
Paradoxes of Cuca gastronomy (Kuchen): the emptying of traditional food at the service of the invention of a European identity in the Middle Itajaí Valley

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Abstract

Context: This article aims to understand the phenomenon of Cuca's (Kuchen) gastronomization contextualized concerning the creation of a Europeanized identity for advertising and tourist purposes in the Middle Itajaí Valley (micro-region located in southern Brazil). Cuca (Kuchen) is an ethnic food that preserves traditions and identity importance to both rural and urban communities. **Methodology:** For this, a combination of different methodological resources was used: Ethnography, with interviews with eight residents of this micro-region and participant observation; documentary and bibliographic research. **Results:** It is concluded that when it is removed from the domestic sphere, the Cuca (kuchen) the tourist attraction is raised through a process understood as being the gastronomy. By applying advertising varnish with tourist ideals, the traditions impelled to this food considered emblematic to the descendants of Germanic immigrants, although not only to these. Especially when the peasants are disregarded in these processes as members of the traditional food system of this territory.

Keywords

Cuca (kuchen), traditional food, Germanic immigration, Middle Itajaí Valley

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Introduction

This article aims to understand the recent phenomenon of gastronomy (Barbosa 2009; Poulain 2016) of *Cuca* (Kuchen), contextualized in relation to the creation of a European identity for advertising and tourism purposes in the Middle Itajaí Valley (micro-region located in Southern Brazil). The *Cuca* (kuchen) is a traditional food that was inserted in this region by the Germanic immigrants in the 19th century, contextualized to their habits and customs. It is understood as emblematic food, since it is connected to the identity of the residents of this region where this *Cuca* (kuchen) is consumed, being therefore relevant to ethnic trade* and the maintenance of the residents' food traditions, whether they are descendants or not of Germanic immigrants.

Recently *Cuca* (kuchen) has been the protagonist of events and festivals with tourist appeal, which have been blurring the boundaries between traditional and invention with advertising varnish, calving as a phenomenon of gastronomy. By gastronomy it is understood as a complex process of valuation, recognition, learning and enjoyment of hitherto artisanal and ethnic foods. Food, therefore, is clipped from the domestic rustic sphere to be raised to the condition of special, although emptied of its traditional senses, after going through processes of sophistication that may involve the inclusion of new ingredients, forms of consumption, presentation etc. (Barbosa, 2009, 2016). The *Cuca* (kuchen) gastronomy, therefore, is designed to be part of the long-term advertising creation of a supposed European (German) identity of the Middle Itajaí Valley (MVI) — territorial cut of this article.

Although the *Cuca* (kuchen) is present in the eating habits found in the MVI just over a century and a half ago, there is a shortage of materials that discuss the role of this food in the development of the region and in the lives of its inhabitants, nor are the changes undertaken around the *Cuca* (kuchen) under different optics. Therefore, in order to understand these phenomena, in the methodological course the combination of different resources was employed. Initially, ethnography, with participant observations and in-depth interviews with eight people living in the MVI. Through interviews with community members, involved at different levels with *Cuca* (kuchen) — manufacturing, consumption, etc. — and ages it was possible to unveil the relationship of this food and its diners not only in the contemporary period, but also in the past. The participant observation allowed the assimilation of the knowledge-making of *Cuca* (kuchen).

To give account of the proposed discussion the combination of documentary and bibliographic research was also used, allowing the assimilation of the data analyzed and presented here. The article is divided into five blocks, starting in this introduction. It follows with the location of the *Cuca* (kuchen) in the analyzed territory, therefore, of which *Cuca* we are dealing with. Subsequently, it is involved in the analysis of how a Germanic identity was created with a view to advertising and tourism, and then how this project impacts what is understood as the process of *Cuca* (kuchen) gastronomy, a theme explored in the fourth part of this article. Finally, the discussions raised are summarized and proposed further details of the theme.

Cuca (kuchen) of the Middle Itajaí Valley

It should be elucidated which *Cuca* (kuchen) is referred to in this article, since it is a food often present where there are descendants of Germanic immigrants in different parts of Brazil and the world (Matthes

*2 Often linked to the past of certain social groups, usually at risk of disappearance, emblematic foods are understood as "those who are perceived as the most "characteristic" (own of), thus becoming emblematic"(Maciel, 2005, p. 443).

