

Parma: Gastronomic Identity and Local Branding

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to analyze from a new perspective, that of the actual and potential consumers, the level of knowledge of the elements that comprise the gastronomy of Parma, fundamental feature of the local brand, with the purpose of identifying both the elements of notoriety and those less known by the consumers. The main research methods were: the critical analysis of the specialised literature, and the survey through a questionnaire distributed online comprising several types of questions, applied to a sample of mixed respondents made up of people who have a personal or professional interest in Parma as well as people who have no connection with this city.

The answers partially confirmed the initial hypothesis, in the sense that the respondents indicated the gastronomy as local brand and mentioned the main territorial traditional food products, as well as the main brands of the food industry, but there are also some aspects less known that should be promoted more, especially outside Parma. The limitation of this study is that the research was conducted only in Italy. In a future study, the results could be supplemented by answers from respondents from abroad.

Keywords: Food, Food Identity, Gastronomy, Branding, Parma

Introduction

The gastronomic criticism claims that "The civilization of a country is not identified just in arts, literature, music, but also in its cuisine and the way it is organised" (Bernardini, 1986, pp.9). The cuisine "together with its recipes, is always the reflection of a society", "a privileged place in which culture is expressed, if not even the civilization of a country" (Ballarini, 2017a, pp. viii-xii). Starting from the assumption that "where there is good food, there is civilization", it can thus be said that "Parma is one of the most civilized cities in Europe" (Molossi, 1967, pp.15).

Parma, a city with tradition in the field of agriculture and food situated in the north of Italy, in the Emilia-Romagna Region, became a UNESCO creative city in the field of gastronomy in the year 2015. From the presentation form, we find out that this city with 189,000 inhabitants is the capital of the "Italian Food Valley" and that Qualivita Foundation considers it "as the first Italian city for Agri-food Qualitative Supremacy" (UNESCO, 2021).

UNESCO Creative Cities Network was established in 2004 with the purpose of promoting collaboration between cities that turned the creative element into a strategic factor for sustainable urban development, today including 246 cities that stood out in seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.

To be part of the network dedicated to gastronomy, the cities have to meet the following conditions: “Well-developed gastronomy that is characteristic of the urban centre and/or region; Vibrant gastronomy community with numerous traditional restaurants and/or chefs; Endogenous ingredients used in traditional cooking; Local know-how, traditional culinary practices and methods of cooking that have survived industrial/technological advancement; Traditional food markets and traditional food industry; Tradition of hosting gastronomic festivals, awards, contests and other broadly-targeted means of recognition; Respect for the environment and promotion of sustainable local products; Nurturing of public appreciation, promotion of nutrition in educational institutions and inclusion of biodiversity conservation programmes in cooking schools curricula” (UNESCO, 2013).

Literature Review

In a known definition that became a reference point in the field, marketing is considered the sum of activities set out to plan, to establish a price, to promote and distribute products and services able to satisfy current and potential clients (Stanton & Varaldo, 1986, pp. 39).

In order to properly define the marketing of a certain territory, a broader concept was introduced, that of *place marketing*, which “is a strategic process contributing to urban/regional development and urban/regional competitiveness. To this end, place marketing can operate effectively, mainly through the promotion and support of the image of a place as a ‘final provided good’. This image relates both to the vision and the locally distinctive branded characteristics of each place” (Deffner & Metaxas, 2010, pp. 67). Besides the material elements, this type of promotion focuses also on the non-material elements, such as the identity and culture of the place.

Following this theoretical line, Paolo Enria considers that the offer of a territory, besides productive activities, can also put an emphasis in its promotional actions on certain non-material aspects, which include the quality of life, that makes that area to be a space with a marked cultural identity, “where it is pleasant to live and work” (Enria, 2012, pp. 10). As standard of living, in November 2021, Parma was indicated on the first locality in Italy, in a classification done by the newspaper “Italia Oggi”, La Sapienza University from Rome, in collaboration with Cattolica Assicurazioni. For the final list, the following aspects were taken into account: the business and work environment, the environment, social and personal dissatisfaction, education and the forming of the human capital, population, income and the level of well-being, security, the health system and leisure time (Oggi, 2021).

