

Article

Making Typicality: The Birth and Rebirth of the Torta Mattone of Bressana Bottarone, Italy

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Abstract: This article addresses the concept of “typicality” in community products, proposing a performative interpretation of this category. It ethnographically demonstrates how identifying products as “typical” is a process that involves a community in constructing both the product and its meaning. To illustrate this, this study delves into the case of Torta Mattone from Bressana Bottarone (PV) and its history. It highlights how, over 50 years, this dessert has been created and recreated as a symbol of the community in response to the pressing needs it faced amidst socio-economic changes. In doing so, this paper details its micro-gastronomic history, illustrating how the Torta Mattone has become instrumental in maintaining the social and cultural cohesion of the Oltrepo Pavese area.

Keywords: food anthropology; Italy; local food; local development; typicality

1. Introduction

In recent years, the international food market has transformed. Starting in Europe and North America, it has been characterized by the revival of small production, often referred to as “traditional” or “typical” productions [1]. It is common for typical products to find their meaning by referring to the past of communities, creating a bridge between the present and an ancestral past [2]. Thus, their meaning is the outcome of a sociocultural construction that often follows the dynamics of the “invention of tradition” theorized by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger [3], wherein a community rewrites the history of a product by placing it in a narrative context inscribed in a distant past, making that object a flag and a cornerstone of community identity. The value of typicality is based on the recognized datedness of a strong yet a-historical link between a product, a place, and a community [4]. This relationship is so semantically significant that it makes the complex process that led to it obscure to both consumers and producers, often redesigning communities and landscapes, as happened in Gironde with the creation of Bordeaux wine imagery [5] or in Burgundy [6].

Just as in the case of the valorisation process of paca (*Cuniculus paca* L.) in Belize after the independence of the British colony [7] or that of pink asparagus (*Asparagus officinalis* L.) in Mezzago in the face of rapid urbanisation in the Brianza countryside [8], the identification of these products coincides with a process aimed at prospectively defining a new identity for the community for its territory and, at the same time, at the action of institutional and economic actors who wish to address contingent political and social challenges through gastronomic initiatives. Given this significance, there is a scientific necessity to re-emerge the trajectories, stories, and dynamics that bring a product from being “foreign to fad” [9], especially the complexity of the role of local actors in “calibrating” the local landscape, knowledge, and uses to define “the” typical product of that place [10]. Ethnographic research has highlighted how performatively the indication of typicality corresponds to an attestation of the embeddedness of a product within the life, imagination, and foodscape of a community [11–13], as it is precisely the semantic significance of food that attests to its



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greater centrality in the life of the community [14]. In this analytical context, a process of promoting typicality represents a path of symbolic enhancement that develops in the sense of not only intensifying the meaning but also creating, transforming, and updating the semantic aspect of the product [15]. In this process, hence, the indication of typicality no longer appears to be a simple territorial marketing strategy but a collective exercise aimed at giving meaning to a human and natural landscape in rapid transformation, constructing a cultural response to the contingent challenges of the community [16].

This present paper engages with this premise, exploring how typicality is created by a community and used as a symbolic tool to counter the effects of the deep socio-economic transformation that engulfed it, making sense of its landscape in so doing. In this respect, it casts an ethnographic gaze on a small community in NW Italy, Bressana Bottarone, asking the following questions:

- (1) How is typicality created?
- (2) Who are the actors involved?
- (3) What is the space for new typical food in a society?
- (4) How can a product be created that builds community engagement around itself?
- (5) How can a valorisation strategy be developed that incorporates a product within a community, and what are its limitations?