2017). Food is understood here as food crossed by culture. How certain food is prepared, as well as when, how, with whom, where and how you eat, you give meaning to food and meals (Fischler 2011; Poulain 2004). It is possible to observe regionalized differences in the preparation of *Cuca* (kuchen), because, like culture, food is dynamic and subject to modifications. Although there are certain distinct characteristics among the *Cucas* in the regions of Brazil where Germanic immigration occurred, especially from the second half of the 19th century, the essence remains. It is a sweet dough usually made from wheat flour, fat, eggs, liquid (milk or water), sugar and yeast (biological or chemical), then receives a layer of chopped fruits (banana, pineapple, apple, grape etc.) or jellies (it is also possible to find without this layer) and covered with sweet crumble made with sugar, fat and wheat. The differences are usually related to the availability of inputs in each region and format, which can vary from rectangular tray or to the usual baking trays (narrow, high and long). In the Serra Gaúcha (northeast region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where Germanic and Italian immigrations occurred), for example, it is customary to grape *Cuca*. In the Itajaí Valley, in the state of Santa Catarina, *Cuca* is common with banana cover. Fruits, in both cases, are abundant in the respective regions (Ammvi 2018). When we deal with *Cuca* (kuchen), in this article, we refer to the produced and consumed in the Middle Itajaí Valley — microregion of the Itajaí Valley — located in Santa Catarina, a state of the Southern region of Brazil.

Cuca is originally called *StreuselKuchen* — a term still in use in Germany. Translating from German, *Streusel* is granules/crumble, and *kuchen*, cake, therefore, a cake covered with crumble. It is believed that due to corrupting the language spoken by immigrants and descendants (the *Brasildeustch*), as well as historical events, the word *StreuselKuchen* over the years changed reaching the current term *Cuca* (Matthes 2017). Reports and records indicate that in the region of the Middle Itajaí Valley commonly referred to the sweet while *kuchen* (expressed, in regional speech, something like “*curren*” or “*cuquen*”). It is estimated that the effective adhesion of the corrupt *Cuca* by the speakers occurred during the New State, especially between 1939 and 1945, a period in which the national government prohibited the use of any language other than Portuguese, directly reaching colonies and settlements of different ethnic groups, among them, the Germans. Under the risk of imprisonment, residents quickly needed, among other measures, to adapt their expressions without translation (Seyferth 2012). In this article, it is chosen to use the term *Cuca* followed by parentheses *Kuchen* when it refers to the *Cuca* found in the MVI, since there are still residents who refer in both ways to the object of this research, although the first is already the most usual.

Formation of the traditional food system of MVI

Germanic immigration[†] in Brazil began in the 1820 for different reasons, although connected, especially with the change of the labor regime at the national level. Initially, the first Germanic immigrants were allied to the change of continent to work on coffee farms in the Southeast Region, in gradual replacement to slave labor. Controversial policy, with unsatisfactory results that led the imperial government to create colonies for occupation of regions still without established settlements. Thus, the first Germanic colonies emerged on Imperial initiative, such as São Leopoldo, in Rio Grande do Sul, in 1824. Later, other colonies emerged, this time through private initiatives, such as the *Colônia São Paulo de Blumenau*, constituted in

[†] 3 Ethnic trade is understood by the one where foods are marketed that remits to the traditions of certain groups. In this article, it refers to free fairs, bakeries, colonial cafes and *Cuca* makers.

1850, by Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau, in Santa Catarina, which after decades dismemberment gave rise to the cities that form the MVI (Trespach 2019).

The Blumenau Colony occupied much of the Itajaí-Açu River basin — today about 50 municipalities — in Santa Catarina. The parcels of the original territory of the colony over almost a hundred years after its foundation gave rise to the mesoregion Itajaí Valley, which is divided into three microregions: High Itajaí Valley, Middle Itajaí Valley and Foz do Itajaí. The territory referred to in this article is the Middle Itajaí Valley (MVI), in which Blumenau is a polo city. The central region of this city constituted the Stadtplatz of the colony, where the administration, commerce and port were gathered on the Itajaí-Açu — River, which until the first decades of the 20th century was the main means of connection with other regions. Part of the cities that now form the MVI were closer to the Stadtplatz. The option for this territorial cut in this article stems from the affinity of the constitution of these cities, which have similar cultural characteristics.

Located in the central portion of the Itajaí Valley region, the micro-region of the Middle Itajaí Valley has about 828 thousand inhabitants (Ammvi 2018). It is formed by 14 cities: Apiúna, Ascurra, Benedito Novo, Blumenau, Doutor Pedrinho, Gaspar, Indaial, Pomerode, Rio dos Cedros, Rodeio and Timbó, that have in common the belonging to the old territory of Blumenau. Also part of the MVI are the municipalities of Brusque, Guabiruba and Botuverá, which were part of the Itajahy-Brusque Colony, which followed a model of colonization similar to that occurred in Blumenau. Although the official occupation in the government vision of the MVI occurred from 1850 with the institution of the Blumenau Colony, this territory was already occupied by sertanejos and indigenous people, especially the Xokleng (Florit et al. 2016). As a result of the type of colony that had been established (private and agricultural), as well as the characteristics of the territory and the contact among immigrants, sertanejos and indigenous people, a characteristic food system was established, where Cuca (kuchen) is recognized as food (Ammvi 2018; Seyferth 2012; Silva et al. 2013).