Numerous researchers, especially Pecqueur and Gumuchian, underlined the existence of two types of regional resources that contribute to the development of a local brand: generic resources which can be easily reproduced in other places, and resources specific to a certain area which depend on its characteristics (Pecqueur & Gumuchian, 2007). Among these, a local gastronomy with a strong identity can be considered a central element around which a local

brand can be developed: “A food identity can be used to market and brand a region as a culinary tourism destination and give a taste of a locality” (Bonow & Rytönen, 2012, pp. 3). To distinguish itself from other places or regions, a certain area must develop its own brand which makes it unique in the mind of the consumers, and which is made up of “identity; image; and communication. The identity of the brand is defined by the sender itself, whereas a brand image is the real image developed in the receiver’s mind. Brand identity means how the owner of the brand wants it to be experienced. On the other hand, brand image refers to how the brand is being experienced in reality” (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009, pp. 7). In our endeavour to identify the relation between the image and the identity of a place, which according to Answorth and Kavaratzis “could be summarised as follows: the place identity concerns those distinctive characteristics that historically more or less provide the place with a character” (Deffner & Metaxas, 2010, pp. 52), in the present paper we set out to analyze if the brand identity of the area of Parma corresponds to the image the consumers have in relation to it.

Methodology

Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to analyze from a new perspective, that of the actual and potential consumers, the level of knowledge of the elements that comprise the gastronomy of Parma, fundamental feature of the local brand. Making a terminological clarification, Giovanni Ballarini thinks that cuisine has in general a traditional character, while gastronomy is open to innovation (Ballarini, 2007a, pp. 29).

In our research, we therefore set out to examine whether:

- Parma has a strong territorial identity, built around the concept of gastronomy;
- the gastronomic aspect is an important one for respondents when choosing a holiday destination;
- traditional local food products from Parma are well known throughout Italy;
- local food products registered at a European level such as PDO, PGI and TSG, are well known among consumers;
- both Parma's main dishes, as well as its desserts and wines are well known by consumers;
- ingredients from Parma are used in the menus of restaurants from Parma and elsewhere in Italy and are recognised as such;
- local food industry brands are well known locally, nationally and internationally.

The main research methods were: the critical analysis of the specialised literature, and the survey through a questionnaire distributed online through the platform “google forms” that was filled in by 148 people, of which we chose 145 valid questionnaires. After the classification questions, the other questions from the questionnaire were open-ended questions, closed questions, and a question for which we made a scale with 5 values of intensity, from 1 (none at all), to 5 (very much).

Results

Regarding the classification questions, the respondents of the questionnaire are 69,7% females and 30,3% males and have the following age categories: 45/55 years - 26,9%, 35/45 years – 22,1%, 18/25 years 19,3%, 55/65 years- 18,6%, 25/35 years- 8,3%, 65/75 years- 4,8%. Among these, 55,9% have connections with the Province of Parma (such as, for example: birthplace, connections for work or study reasons), while 44,1% have no direct connection

with this area. In the distribution of the questionnaire, we tried to maintain a balance according to this criterion so as not to have subjective answers because the inhabitants of the city have a deeper knowledge of the aspects checked during research.

Image and Brand Identity

The first question of the questionnaire had as its main objective to check the perception of the visitors and of the inhabitants of the city towards the fundamental elements that represent the identity brand of this area. The main hypothesis was that Parma has a strong territorial identity built around the concept of gastronomy and the results of the questionnaire come to confirm this.