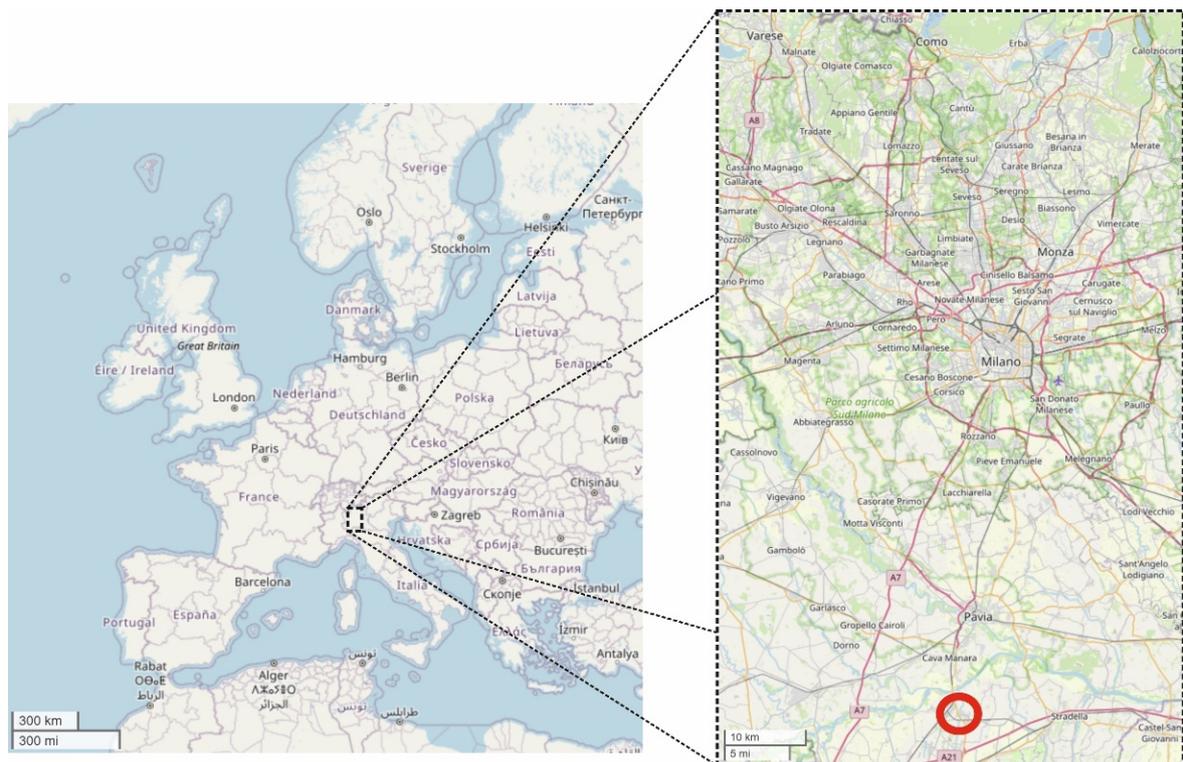
This article presents the outcomes of research conducted from July 2022 to July 2023. This article presents both the research and the results of the fieldwork conducted. It delves into the local reality and the history of the dessert, then discusses the processes underlying the creation of typicality tied to the history of the Mattone dessert.

2. Materials and Methods

Italy is one of the key countries for exploring the blooming of typical products [17–19]. There are thousands of such products, as evidenced by the 5450 Traditional Agri-food Products recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forests in 2022 [20]. Some are industrial [21], while most are small-scale productions, often artisanal and linked to the exploitation of specific traits of local biodiversity and cultural diversity [22]. In the global market and in tourism, they increasingly find space for their ability to evoke wide-ranging stories. Yet, these narratives often turn out to be inconsistent with history, as recently highlighted by Alberto Grandi, who noted that “the so-called current Italian cuisine has no relationship with ancient traditions and medieval and Renaissance cuisine. . . [but is rather] born around the 1970s and 1980s; thus, to be generous, we can give it forty years of life” [23]. The past 50 years, thus, are the period in which the foodscape of the country changed, and new foods—the typical products—emerged.

This article investigates the history of one of these foods, the Torta Mattone, through case-study research [24] completed in Bressana Bottarone (Scheme 1) between 2022 and 2023.

In Italy, when speaking of Torta Mattone (brick cake), one commonly refers to an Emilian product made with packaged dry biscuits, sugar, eggs, cocoa, and coffee, closely resembling the more famous *tiramisù*. It is a compact, rectangular cake that resembles a brick or a tile, depending on the number of layers, rows, and lines of biscuits that comprise it. The cake from Bressana, however, stands outside the broader chain of repetitions, variations, and multiplications typical of the dissemination of every artisanal product [25]; it is a story of gastronomic creation and an active search for local typicality that spans over half a century, marking the attempt of a community facing profound transformations in its recent history to shape its local identity through a confectionery product and a festival. This research investigated this history through a multimodal approach.



Scheme 1. Location of Bressana Bottarone (base map: www.openstreetmap.org, accessed on 14 May 2024). Circled in red is the location of the municipality and its collocation within Italy and Europe.