Blumenau's colonization system privileged small private and polycultures property, based on family labor. The 25-hectar lots accompanied the watersheds toward the Serra Geral, ensuring the supply of water for family and animal consumption. These productive units used essentially family labor, with simple division of labor (Seyferth 2012). In the colony — which can be understood as the lot itself, but also the rural area — there was polycultures production for subsistence, animal husbandry (poultry, pigs, cattle) and artisanal production of dairy products (butter, cheese), lard, charcuterie, jams etc. essentially for subsistence. The surplus was sold to walking traversers and merchants of the Stadtplatz. The men (settlers) knocked down the forest, did the heavy duty of the crop and care for the animals, while the women (settlers) occupied themselves with garden, vegetable garden, milking, orchard, domestic services and children's education, as well as helping their husbands. Children, from seven years old, besides attending school, also helped in domestic chores and work in farming and animal care (Silva et al. 2013).

This agricultural system was structured in the interdependence and combination of elements of plant and animal origin, being adequate by women through the know-how brought by them and adapted to the new territory. Such changes led to the recreation of the cuisine they held — as a structured kitchen (Maciel 2004)— and a food system, which is still characteristic of the food heritage of the MVI territory (Silva et al. 2013). In kitchens, habits thus become the invisible repetition of daily life, the stacking of gestures, codes, rhythms and options, with inheritances and recidivism of customs (Giard 2003). Allocated in a territory of wet forest and heat — very different from cold and dry Europe — the adaptations to the reality

they found in the new home were gradually imposed on immigrants, in agriculture and, consequently, in the kitchens of the female settlers[‡].

Wheat and rye, basic food vegetables in Europe, did not develop on the land acquired by immigrants in the Blumenau Colony. The high rainfall rates of the Atlantic Forest did not allow the seeds brought to thrive, because they require dry climate. In the first years of the colony, with the difficulties trying to plant what was already known, including with reports scarcity, immigrants gradually adopted the planting of tubers already domesticated and consumed in the region by the sertanejos and indigenous. If until then the immigrants had as a food base wheat, rye, cabbage, English potatoes, pork and lentils, with the difficulties encountered in the new home they needed to plant and consume white corn, sweet potato cassava, yam, taiá and beans. Peanuts and fruits hitherto unknown to them were also incorporated into the cuisine and eating habits of immigrants, being kept by their descendants (Menasche Schmitz 2009).

Although the aim was to survive, with the progress of the polycultures agricultural properties and the development of the colony, the surpluses were sold in local trade (at the Stadtplatz) and later outside the colony. Jams, cheeses, butter, lard, sausages etc. were known colonial products, that is, made in the agricultural polycultures properties in the rural area. Milk milked from cows in the morning was reserved for family consumption and own production of derivatives. The rest of the milk taken during the day was destined for commercialization to the center of the colony and industries. The resources from these practices were intended for the purchase of equipment, hoes, clothes and products that they could not manufacture by their own means (Silva et al. 2013).

Despite the gradual change in the profile of rural properties (Ammvi 2018), the system originated in the period of colonization of Blumenau, based on small agricultural properties of vegetable and animal polycultures production, with essentially family labor, still remains in the MVI, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). While only 9% of the population of the region still resides in rural areas (Ammvi 2018), the 2017 Agricultural Census (Ibge E 2017) indicated that of the total agricultural establishments in the MVI, 83% were of individual ownership. Of the total number of people employed in agricultural establishments (considering all types), 88% had some degree of kinship with the owner. In Blumenau, for example, there were, in 2017, 666 agricultural properties, whose 492 of them were from individual producers. 1.6 thousand people worked in these places, 1.4 thousand were family members of the owner farmer, revealing that even most of the agricultural properties maintain characteristics that date back to the colonization period.

The maintenance of polycultures rural properties in the MVI, it is important to highlight, is fundamental in terms of food sovereignty and safety in the territory. In a short chain, varied small plantations, including species of local habits, provide access to fresh food for local supply. The link between food and nutrition security (regular and permanent access to quality food in sufficient quantity) and food sovereignty is inherent, since the second is comprehensive as a public policy providing for the valorization of family and peasant agriculture. It is based on principles of agroecological, agroforestry and preservationist agriculture, without the use of pesticides and means that deteriorate the environment, prioritizing the direct relationship between consumer and farmer, respecting peoples' livelihoods and culture (Silva Da 2020).

[‡] 4 It was chosen to refer to the Germanic immigrants this way, since the unification of the Germanic states that led to the creation of Germany occurred only in 1879, just over half a century after the beginning of the immigration of these peoples to Brazil in 1824.