For the question: “What do you think of when you hear the name Parma?”, the respondents indicated: “Prosciutto” (Prosciutto di Parma) - 38,6%, “Parmigiano” (Parmigiano Reggiano) – 15,8 %, “food + gastronomy + gastronomic riches + eating”- 13,7%. Overall, 68,1% of those who filled in the questionnaire identified Parma with elements that belong to gastronomy. In addition to these, there are also the answers of two respondents who identify Parma with Barilla, a well-known industrial business from the food industry that produces various types of pasta and breadstuffs.

Designated Italian City of Culture in 2020 (+2021 – another year was designated to it because of the pandemic that prevented the normal development of the activities scheduled for 2020), however, Parma is also connected to other aspects, such as those related to culture: city of arts, the place of origin of the composer Giuseppe Verdi, capital of lyrical music or the city in which the famous Monastery from Stendhal’s novel is situated. In addition to the options mentioned, that represent 14,4% of the total answers given by the respondents, there are 4% for which Parma identifies with its university, one of the oldest in Europe.

The city that today can compete with the most important European cities owes many of its architectural jewels to the noble print of Maria Luigia of Austria, duchess of Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla and wife of the emperor Napoleon. Her favourite flowers, the violets of Parma, were also mentioned by 2,7% of the participants in the inquiry.

For a quite high percentage, 9,6%, Parma means their birthplace or “home”, this result having a highly emotional significance.

Foodstuffs from Parma

The food style is influenced by the environment in which people live, by the social interactions they have, by their religion, their culture, their genetic inheritance, the time dedicated to cooking and eating the food, as well as by the conditions in which they carry out their activity (Nistoreanu et al., 2019).

Regarding the cuisine of Parma, Giovanni Ballarini thinks that this originated from the overlapping of three types of cuisine that represent a real social triad: the folk cuisine (from the rural and urban areas), the bourgeois cuisine and the upperclass cuisine, that over time contributed with various elements to the birth of the local gastronomic system, after a complex process “that must be interpreted among the phenomena of food syncretism” (Ballarini, 2007 b, pp. 406-407).

According to the same author, “the current culinary and gastronomic style of Parma defines and consolidates itself between the second half of the XIXth century and the first half of the XXth century”, with important consequences up to the present (Ballarini, 2020, pp. 168).

The question from the questionnaire, “What foodstuffs typical of Parma do you know?”, was formulated starting from the hypothesis that the food products from this area are very well known by the consumers, especially because of the fact that the names of many of them, registered geographical denominations, make reference to the area of origin (Parma, Felino, Zibello). The open-ended question allowed for the mentioning of more known products, the results being as follows: 77,2% mentioned Prosciutto di Parma (aged ham from salted pork legs), 66,8% Parmigiano Reggiano (aged hard cheese from cow’s milk, salt, curd), Culatello di Zibello – 17,2% (a pear shaped charcuterie product, obtained from pork – from the interior muscle of the hind thigh, seasoned with salt, pepper and garlic, followed by curing), Salame di Felino – 14,4% (dried and aged salami, obtained from minced pork, seasoned with pepper, garlic, wine). Besides these, the general term of charcuterie was mentioned by 11,03%, which can include all types of salami as well as prosciutto. Among the meat specialities, the following were mentioned: Coppa di Parma – 4,1% (a product obtained from a piece of pork taken from the neck, salted, then put into natural cow casing, tied with hemp and going through a curing phase), Strolghino – 6,2% (made of high quality minced pork, remained after the preparation of culatello and prosciutto), spalla cotta – 4,1% (obtained from the pig’s shoulder), culatta/culaccia – 2,7% (is similar as shape to culatello and is obtained from the same type of meat, with the difference that the exterior rind is kept, the product becoming sweeter). A local product typical of Parma is horsemeat, mentioned in 2,7% of the answers, which is eaten raw ground and seasoned, as well as cooked.

Other products mentioned by the respondents are: tomatoes (the area of Parma is famous in Italy for its sauces), pasta – 2,7%, the fresh stuffed pasta: tortelli – 6,8% and anolini – 6,2%. As an appetizer from leaven and fried dough, torta fritta (salted dumplings) was mentioned in 4,8% of the answers. The local wines, among which the most famous is Lambrusco, appeared in 4,8% of the answers.