This research involved bibliographic and archival studies throughout the period in municipal archives and the local library to identify texts and documents detailing the economic contemporary history of Bressana Bottarone and the history and characteristics of the event. It also included two main ethnographic in-depth studies (August–September 2022, December 2022–January 2023), during which participant observation in the community and a focused ethnography [26] of the Mattone festival were conducted. Interviews with actors involved in the 2022 revitalisation of the dessert (producers, local administrators, event organizers, residents of Bressana, tourists) were carried out. The unstructured interviews, conducted following a life story methodology [27], included questions about the interviewees’ history and a survey of their gastronomic knowledge and familiarity with the cake and the territory. All data related to the identity of informants, except for those who were public figures associated with the organisation of the 2022 festival, were anonymized.

3. Results

In Bressana Bottarone, there are two pastry shops located at opposite ends of the main street of the Bressana area, Riccardi to the east and Gubernati to the west—two establishments with different stories. Riccardi is one of the historic pastry shops in the province of Pavia with over half a century of activity, and Gubernati is a more recent expression of generational change bringing new professionals into the town. Both serve as daily meeting and gathering points, becoming destinations on weekends for customers from nearby Pavia and surrounding towns interested in their artisanal products, which are deeply rooted in Lombard and Pavia’s gastronomic traditions. Entering either shop during fieldwork days, one can see a framed print hanging behind the counter. The colour print bears their business name and the inscription “50th Anniversary of the Mattone di Bressana Bottarone Professional Pastry Chefs. The Municipal Administration and the Committee of Honor confer this certificate as the best interpretation of the historical recipe of Il Mattone di Bressana for the 2022 edition” (Figure 1). Proudly displayed, this certificate was the

first material trace of the presence and reappearance of the dessert, whose image occupies almost the entirety of the print.



Figure 1. A copy of one of the certificates. It says “50° anniversary the Mattone of Bressana Bottarone. Professional Pastry Chefs. Nicholas Perduca–Pasticceria Riccardi. For the honorary committee, Emanuele Bottirolì. The Mayor of Bressana Bottarone, Giorgio Fasani. The Town Administration and the Honorary Committee bestow this certificate for best interpretation of the historical recipe of the Mattone of Bressana Bottarone for the Edition 2022”.

The Mattone dessert, a parallelepiped roughly the size of a full brick (12 × 25 × 5 cm), is covered around its entire perimeter with dense hazelnut granola, hiding a layer of custard cream. The top layer is covered with cherry jam, on which slices of syrupy fruit are placed to create roses. The interior of the specialty consists of three layers of shortcrust pastry, interspersed with custard and chocolate cream. The cake from Bressana differs significantly in size and shape from the more well-known cake from Emilia. In fact, its recipe (Figure 2) is not a variant of that, but the outcome of a creative process rooted in the history of Bressana, particularly in two moments: 1971 and 2022.

Preparation: Prepare three sheets of shortcrust pastry sized 12 × 25 cm in the shape of a brick and let them cool. Meanwhile, cook the custard cream slowly. When ready, divide it in half, and, to one part, add melted dark chocolate mixed with sufficient milk. Then, make a layer of shortcrust pastry, a layer of custard cream, another of chocolate cream, and repeat, ending with the third layer of pastry. Spread a very thin layer of cherry jam on the last pastry layer, then garnish with half-sliced peaches arranged in a circular “rose” pattern, followed by a second “rose” of half apricots, and place a canned cherry in the centre. Spread the edges of the brick with some custard cream and roll them in coarsely chopped hazelnuts. With a wooden spoon, drizzle the fruit with caramel, ensuring it forms a very thin, web-like pattern.

Ricetta de "Il Mattone di Bressana Bottarone"

Ingredienti:
Pasta Frolla
 gr. 300 di farina
 gr. 200 di burro
 gr. 80 di zucchero
 gr. 80 di nocciole tritate
 n° 2 tuorli d'uovo
 un pizzico di sale
Crema Pasticcera
 mezzo litro di latte
 gr. 250 di zucchero
 n° 10 tuorli d'uovo
 gr. 30 di farina
Crema cioccolato
 Dividere a metà la crema pasticcera e aggiungere cioccolato fondente fuso.
Caramello
 Zucchero e glucosio in quantità sufficiente.
Guarnizione
 Pesche sciroppate, albicocche sciroppate e ciliege sciroppate.
 Un velo di marmellata di ciliege sopra tutto l'ultimo strato di frolla.
Preparazione
 Si preparano tre sfoglie di pasta frolla della misura di 12x25 a forma di mattone e si lasciano raffreddare. Intanto si cuoce a fuoco lento la crema. Quando è pronta la si divide a metà e ad una parte si aggiunge il cioccolato fondente fuso con latte q. b. Quindi si fa uno strato di frolla, uno di crema pasticcera, un altro di crema al cioccolato, e poi si ripete terminando con il terzo strato di frolla.
 Si spalma l'ultima frolla un leggerissimo strato di marmellata di ciliege che poi si guarnisce, una prima rosa inscritta a cerchio di fettine di mezza pesche, una seconda rosa di mezza albicocche e al centro si posiziona una ciliegia sciroppata (ogni rosa e una porzione per un totale di 4). Si spalmano i bordi del mattone con un po' di crema pasticcera che si ingranella con nocciole tritate grossolanamente. Con un cucchiaino di legno si cosparge la frutta con il caramello ma attenzione che scenda a fili e formi una ragnatela molto sottile.