Production for commercialization and subsistence prevails in small farms in the MVI, although there are male and female settlers who also obtain income from concomitant labor in local industries and/or retirement (Ammvi 2018; Silva Da 2016). In these properties, various crops of roots and vegetables are common, as well as breeding pigs, cattle, poultry and fish farming. Milked milk has part reserved for its own consumption and another for the marketing and manufacture of derivatives such as butter, cream, curd and cheese. Including Kochkäse, a type of pasty cheese made from raw milk, which undergoes a process of maturation and subsequent cooking. It is a particular cheese to the region, usually appreciated by the descendants of Germanic immigrants, which is in the process of patrimonialization and legal adequacy due to its importance of identity and maintenance of families in the countryside. (Silva, 2016, 2013).

The free fairs present in the cities (urban) of the MVI are supplied, in general, by types originated from the colonies. In addition to vegetables, fruits and roots, meat products are also sold, such as sausages (such as Blumenau), sausages, mortadella, among others, lard, eggs, pasta, preserves, fermented (sauerkraut) etc. Confectionery items manufactured by women settlers are also marketed, although items made by small cooperatives or smaller industries allocated in rural areas of the region are also present. There are buttery cookies, black treacle and arrowroot; Christmas painted cookies (Spekulatius); jellies; muss (banana paste cooked with black treacle or sugar); cakes; traditional breads (aipim, yam, taiá, corn meal, corn etc.) and Cuca (Kuchen) (Matthes 2017).

The ethnic cuisine of immigrants, in practice, brought together Germanic traditions brought by them and the colonial production that was possible (Seyferth 2012). Stew with aipim, roast teal, fruit jams, preserves of vegetables, sausages and cold meats products, as well as jams, pies, flour threads, cakes etc. are the result of the adaptations made by women. These foods are part of the food system that developed in the MVI and remains remarkable, although, notably, in gradual change before the transformations in the territory that have been happening since the nineteenth century, such as urbanization, for example. As part of this food system, Cuca (kuchen) is not isolated and has undergone (and is still undergoing) significant changes over time, both in its inputs and in the way of making and consuming, accompanying the territory transformations and the society in which it is inserted.

In the first decades of the then colony, and then municipality of Blumenau, the Cuca (kuchen) was made and served only on December 25th, Christmas Day. Eventually, in the wealthiest families, it was prepared and served on holidays such as the Day of the Holy Spirit and the patriarch anniversary. The fact that it is consumed from its origins in collective ways (family, community, etc.), this being an important feature of Cuca (kuchen) still today, even if it is also present in other types of meetings (such as in companies, for example) (Matthes 2017; Wierlacher 2008). As an emblematic food, it bears a symbol of communion, both of the family itself and of the community. The preparation of Cuca (kuchen) could take days or weeks, starting with the purchase of the inputs. In a context of certain isolation, the communities expected news that some loading of wheat and white sugar bags would be about to arrive, they placed the order to then have access to raw materials. Another difficulty, especially of farming families, was access to money for the purchase of items such as wheat, since they lived from subsistence agriculture and sold little of what they produced (Matthes 2017; Seyferth 2015; Silva et al. 2013).

With the use of natural yeast (madre dough), which could have several origins, such as the garapa of sugarcane production remains or potatoes, the fermentation of the dough that usually had, in addition to flour and sugar, liquid (milk or water), eggs and fat, could take hours or a whole day, depending on the weather. After the growth of the dough, they were covered with fruits, jams our fruit spread, or fresh

cheese (quark type, known as “queijinho” in MVI) and sprinkled with sweet crumble made with wheat, sugar and fat. The Cucas (kuchen), made in large quantities to cater to numerous families, were baked in the wood oven on Christmas Eve, to be then served on December 25th, usually in the afternoon breakfast. The children were involved in the process, from seeking the inputs in the local groceries, to preparing the hot coal in the wood oven. (Ammvi 2018). With the development of the region, Cuca (kuchen) undergoes changes.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the municipality already had better established logistics and growth of trade, facilitating the acquisition of items that are not possible to produce in the region, such as wheat. The electrical grid advanced beyond the central streets, allowing access to the electro portables, such as the electric oven. Industries have established themselves, emerging the figure of the settler working one period in the industry and another, in his property (Silva et al. 2013). Thus, they began to have more access to items that required money. In the markets fresh organic yeast industrialized arrives in place of natural, reducing the production of Cuca (kuchen) within a few hours. The electric ovens also gained popularity, decreasing the work of women, who no longer needed to resort to hot coal in brick ovens to bake breads and cakes.

