observe:** they spend a lot of time in the field exploring their designated area. They have to remain always vigilant and on the lookout for places that may ordinarily fly under the radar, but would in fact make a fine addition to Michelin guide's selection.
- 2) **Research:** additionally, their work involves a consistent research. They usually do it on blogs, foodie publications and the weekly dining sections of the area's newspapers help them keep information on chefs and key restaurants frequented by critics
- 3) **Readers' opinions:** another valuable resource is our readers' opinion. Costumers and readers feed backs and suggestions are considered precious and seriously important.
- 4) **In the restaurant:** when dining in a restaurant, they have to be as discreet as possible. They have to dress appropriately and order a complete meal, being sure to observe those items that may be specialties of the chef or cuisine. As said before many senses come

⁴ Stigler G, Becker G., *De gustibus non est disputandum*, 1977, American economic review

into play during a great meal, and with trained eyes they can evaluate a number of aspects about the cuisine.

- 5) **Working anonymously:** most crucial element of an inspector's job is to work completely anonymously. When making reservations, they use an alias. Unlike many restaurant critics, if the kitchen team and restaurant staff are unaware of their presence in their establishment, then there is no chance that Michelin inspectors' will receive special treatment. This certainly helps furnish a uniquely objective evaluation.
- 6) **Writing reports** After each visit, they write a detailed report where they express their judgment on the food quality, preparation, and presentation; the service; and overall ambience of the establishment. From this report, they assign the appropriate classifications to the restaurants in reference to food, comfort, and other features based on our standardized international criteria. These reports are an invaluable resource for gauging the consistency of the restaurants selected for each edition of Michelin annual guide, and are translated into the descriptive text for readers.

Another interesting point to investigate could be what someone called the "superstar effect" in Haute Cuisine field. That is to investigate whether restaurants guides' high ratings have positive effects on restaurant revenue.

Ehermann, Meiseberg and Ritz published in 2009 a paper whose principal aim was to analyze whether superstar effects exist in german Haute Cuisine Field⁵. Building on Rosen's⁶ and Adler's⁷ central theories on star effects they decided to test if quality differences between chef's performances, as measured by restaurant's guide ratings (they used Michelin guide's benchmark) have a direct impact on financial rewards.

Further, they addressed the impact of media presence on chef's financial rewards considering Adler⁸'s explanation : "The phenomenon of stardom exists where consumption requires knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge by a consumer involves discussion with other consumers ,and a discussion is easier if all participants share common prior knowledge. If there are stars, that is, artists that everybody is familiar with, a consumer would be better off patronizing these stars even if their art is not superior that of others".

According to Ehermann, Meiseberg and Ritz's research higher performance quality increases Chefs' revenues, but not disproportionately so. High ratings require substantial investments in exquisite ingredients, staff and ambience, which may imply negative marginal profits for additional quality. Furthermore TV presence has a moderate effect on income, higher than being awarded with Michelin stars, though. The fact that consumers pay TV-presence Chefs more shows that consumers utility increases when consumers can discuss prominent Chefs with others. Restaurants income, however, is much harder to acquire than TV-related revenues.

This research, then, brings to the conclusion that self-marketing seems the less risky and the less stressful way to enhance income

4.D Relationship between Chefs and Critics

Restaurant guides and critics reviews are very important for restaurants' reputation: how are they seen from Chefs' perspective? Do they make a point of critics' judgment?

According to the script the first category of Haute Cuisine Chefs listed – *namely Cook for Cooking's sake Chefs* – has a very controversial relationship with critics. That is that some Chef

⁵ Ehermann T., Meiseberg B. and Ritz C. *Superstar Effects in Deluxe Gastronomy – An empirical Analysis of value creation in german quality restaurants*, 2009, Blackwell Publishing

⁶ Rosen S. *The Economics of superstars*, 1981, American Economic Review

⁷ Adler M. *Stardom and Talent*, 1985, American Economic Review.

⁸ Adler M. *Stardom and Talent*, 1985, American Economic Review.

decided not to be listed in the most important Restaurant Guides, provoking a little revolution in the field.

This is due to the very intimate approach that this typology of Chefs has with their job. They consider cooking their personal form of expression, therefore they take every critic as a personal one, considering critics judgment on their dishes as a critic on their personality.