Figure 2. The recipe of the cake relaunched in 2022 [28]. It reads as follows: **Ingredients.** Shortcrust Pastry: 300 g of flour; 200 g of butter; 80 g of sugar; 80 g of chopped hazelnuts; 2 egg yolks; a pinch of salt. Custard Cream: half a litre of milk; 250 g of sugar; 10 egg yolks; 30 g of flour. Chocolate Cream: divide the custard cream in half and add melted dark chocolate. Caramel: sugar and glucose in sufficient quantities. Garnish: canned peaches, canned apricots, and canned cherries; a layer of cherry jam on top of the last layer of shortcrust pastry. **Preparation:** Three sheets of shortcrust pastry, measuring 12 × 25 cm and shaped like bricks, are prepared and left to cool. Meanwhile, the custard is cooked over low heat. Once ready, the custard is divided in half, and one portion is mixed with melted dark chocolate and enough milk. A layer of pastry is placed down, followed by a layer of custard, then a layer of chocolate custard. This sequence is repeated, ending with the third pastry layer. A very light layer of cherry jam is spread on the top pastry layer and garnished: the first rose-shaped circle is made of peach slices, the second of apricot halves, and a candied cherry is placed in the center. The edges of the pastry brick are coated with a bit of custard and rolled in coarsely chopped hazelnuts. The fruit is drizzled with caramel using a wooden spoon, ensuring it forms thin threads like a delicate spider web.

The sweet originated in the post-war period, at a time of redefining a fundamental aspect of the local economy—the brick-making industry. The municipality, situated in a particular geological area on the border between the Apennine and fluvial plains, boasts a territory rich in clay deposits, facilitating the spread of extraction and transformation activities. In the early twentieth century, there were about a dozen large active furnaces, the largest of which, Fornace Palli, employed over 300 people [29]. “Even after the war, it can be said that all families in Bressana had someone working in the furnaces,” recalls one interviewee born in the 1940s. The production of bricks occupied a large part of the population, providing work and an additional source of income to the rural economy that characterized the village until the post-war period. One interviewee, born in 1925, recalls:

In Bressana, most men and women were employed in the furnace, rather, in the furnaces, because in Bressana there were more than one. All the furnaces made a production of tiles. . . And this work kept many people, entire families, busy. . .

And there, those who made the tiles, and also the bricks, which were made by hand, were usually relatives, mother, son, and husband, because the right team when making tiles was three.

The post-war brick demand gave a new impetus to the industry: “[the furnaces and their respective quarries] had a dizzying development, peaking in 1961–1962 when extraction reached 1,000,000 cubic metres [annually]” [29]. However, the increase in extraction activity ultimately defined the local landscape. “It was a lunar landscape. Not a plant. One quarry after another. Today the holes are covered, and there are houses and supermarkets, but at the time it was impressive. The town was its furnaces,” describes an interviewee born in the 1950s.

From the early 1960s, however, the industry began to decline rapidly, and the community faced a growing economic crisis. While new cement-based materials limited the use of bricks (including cement–asbestos products also produced in nearby Broni [30]), the number of employees dropped from 745 in 1971 (23% of the total population and 61% of the active population) to 403 in 1981 (13% of the total population and 50%) [29], almost completely disappearing over the next two decades. It was during the economic uncertainty of the early 1970s, as the town began to experience deindustrialisation, that the municipal administration launched the initiative of the “1st Mattone Festival”.