Another significant change, already in the second half of the 20th century, was the popularization and use of chemical powder yeast, known at the time by its — Royal — brand that transformed Cuca (kuchen) from bread to cake. If before it was necessary to wait hours for the dough to grow using the organic yeast (for bread), now it was no longer necessary. It was enough to follow the mixture with the chemical yeast (for cake) and put in the electric oven so that in about an hour the Cuca (kuchen) was ready for tasting. These changes in the form of preparation, as well as in society and the region itself, influenced the way of consuming Cuca (kuchen). With these changes, if it was previously served exclusively at Christmas or on special dates, it became part of the daily lives of the residents with the expansion of ethnic trade. The change in yeast — from biological to chemical — even imputes a certain discussion among the residents (especially the older ones) about what the “real” Cuca (kuchen) would be, if made as bread dough or cake dough. For older people, the biological yeast originates the “original” Cuca (Kuchen), as they keep in memory the times of childhood and youth.

It was through the traditional food trade, such as bakeries, free fairs and Cuca makers (women who make and sell Cuca (kuchen)) that Cuca (kuchen) became common in everyday life. Since it took time before — women — to make and only then consume Cuca (kuchen), with the expansion of this trade it became possible to consume it routinely. This fact is in line with the growth of the presence of women in the formal labor market, who have reduced time for domestic activities — including cooking. Although the characteristics of the Cucas (kuchen) marketed in bakeries, free fairs, colonial cafes and Cuca makers are distinct. In bakeries, it is common to use pre-made cake mixes, generic, only assembled with filling and crumble cover. In open fairs, the origin is usually from home producers, many of them residents of polycultures properties, family farming. Whereas the Cuca makers prefer to make the recipe that many consider “original”: using with organic yeast in the dough, that is, bread — as sold in the open markets.

The institution, and consequent popularization of colonial breakfast, was another important element within what is understood in the expansion and review of Cuca (kuchen) consumption in MVI. The goal of colonial breakfast would be to bring to the table, usually served in the afternoon, everything that is supposed to be done in the colony in a rich way: frosted cakes, Apfelstrudel (kind of roulade with fine dough stuffed with apple and raisins), sausages, salami, cheeses, Kochkäse, muss, Cuca (kuchen) etc. Common in the MVI and other regions of Germanic colonization, such as some cities of Serra Gaúcha

(in the state of Rio Grande do Sul), colonial breakfast as a tourist product emerged during the 1970's, in which the federal government sought the “‘touristification’ of certain cultural traits or shared memories — in particular culinary practices” (Goodman, 2018, p. 7).

These contexts allow us to understand that the *Cuca* (kuchen), over time, assumes more than one character. Until at least half the 20th century was restricted to the domestic environment, when it extrapolates this territory and also becomes food from outside home (Schubert et al. 2021). It integrates a new dimension of eating, when it becomes part not only of intimate moments of the family, but of colonial breakfast and all kinds of small collective meal with a mild character (as in coffee breaks, for example). At the same time, *Cuca* (Kuchen) is also made outside the home, i.e. in commercial/industrial kitchens (Barbosa, 2009, 2016;) (Benemann Menasche 2017).

The creation of a supposed Germanic identity

The phenomenon of the *Cuca* (Kuchen) gastronomy in MVI, which occurred especially from the first half of the 2010, is encompassed in a complex process of building a Germanic identity that began about half a century earlier. Although there are indications that *Cuca* (Kuchen) has always been present — more or less frequently, varying according to the time — in the eating habits of the residents (Matthes 2017), it now receives the typical food varnish in this context. To forge this Germanic identity, as the idealization of a European culture and, therefore, supposedly superior, it uses a myriad of elements such as architecture, music, dance, celebrations, including food. This process is not exclusive to Blumenau or MVI. It is a global trend a certain “ethnic revival” from cultural and symbolic bases (Poulain, 2016, 2019;) (Seyferth 2012). This supposed reinvention of the past to worship it in the present is repeated in other places in Brazil where European immigrants settled between the 19th and 20th centuries, it is enough to observe the dozens of Oktoberfest-style parties, for example, scattered in municipalities in Southern Brazil.

With the construction of this Germanic varnish in Blumenau — polo city of the MVI and, therefore, with some influence on the others — began in the 1960's with the constitution of the Municipal Tourism Commission of Blumenau, formed by members related to culture, entrepreneurs and municipal administrators. Although it already had handmade crystals and textile products as tourist attractions, the goal was to create a city-image (Flores Campos 2007) remounted to a colonial past with a trail of heroic overcoming, European order and beauty. Gradually the rhetoric was sustained by the insertion of elements that reminded of Germanness, such as architecture. The timber framing was rescued as an aesthetic. It is a constructive technique used by immigrants, especially in the nineteenth and early nineteenth century, which gives the house remarkable characteristics, usually with bricks and apparent wood. Common in MVI, as well as in ancient buildings in Germany. Tax discount was instituted for real estate that would have timber framing characteristics. Dozens of — private and public — buildings such as the city hall — emerged with what a stream of critics later called a timber framing structures (Flores Campos 2007). The makeup with kitsch aesthetic (Machado, 2011) looked like to Blumenau-German, dressed for the tourist.