What is interesting is that the local industrial brands are so much integrated in the collective mind that are enumerated together with other traditional products. For example, 5 of the respondents mention Pasta Barilla, while 2 of them the Parmalat products.

Only two of the respondents did not know anything to indicate.

From the overall received answers, it generally results that the foodstuffs from the area of Parma enjoy great fame all around Italy, a proof being the high percentages of answers received for the two champion products: Prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano Reggiano.

4.3. Foodstuffs from the region of Parma registered at a European level as PDO, PGI

The first steps registered at a European level towards protecting quality agri-food products began in 1988 with the signing of “The Green Book for the Future of the Rural World”. Since then, several sets of regulations have been enacted, the last one from the field of quality agri-food products being Regulation no. 1151/2012, which replaces EC Reg. 510/2006 and EC Reg. 509/2006.

For wines, EU Reg. 1308/2013 applies, for flavoured wines EU Reg. 281/2014, and for alcoholic drinks Annex III of EC Reg. 110/2008, together with EU Reg. 787/2019.

Another category of products are the organic ones, regulated through EU Regulation no. 834/2007 for foodstuffs, and organic wine through EU Regulation no.203/2012.

At a EU level, the indication “mountain product” (optional) also applies, provisioned by article no. 31 of the EU Regulation 1151/2012 and the EU Regulation 665/2014.

In the Emilia-Romagna region, to which the Province of Parma belongs, 44 agri-food products are registered at a European level, to which wines, 24 in number, are to be added (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2021). Of all these, some are solely specific to the Province of Parma, while others can be produced in other neighbouring provinces and regions, the production area being mentioned in the specifications of each: Culatello di Zibello PDO, Parmigiano Reggiano PDO, Prosciutto di Parma PDO, Coppa di Parma PGI, Fungo di Borgotaro PGI, Mortadella di Bologna PGI, Salame Felino PGI. In addition, there are also Colli di Parma wines PDO.

The open-ended question type, “Do you know foodstuffs from the region of Parma registered as PDO, PGI, TSG? In case of an affirmative answer, enumerate them”, led to the following results: Parmigiano Reggiano - 53,10%, Prosciutto di Parma - 41,3%, Culatello - 14,48%, Salame di Felino - 13,10%, Coppa di Parma - 5,51%, Fungo di Borgotaro - 2,06%.

Unfortunately, 31,03% did not mention any products, 51% of them having no connection with Parma.

Taking into account the fact that at the previous question that regarded checking the level of popularity of the foodstuffs of Parma, the respondents indicated, in decreasing order, Prosciutto di Parma (77,2%), Parmigiano Reggiano (66,8%), Culatello di Zibello (17,2%), Salame di Felino (14,4 %), which are all products registered at a European level as PDO or PGI, it results that the products themselves enjoy a reputation among the consumers but it is not well-known that they are certified products registered at a European level. For this, a subsequent promotion and an awareness action would be necessary, especially outside the area of Parma.

In the book “Descrizione storico-critica dell’Italia”, published in 1781 in London, regarding Parma, there is reference to a type of cheese known in the entire Europe under the name of Parmigiano, which had actually been considered superior to all cheeses since 1484 (Presciutto Botti, 1953, 37).

Culinary critics and historians state that Prosciutto has been appreciated ever since the Roman era and exported from Parma towards Rome, together with other types of salami, ever since those times (Gonizzi and Giovati, 2011; Villa and Gonizzi, 2015). The first gastronomic references about this product appear, however, in the first half of the XIIIth century, in the book *Libro de Cucina*, being cited later, in the second half of the XVIIth century, together with Salame di Felino, in the book of Carlo Nascia, a chef at the court of the duke Ranuccio II Farnese, entitled *Li Quattro Banchetti*. (Gonizzi and Giovati, 2011, pp. 10). The first certain documentation that makes a reference to *Culatello* dates from 1764, that is the reference made by Moreau de Saint-Méry, who said that the name of Culatello is reserved

for the valuable meat from the thigh of the pig that is entirely put in the casing (Ballarini, 2007c, pp. 111).