While only vague memories of that first festival remain among the current inhabitants, specific documentation printed by the festival’s organising committee is still found in municipal archives [31]. The event occurred during two days (26 and 27 June 1971) with “stands and tastings of wines, cured meats, cheeses, porchetta, roasts, fish, and fried frogs,” traditional song concerts, and a culinary competition centred on a product that would be elected as “Bressana’s typical sweet for the whole year, with its recipe put on parchment by the organizing committee”. The main protagonist of this construction of typicality was the town’s population, specifically the “housewives” of the town. All families were called upon to be protagonists of a comprehensive plan for local revitalisation that passed through the festival and its sweet. Indeed, for the Municipal Administration, as well as for the organising committee, “[the] event should not be considered in isolation, but as part of a broader design that has as its main purpose the affirmation and valorization of our town”.

Bressana’s experience can be read within the broader phenomenon that swept across Italy from the 1960s. In a historical period at the end of the economic boom, when the marginalisation experienced by thousands of smaller municipalities in rural areas became increasingly evident within less than two decades [32], communities began to develop new tourist and social initiatives aimed at both strengthening community social cohesion and making it a tourist destination, revitalising its economy and prestige through the promotion of the “typicality” of the place—the food festivals [15]. While these early events, now a pillar of the nation’s summer holiday calendar [33], were based on the promotion of products or aspects of local cuisine already part of the habits and landscape of the locality, the Bressana festival explored a different possibility—that of making the festival a moment of *ex nihilo* creation of typicality through the involvement of the entire community in the creative process. To create typicality, the model of beauty competitions made famous by the television mediation of Miss Italy [34] was adapted to gastronomy, through a contest aimed at establishing, year after year, the forms of what could best express the territory. A committee of honour, composed of authorities, professionals, and prominent people of the community, was in charge of certifying the typicality, thus serving as an expression of those local elites who are, as Abner Cohen [35] explained, the main ministers of a community’s symbolic power.

The strategy chosen in Bressana is singular in the north-western Italian context, but neither oral memory nor documentation give a clear trace of the reason for the choice. Among the interviewees, there is no direct memory, and some joke about it: “Perhaps the choice was made to distinguish the festival. . . perhaps because there was nothing local to promote,” comments one of the members of the Bressana Pro Loco association (28 August 2022). It is plausible that the desire for distinction could have motivated the solution. In

fact, there was no shortage of sweets in the local popular cuisine that were felt just as deeply linked to the town. Alessandra Viola in her oral historiography of the community identifies some of these preparations—polenta and figs, marbled cake, or marubé di San Giuseppe [36]. These products did not find a place in the new festival, and the search for “typicality” was expressed as a project in progress, with the task of keeping a fundamental element of local identity alive, namely the centrality of brick manufacturing understood as the community’s symbol.

On 27 June 1971, among the cakes presented at the competition, the one whose recipe was rediscovered in 2022 (Figure 2) was chosen.

Although the summer festival continued in subsequent years, the generative experience of the Mattone cake competition ended the following year, and the selected recipe was lost in local gastronomic practices, becoming an indefinite memory. “Occasionally at home, we made the Mattone cake, but I don’t think it was this one [referring to the recipe of the 1971 cake],” comments an informant born in the 1950s. Just like her, even in local pastry shops, the Mattone cake found little space, mostly following recipes different from the one canonized in the 1970s. This is the testimony of Nicolas Perduca, who succeeded in running the Riccardi pastry shop, who remembers how “the Mattone cake was made now and then, Mr Riccardi [the founder of the business from whom Perduca took over] told me, but the recipe was different”.

The marginalisation of the Mattone cake is expressed in its lack of dissemination both in domestic spheres and in public patisseries. Beyond mere culinary and aesthetic aspects, an additional factor may have influenced the fate of the cake. As the festival and the cake itself were born as a symbolic response to the decline of the brick industry, as suggested by several informants, the unstoppable decline of this productive sector in the 1970s and 80s, with the closure of the last brick factories, may have drained the sense, in the eyes of contemporaries, of continuing to produce a cake that spoke of a reality increasingly less current to the contingent of Bressana; the brick industry, already in the early 1980s, was a story to be reconstructed by the new generations [29,37,38], having lost the centrality that was still a vivid memory in the adults and elderly of the town: “In the 50s and 60s, Bressana Bottarone was the town of the furnaces and provided employment to many people, both residents and those from nearby towns. The elders of the town still remember the sounds of the various sirens that announced the start and end of work” [38].