The work of the Commission paved the way for the establishment of a tourist party in the shape of what takes place annually in Munich (Germany) since the early 19th century. The first edition of the Blumenau Oktoberfest took place in 1984. Although it was a tourist product architected for years before, initially the Brazilian Oktoberfest had its creation associated with overcoming the population of two large floods (1983 and 1984). In common sense, it would have been a way to raise the mood of the residents after the

two floods of Itajaí-Açu. The work and order, values attributed to this supposed Germanic identity, are evoked, concealing the reason for reproducing the festival of Munich in Brazil. Several resources have been created to give the German style to the party: “typical” costumes, dance, music, beverage (draft beer) and food (Ijuim Moser 2021; Seyferth 2012).

The construction of the Oktoberfest image involves using different signs that do not necessarily have a relationship with the immigrant who arrived in the region in 1850. Costumes understood as “typical”, for example, reflect what was used in Bavaria, southern Germany. However, few immigrants came from this region, most of them from Saxony and the founder himself, Hermann Bruno Otto Blumenau, came from Braunschweig (central-north). Although dance and music were present in the festivities of the Brazilian-Teuto, for the Oktoberfest, the creation of “typical” bands and groups of folk dances, which sought out choreographies and costumes outside the city were encouraged. Although fast foods were present served for quick meals, the restaurants served “typical” food, but little known or usual among diners in the region, such as mallard stuffed with purple cabbage and apple puree, Eisbein (pork knee), Hackepeter (seasoned raw meat) etc.

The trailer of the success of the Blumenau Oktoberfest, other cities in the Middle Itajaí Valley created their own “typical festivals” between the late 1980’s and during 1990’s. As the Pomeranian Feast, in Pomerode; the Immigrant Feast, in Timbó; and the Fenarreco, in Brusque. Other versions of Oktoberfest, including, take place in other municipalities of the Southern Region of Brazil, where the formation of Germanic colonies also occurred, although all are smaller and some have even started before the Blumenau city version.

Around 2010, gradually, the Blumenau party was winning a new outfit with a view to the Munich Oktoberfest, attractions were created every year and higher tickets, in an attempt to be less a draft beer-only party and more of “traditions”. In 2015, the gastronomic attractions were refurbished, since, according to the city “besides the cold draft beer, music and typical costumes, the great attraction of Oktoberfest is gastronomy, that every year attracts tourists from Brazil and abroad interested in tasting the typical cuisine of our region”^{§5}.

The construction of the idea of Germanness or Europeaness, although it has Oktoberfest — and subsequent similar festivals in the region — as an important element, permeates other public tourism policies. For example, the creation of the European Valley to designate part of the Middle Itajaí Valley. As a tourism policy, it would be based on a certain “regional vocation”, although it covers and distorts the information that other populations, such as indigenous peoples, already lived in the region before the arrival of European immigrants (Germanic, Russian, Polish, Italian, etc.) (Florit et al. 2016; Ijuim Moser 2021). The slogans that Blumenau recently adopted in advertising campaigns reinforce the creation of the idea of a European city on Brazilian soil: “Blumenau – Germany Without Passport” (2014) and “Blumenau – The Brazil of German Soul” (2015) (Ijuim Moser 2021). Pomerode, MVI municipality, is called “Little Germany”.

Understanding the construction of the Germanic identity in Blumenau, which reverberates in the Middle Itajaí Valley, is necessary to locate the *Cuca* (Kuchen) gastronomy. As an emblematic food,

^{§5} The Blumenau Colony was characterized by the presence of two social groups: the settlers (peasants) and the small city bourgeoisie. Although they have common characteristics, the cuisine is differentiating, since the women of the second group had access to products from outside the colony, as well as culinary knowledge distinct from the female settlers (Ammvi 2018).

consumed since the beginning of the arrival of the teuto immigrants to the territory in question, passing through different conjunctures and processes that transform it as food and, in a way, symbol.

The Cuca (kuchen) gastronomy

In about 170 years, the Cuca (Kuchen) of the Middle Itajaí Valley went through a path started in the rustic kitchens of the first rammed earth houses of immigrants, passing through changes in their way of preparation and consumption. Of special food, with elements difficult to access between 1850 and the first decades of the twentieth century, it became usual in the daily lives of the residents. Its important characteristic remained: consumption in a collective way. In the 2010's, Cuca (kuchen) was allocated within the context of creating a Germanic identity, where eating habits serve to differentiate against other identities (Seyferth 2012). In this more recent stage, the Cuca (kuchen) gastronomy is observed. It is a new treatment to a socially important food, although it has nothing complex or extraordinary in its preparation. In this sense, Poulain (2016) points out that

What was previously nothing more than “caipira”[country] food or mache-rabes, to use the expression of Molière, is promoted to the position not only of food, which would already be suitable, but of excellent food. The process of “gastronomy” is therefore not reduced to the process of patrimonialization (Poulain, 2016, p. 34).