Restaurant Chefs, instead, have a completely different approach. Having them high managerial attitudes, they learnt “how to handle” critics and how to be supported by critics. They perfectly understand the great impact they can have on people, considering a good critic as a marketing investment for free.

Is not that that they renounce to the freedom of creativity, they just pay attention to critics trying to conform their restaurant at what critics consider the “highest standards” in the field.

TYOLOGY OF CHEFS	RELATIONSHIP WITH CRITICS	MOTIVATIONS
Cook for Cooking’s sake Chefs	Controversial Relationship	They consider critics’ judgment on the food they cook as a critic on their person
Restaurant Chefs	Close relationship	They are aware of the potential that a good critic could have on their restaurant

5 Conclusion

Purpose in the paper was to investigate Haute Cuisine phenomenon’s nature in Italy. It wanted to discover if Haute Cuisine restaurants have the necessary characteristics to be known as a “Cultural Industry”.

Cultural goods are always defined as "non material' goods directed to a public of consumers for whom they generally have an aesthetic or expressive, rather than clearly utilitarian function. Serving these aesthetic and expressive needs has produced a rapidly growing economic sector whose importance extends beyond its boundaries. Cultural industries are highly visible because they exert an extraordinary influence on our values, our attitudes, and our life styles. Should Haute Cuisine be considered a cultural industry?

Haute Cuisine restaurants could easily be linked to the cultural industries that are starting to focus on the product they offer. Just as cultural goods, the food that high-level restaurants serve is an “experiential” good. It derives its value from subjective experiences that rely heavily on using different cooking techniques and ingredients in order to manipulate perception and emotion.

Haute Cuisine food production, like film or theatre, requires diversely skilled inputs. Each skilled input must be present and perform at some minimum level to produce a valuable outcome. I noticed in my research that the majority of costs a restaurant has have to do with staff labor, research and experimentation. Haute Cuisine restaurants need a lot of people to be decently managed and dishes are created using refined techniques and processes that often require collaboration with chemists and physicists.

Dishes served in those kinds of restaurants are differentiated by their quality and uniqueness where each product has a distinct combination of inputs leading to an infinite amount of

options, which is why it is extremely difficult to identify and establish clear standards of quality⁹.

Another easy parallel between cultural industries and Haute Cuisine could be the “workers”. It is easy to assume that workers in cultural industries deal with their art for art’s sake. They care about the originality, technical professional skill, and harmony of creative goods and are willing to settle for lower wages than those offered by banal jobs. In this thesis I defined a type of chef who “cooks for cooking’s sake” to express this concept.

All of the chefs interviewed did not choose their career or because of money. They are emotionally involved with their job, considering it the best way they have to express themselves artistically.

The fact that creativity is the strongest competitive advantage of this kind of activities supports my hypothesis.

Creativity in Haute Cuisine restaurant has the same importance that has for a theatre company. In this restaurant you do not pay just to eat well and be treated as a king, first of all you pay to be amused by the chef’s creations. To be “competitive” in the field means to invest a great amount of money and time in research and develop.

The financial structure of this restaurants remind also to cultural industry. As mentioned in Chapter 3 Haute Cuisine restaurants on their own are not a profitable business, they need other businesses’ financial support to survive. They cannot survive without other businesses’ money which, at the same time, do not have a reason to exist without the “haute” restaurant. Just as in fashion industry, the most expensive business is the most creative, the unprofitable and the one which transmits the values of the brand.

The relationship this kind of restaurants have with critics and guides is also peculiar. The great impact that critics could have on the field reveal how Haute Cuisine values are still centralized in the hand of very few.

The strong influence of critics is, then, harmful for Haute Cuisine. This fact could prime a vicious circle which might make the chefs slaves of the critics’ judgment. They would start, that way, to cook just to appeal critics without caring about doing other experiences. In Britain chefs became superstars thanks to the television, and are now exploiting the great impact that few of them had on the media to upgrade and export British Haute cuisine values all over the world.

It may sounds strange that “gourmand” tourism is a way more developed in Britain or in Spain than in Italy. What happened to our famous-for-food-and-fresh-ingredients country?

Last year I was shocked by finding in a Swiss shop made in Italy tortellini and pasta branded with the name of Jamie Oliver, the most famous Chef in Britain....

⁹ Holbrook, M. B., E. C. Hirschman. 1982. *The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun*. J. Consumer Res.

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