With no more bricks, from the second half of the 1980s, the local economy reorganized, seeing an increasingly marked dependence of Bressana on Pavia, making it a de facto integral part of the local labour system [39]. At the same time, the town became the residence of many new families who had moved there from Pavia—in some cases, from farther away, given the more affordable cost of real estate and the presence of sufficient personal services. For some of these new Bressanese, moving to the town did not entail the creation of an awareness of the town’s political and economic history. “We’ve been here for a few years, but I didn’t know how important the furnaces were for Bressana,” commented a new Bressanese during the 2022 festival.

The relaunch of the Mattone cake in 2022 must be read in light of this socio-economic dynamic and the desire of the municipal administration to give a face to Bressana within the growing market of gastronomic tourism, filling a perceived void in the local foodscape. In the last 30 years, the town has established itself as a gastronomic destination thanks to its patisseries, offering high-quality products that compete with those produced in other centres. However, even in the eyes of the same master pastry chefs, there was a lack of a product capable of distinguishing and making the town unique. In light of this, and further motivated by the deep impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that for two years had minimized the community’s opportunities for socialisation, the local municipal administration, together with the Pro Loco and a substantial nucleus of public and private partners, decided to relaunch the summer festival of Bressana by reactivating the memory of the winning cake from the competition in the 1970s [37]. As explained by the mayor during the press conference of the event (27 August 2022):

Bressana at the Festival 2022 wants to be an invitation to rediscover our municipality, Oltrepò Pavese, and the province of Pavia [...] It is a return to a major event in presence after the difficult years of COVID and the pandemic alarm [...] The policy we are pursuing is to valorize Bressana as the “Gateway to Oltrepò Pavese,” strong with its history and local talents [...] [40].

This goal was articulated through the event, conceived by Danila Quistapace and Luca Carlo Benicchi of Hub Voghera:

After a careful analysis of the local context and an in-depth study of the historical stratification of the Bressana Festival, it was immediately understood that there was no real identity in which the community could recognize itself and that could act as an attractor, driving force or qualifying element of territorial representation of the local community. Such elements are essential for the involvement of a local community and to attract the public to the “Festival” and consequently for the success of an initiative [...] [41].

This void was filled through the recovery of the cake as an element of local identity, thus marking a semantic shift from a dessert born to celebrate an identity present and distinct from the dessert, that of the brick industry, which became the emblem and foundation of the community’s identity itself.

The festive recovery of the cake proceeded based on an initial administrative action of the Municipality. With the Deliberation of the Municipal Council, No. 23, dated 28 July 2022, the entity established the “Regulation for the protection and valorization of local typical products and for the establishment of the municipal denomination of origin”. This act established a guarantee brand, the Denominazione di Origine Comunale (De.Co, Municipal Denomination of Origin in English), under Law No. 142 of 8 June 1990, to be used to promote specific agri-food products deemed by the municipality to be suitable for representing and enhancing Bressana Bottarone. With the intention of the Mayor and the Administration, as expressed in the press conference on 27 August [41], the first product identified for a De.Co. was to be the Mattone cake; therefore, the festival was to be read as the reappearance of the cake in the food landscape and the life of the community.

To this end, as in 1971, a gastronomic competition was organized, this time aimed at the public (Figure 3). Unlike the competition in the 1970s, participants were asked to make a specific recipe, that of 1971. Not only private individuals were involved but also, for a specific category of the award, professional pastry chefs.

The event took place from 27 August to 11 September. In this schedule, 4 September saw the day’s programme focused on promoting the cake. In the morning, the competing cakes were put on display at the premises of the Oratory of San Giovanni, a central and lively place visited every Sunday by the population of the village. During the exhibition, the members of the committee of honour judged the cakes and awarded the prizes. In the afternoon, there was a charity sale of the cakes for the benefit of the parish. The activities closed in the evening, around 10 p.m., with the awarding of the two prizes (Nicholas Perduca among the professionals and Roberta Del Bò among the private individuals) and two special mentions (to Claudio Governati and Gianfranco Liviero, both in the professional category). For both locals and festival visitors who came from further afield, the day represented a moment of discovery of this dessert. “I didn’t know there was a typical cake in Bressana,” “This is the first time I hear about [the brick],” and “I don’t remember it being quite like this, you know?” were some comments collected in the field from visitors for whom the day completed a journey of acquiring a fragment of local gastronomic identity and memory.

Regolamento di partecipazione alla giornata di omaggio a "Il Mattone di Bressana Bottarone" – 50° anniversario 1972–2022

1. Sono presenti due categorie: una è quella riservata ai pasticceri professionisti, la seconda è quella riservata ai privati.