Within the numerous trends related to food, gastronomy is the one where “food and drink are no longer thought of as a nutrient, as a fuel, and are thought of as food, as pleasure, taste, culture and tradition” (Barbosa, 2009, p. 49). The gastronomy of eating and everyday life is understood as the stages of valorization, recognition, learning and enjoyment.

This is constituted of several processes such as the recovery and ennoblement of culinary practices and knowledge defined as artisanal, ethnic, traditional and authentic; the expansion of the notion of gastronomy for all kinds of culinary expressions; the constant search for new products and ingredients; the multiple forms of labels present in the forms of food intake, production and sharing; the appearance of new actors related to food and eating and the increase of markets and products related to food (Barbosa, 2016, p. 104).

Because it is with culture varnish and tradition that Cuca (Kuchen) is now depicted, it comes from supporting rustic kitchens to the protagonist in fairs and festivals. In the 2010, initiatives with tourist and identity appeal emerged celebrating and revisiting Cuca (Kuchen), creating promotions and contests that seek what the recipe would be to be updated, using innovative ingredients — under certain aspects — for preparation.

This is the case of the National Festival of Cuca, which takes place in the municipality of Brusque (member of the MVI), since 2014, promoted by the Center of Bakery and Patisserie of the Business Association of Brusque, Guabiruba and Botuverá. A city that even intends to become the National Capital of Cuca — a bill for this purpose has been in progress in the Congress since 2017. The event, under the slogan “The taste of German tradition” — takes place in the city's event hall, bringing together bakeries and pastry shops from all over the city. For the public, there is a Cuca buffet (Kuchen) option and colonial breakfast. At the same time, there are workshops on how to prepare Cuca (Kuchen), with different fillings and toppings. During the Festival there is also a competition to elect the best Cuca (Kuchen) open to the general public, however, only people with experience in confectionery or even professionals usually participate. Innovative recipes of Cuca (Kuchen) are made including ingredients unusual to delicacy in

MVI, such as milk candy, bacon, pepper, exotic fruits, nuts, etc. The jury is made up of personalities from the municipality, as well as famous chefs, usually linked to television programs. Winners win a trophy, plus prizes offered by the sponsors. The Festival is an example of what Poulain (2019) sees as gastronomization. For the author, it is when the attention turns to the regional, local. More than valuing or patrimonializing regional food, it is when chefs and gastronomic experts offer a rereading, "revisiting the terroir", transforming old kitchens into "a new cuisine of excellence"(Poulain, 2019, p. 11).

In Blumenau, at the Oktoberfest until 2015, *Cuca* (Kuchen) was offered in the set of other dishes at the colonial breakfast served in restaurants in the pavilions where the party takes place. In the remodeling of the marketing of food and valorization of the considered "typical", *Kuchen Haus* was created (which could be translated from German as "house of *Cuca*"), where it became a specific point of sale of *Cuca* (Kuchen). Until then, it was possible to consume *Cuca* (Kuchen) only as an item of colonial breakfast served by one of the restaurants. The inclusion of new dishes and modification of the food marketing system in the party, according to the Secretary of Tourism at the time, had as objective "to rescue the cuisine of immigrants with creativity and innovation based on current German gastronomy" (Blumenau De 2022). The ribbons of "tradition", innovation and modernity guided the changes. The menu, which already contained since dishes long ago taken as "typical", such as *Eisbein* accompanied by mashed potatoes and sauerkraut, and mallard stuffed with purple cabbage and apple puree, included fast foods such as mallard burger, potato chips and lamb-based preparations. That year, 2015, the theme of the Oktoberfest constant in its publicity poster was "You are well served by tradition". Therefore, everything related to the party was under the idea of "typical" of Blumenau.

Still in Blumenau, in early September, when, on the 2nd, the anniversary of the city is celebrated, the *BlumenKuchen - Blumenau City Festival*, promoted by the city hall with the support of entrepreneurs. In it, bakeries from all over the municipality participate, which in that period commercialize *Cuca* (Kuchen) at promotional prices. On the day of the launch of the festival, which brings together authorities, the press and personalities of the city, the result of the contest also titled *BlumenKuchen* is revealed. With two categories, professional and amateur, the winning recipes can be reproduced for marketing in the participating bakeries of the festival. According to the organization, the objective is to "stimulate the appreciation of typical German gastronomy in Blumenau".

The municipality of Pomerode, the "Little Germany", also holds annually the contest for the best *Cuca* (Kuchen) in the city. Usually women from the community with family tradition participate in producing the delicacy, the so-called *Cuca makers*. At the *Pomeranian Festival*, which, in the shape of the Oktoberfest celebrates the immigration of the Germans — specifically the Pomeranians —, there is a space for the manufacture and commercialization of whole *Cucas* (Kuchen). Although sweets are in fact made in space, there is a certain aspect of dramatization, with decoration reminiscent of the houses of *Omas* (grandparents, in German) and the wood oven in operation before the eyes of tourists. An imaginary is built about what an "original" *Cuca* (Kuchen) is. It is inside the *Pomeranian Festival* that the *Delícias Caseiras* [Homemade Treats] contest takes place, which among the categories of delicacies to be prepared by the participants is the *Cuca* (Kuchen), which receives unusual versions in the MVI. The winner in 2018, for example, was the one with milk fudge and nut filling.

Final considerations

In just over a century and a half, Cuca (Kuchen) has undergone several transformations in the Middle Itajaí Valley. Initially, the necessary adaptation of the preparation to the elements available in the region. Before crossing the Atlantic, it was the habit of German immigrants to prepare the StreuselKuchen with red plum (flauma) or oilseeds cover (Wierlacher 2008). In MVI, it was necessary to use the fruits available, such as banana, pineapple and pear. With difficulty accessing the ingredients, it was made only for the celebration of Christmas or, in the case of wealthier families, on other special days, as the patriarch's anniversary. It was up to the women to adapt to the knowledge they held.

Gradually, the region became from colony to municipality, developing into urban structure. These changes transformed the way of eating and making Cuca (Kuchen), which is no longer a long fermentation bread dough, and then becomes less slow with biological yeast, and finally instant with chemical yeast. — however, being turned from bread to cake. Its consumption becomes more and more daily, present in the daily lives of the residents of the region.

Concomitantly with these changes — from the 1960's —, the phenomenon of the construction of a Germanic identity, with tourist and advertising appeal, takes place in Blumenau. This identity is formed by different segments: architecture, dance, music, food, etc. It is built an idea that Blumenau is a German, not Brazilian, Latin American city. The construction of façades of buildings that imitate the constructive method brought by immigrants, next to the garden of the city, opening of “typical” restaurants, give varnish to a city-image (Flores Campos 2007). The creation of Oktoberfest, which has as its motto to value a “typical” culture, is part of this plot. The draft beer and the food served at the party are important elements that dialog with this supposed Germanic identity.

The Cuca (kuchen) gastronomy creates a paradox in relation to food sovereignty: at the same time it values it as traditional food — although this fact may question form and ends. —, It does not include in this movement the peasants of small estates, who have in the manufacture of ethnic foods, such as Cuca (Kuchen), an important source of income, contributing to the permanence in the countryside. This is because free fairs and colonists are not included in the events that evoke the Cuca (kuchen) as a regional tradition. As a public policy, the focus is on tourism, involving companies and businesses, but ignoring the production of rural areas. Although these events also generate jobs, both directly and indirectly, covering trade and services related to baking and tourism, especially.

It is in this paradox that the Cuca (kuchen) gastronomy is contextualized. While food in fact present in the eating habits of the MVI residents, also for this reason, considered emblematic, is, to some extent, revisited and transformed into an advertising icon of local events — although they aim for national reach. With these new ingredients, the limits of what is traditional food habit and where it is invention with tourist and advertising appeal are blurred.

It remains evident the importance of Cuca (Kuchen) in the eating habits of MVI residents. It is a traditional food, present at the table of the inhabitants of the MVI since the early colonization of Blumenau by the Germanic immigrants in the 19th century, who brought with them the know-how of the Cuca (Kuchen) and the customs around it. Together with the manufacture and marketing of other traditional products, Cuca (Kuchen) is an important source of income for peasants living in small agricultural polycultures properties in the region, which in addition to maintaining already less frequent food traditions in the urban environment, they are also important for local food security. In ethnic trade, it is a fundamental element, as in colonial breakfasts, bakeries and free fairs, as well as being a source of income in the autonomous work of Cuca maker women. The phenomenon of gastronomization of Cuca

(kuchen), contextualized to the creation and maintenance of a supposed Germanic identity with a view to advertising and tourism, raises questions to be followed. Among them, the understanding how this process can affect the habits of residents in relation to Cuca (Kuchen), from its preparation to consumption.

Credits

Daniela Matthes: Conceptualization and writing – original draft, Maiko Rafael Spiess: Writing and revision and editing, Marcos Antônio Mattedi: Supervision

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