2. Le creazioni realizzate secondo la ricetta tradizionale e con libera interpretazione sulla guarnizione superiore devono essere consegnate sabato 3 agosto dalle 18.00 alle 20.00 presso l'Oratorio della Parrocchia di San Giovanni Battista di Bressana Bottarone (i dolci saranno conservati in frigorifero fino al momento della degustazione).

3. Le creazioni saranno presentate con il nome del pasticcere o dell'esecutore privato e degustate da una commissione che compilerà una scheda tecnica di degustazione e ad insindacabile giudizio della stessa, che si riunirà domenica 4 Agosto alle ore 09.30 presso l'Oratorio, determinerà il dolce che meglio rispecchia ed interpreta la ricetta tradizionale.

4. I due dolci che riceveranno il maggior punteggio dalla commissione di degustazione saranno comunicati martedì 6 agosto alle ore 21.00 presso l'area feste durante il convegno: Filiere locali e De.Co. (Denominazioni Comunali) come strumento di promozione territoriale.

5. Tutte le torte, dopo la degustazione della commissione saranno messe in degustazione ad offerta nel pomeriggio di domenica 4 settembre 2022.



Figure 3. Regulations of the 2022 competition [28]. It reads: 1. There are two categories: one reserved for professional pastry chefs and the other for private individuals. 2. Creations made according to the traditional recipe with free interpretation on the upper decoration must be delivered on Saturday, 3 August, between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. at the Oratory of the Parish of San Giovanni Battista in Bressana Bottarone (the desserts will be stored in the refrigerator until the tasting). 3. The creations will be presented with the name of the pastry chef or private individual and tasted by a committee that will complete a technical tasting sheet. Based on the committee's indisputable judgment, which will meet on Sunday, 4 August, at 9:30 a.m. at the Oratory, the dessert that best reflects and interprets the traditional recipe will be determined. 4. The two desserts that receive the highest scores from the tasting committee will be announced on Tuesday, 6 August, at 9:00 p.m. at the festival area during the conference: "Local Supply Chains and De.Co. (Municipal Denominations) as Tools for Territorial Promotion". 5. All cakes, after the committee's tasting, will be available for tasting by donation on the afternoon of Sunday, 4 September 2022.

However, this effervescence dampened over the following weeks. In the days immediately following the festival, and for about a month, the patrons of the patisseries continued to ask for the dessert, driven by the significant media attention the event had received in Pavia. This interest had already waned by the time All Saints' Day was approaching, to the point of justifying the activities to produce the cake only by reservation. "It behaved like a seasonal speciality. It is strong for a while but then you have to change," commented one of the pastry chefs. On the other hand, among the population, the memory of this dessert, in the spring of 2023, was still active; "although honestly, I don't feel like making it at home... but a slice is really good..." commented an informant, thinking back to the speciality in January 2023.

Unlike what happened 50 years earlier, the experience of the festival and the gastronomic challenge did not end in a year. In the summer of 2023, the local administration relaunched the festival for the first few days of September [42]. Although without the media and organisational commitment of the previous year, the cake was again presented to the general public as a rediscovered element of the identity and typicality of the place, providing this dessert with another lease of life in the community.

4. Discussion

The case of the birth and rebirth of Bressana Bottarone's Mattone cake shows a stratification of patterns through which a community created and performed typicality over 50 years. The history of the dessert sees two distinct phases in which the making of typicality

takes form: the first in the early 1970s and the second in 2022. The primary difference between these two processes lies in the dynamics of recognising the product's value [43–45]. Specifically, the fundamental difference between the 1971 festival and that of 2022 is the identification of the reasons for the product's typicality, that is to say the causes that make the cake an element of strategic relevance for the community.

In the first festival, the cake was a new element within the local gastronomic landscape; it did not have an intrinsic link from a production or historical perspective, but it was rather created to be typical. However, the centrality in this process of gastronomic signification [46] passed through specific ways of creating this product; the choice to involve an entire community in creating the recipe and (albeit mediated by local elites) in selecting the best and most significant for the collective makes this dessert "typical" as a strongly incorporated element in its gastronomic landscape. According to Andrea Borghini [47], for each recipe, one can always identify the authors who invented the procedure, those who have the right to judge the correct execution, and those who can legitimize the change in the original recipe without altering its recognizability. In the case of the 1971 festival, the three roles coincided and were covered by the community that lived in the present. In fact, the institutionalisation of the recipe was still to come, and the process asked the members of the community to present their inventions, with the judges selecting a winner on the basis of their own personal preferences.

In 2021, the cake was again placed at the centre of the life of Bressana Bottarone and again presented to the wider world as an object manifesting the territory's specificities. However, the value of this product is no longer entirely in the hands of the present community but in its past. In 2022, the Mattone cake was presented as a distinctive element because it is taken from the community's past, while in Borghini's theoretical framework, this means that there is a misalignment between the author (past community) and those who reserved the role of judge of the appropriateness of the forms of realisation and its variations (present community); typicality thus appears as the result of a process of re-territorialisation of knowledge and meanings. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari [48] suggest that a process of re-territorialisation is the rewriting of the meaning of an object and its relocation in a network of meanings and connections different from the original. In this case, the shift involves a product born in the 1970s being removed from that context and taken and embedded in the current one.

Furthermore, distinguishing the processes active in the two historical moments is a different attitude towards commerce and the consumption of the cake throughout the year. While in the 1971 festival, only a possible consumption of the cake during the year was hinted at without developing a project plan, in the 2022 festival, access was guaranteed throughout the year through the involvement of local pastry chefs as an interface through which visitors always had the opportunity to experience and access the typicality of the town. This difference can be read as a sign of greater awareness of the dynamics of tourism, characterising the approach to gastronomy in the present.

Despite the differences in the implementation models in each of the historical moments, the processes of valorising typicality respond, as also recorded in other anthropological fields [49–51], to a local crisis ignited by the rapid political, economic, and social changes it undergoes. In Bressana, as seen, the 1970s correspond to the rapid decline of the main local economy; inventing a cake that is a sign and recognition of such industry is an open expression of the local elites' desire to underscore its importance to the town, somehow solidifying an otherwise compromised territorial identity. Fifty years later, having experienced the industry's decline and entering a post-industrial phase, the rediscovery of the Mattone cake is functional in strengthening the social cohesion of the local population affected by both long-term socio-economic transformation phenomena and the pandemic contingency, as remarked by the Bressana mayor [40]. At the same time, it plays a central role in constructing a public image and narrative of the community, to be read as a project of reimagining the town as a tourist destination, necessary to create the prerequisites for the tourist development of Bressana Bottarone [52] and, thus, of a new form of economy

that, even in the Oltrepò town, becomes a perspective with which to direct the community to emerge from a state of socio-cultural permacrisis.

5. Conclusions

Turning to the conclusions, this ethnographic research shows how the promotion of typicality is always a performative act aimed at creating landscape and community through food.

As this article is being finalized at the end of 2023, Bressana Bottarone presents itself to the world through a single typical product—the Mattone cake. Locally, too, after two editions of gastronomic competition, there is a stronger awareness in the everyday life of the town about what this product is and, partly, of its history, as reconstructed in these pages. While this datum encourages thinking about a future for this dessert, the 50-year hiatus between the two competitions compels reflection on the actual resilience of this valorisation process.

The rooting of a product in a community depends on the persistence of cooperation among various local institutional and economic actors: the municipal administration, Pro Loco, associations, third-sector entities, and economic operators. In Bressana, after the first edition, this synergy around the product was lost, leading to its disappearance. The recovery of the cake in 2022 was achieved by reactivating the relationship between the actors, and thus, the affective economy centred on the cake, involving the community and the wider world. The year 2023 marks a continuation of this synergy, but it is reasonable to look to the future and ask what responses the local community will provide to keep this product vital and central.

From here, questions arise about the sustainability and continuation of this process, namely how and to what extent local actors will succeed in incorporating this cake and its meaning into the community. Alongside this, there are questions about the new meanings the cake will take on and the ways it will give sense to the place of the town.

On another level, the case of the Mattone cake encourages reflection on the concept of typicality, moving beyond its declaration and viewing this concept as performative reality. In this regard, typicality is the outcome of construction, but this should be read as follows:

- A relationship between the community and its present and contingencies, even before its past;
- An open question about the community's future.

This capacity to convey such a cultural relationship makes the “typical” product stand apart from other items that populate the cuisine and life of the community. This case study highlights this cultural dynamic, enriching the debate about the processes of gastronomic promotion, as well as that related to the cultural and social value of food. Hence, while case studies allow for understanding how products become central to the life of a town, becoming the pivot of an affective economy that tells the past, present, and future of the community, ethnography indicates new research paths related to how the landscape itself is transformed by such an affective economy and how this can transform changes in the cultural and geographical context in which it is situated, as well as the urgency to better explore the contributions that individual actors of this economy make in creating place and community.

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