*Types of Dishes, Desserts, and Wines from Parma
Specialties from Parma*

The purpose of the next three questions in the questionnaire was that of checking the level of knowledge of the food specialties, of various types of dessert and local wines.

Moreover, the resulted classification in descending order of the number of references, from the most famous to the least known elements, renders a current picture of the gastronomy of Parma. Starting from these findings, the operators in this field can make decisions towards the improvement of proposals in a local menu, with the purpose of confirming the existing offer or of adding new proposals.

A dish on the first place in the order of preferences (46,8%) is *tortelli*, square stuffed pasta, made of eggs and flour dough and stuffed with cheese and spinach, pumpkin, potato, or other stuffings. After this, with 30,33% of answers, there is another type of stuffed pasta, round and as big as a coin, which in Parma are called *anolini* and in the neighbouring localities *cappelletti*. These are also made of egg and flour dough, are stuffed with meat and Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, and are served in soup.

The *anolini* stuffed pasta are considered a symbol of the noble cuisine of Parma, being “imported” from Rome thanks to the Farnese family, in the XVIth century (Razzetti, 1990, 79). The oldest recipe that has lasted till today is the one from 1570, introduced by Bartolomeo Scappi, the secret chef of Pio V, in the recipe book “Arte del cucinare”. Over the years, the original recipe, the production method, and the shape have undergone several changes.

A limited number of respondents indicated *risotto* (2,7%), a dish based on rice that is not necessarily typical of Parma and which can be cooked in various combinations.

For appetizers, a significant number of references (26,2%) was held by *torta fritta* (also called *gnocco fritto* in the neighbouring areas of Parma), little dumplings made of dough, salted, fried in lard, that are eaten warm, with cream cheese and salami, accompanied by a sparkling wine.

The best-known dish for the second course is *rosa di Parma* (11,7%), a stuffed fillet of beef, stuffed with Parmigiano Reggiano and Prosciutto di Parma, the most famous products from Parma, seasoned and sprinkled with Lambrusco wine.

As second course, a product typical of Parma stands out, and that is horsemeat (9,6%), which can be eaten as *Cavallo pesto (caval pist)*: raw minced, as tartar, seasoned with spices and mixed with yolk. Horse meat was also mentioned as “vecchia” specialty (3,4%): minced horse meat, cooked with vegetables, potatoes, and sauce.

Another specialty typical of Parma is “*bomba di riso*” (3,4%), that looks like a small stack of rice seasoned with cheese and egg, with a pigeon with its giblets in the middle of it, cooked with tomato sauce and wine. The same number of mentions was gathered by *trippa alla parmigiana*, a stew with tomato sauce and strips of veal tripe.

The oven roast with meat from the breast of the veal, *punta al forno*, was mentioned by 5,5% of the respondents.

There were also wrong answers, meaning that 7,5% of the answers indicated *melanzane alla parmigiana* as local specialty, starting from a terminological confusion. Actually, this type of dish similar to moussaka, made up of eggplants fried in oil or on the grill, arranged in layers in a baking pan with mozzarella, Parmigiano Reggiano and tomato sauce, is typical of Campania or Sicily.

From the processed data, it results that stuffed pasta (*tortelli, anolini*), that are served as first course, as well as the salted dumplings as appetizer (*torta fritta*) enjoy more popularity than the specialties for the second course and are better-known among the consumers.

Unfortunately, 26% of those who filled in the questionnaire did not know to mention any type of food specific to Parma. Among these, most of them (78,9%) have no direct connection with Parma.

Desserts from Parma

When it comes to sweets, according to the results of the inquiry carried out through the questionnaire, the best-known local dessert is *torta duchessa* (14,4%), dedicated to Maria Luigia, Napoleon's last wife, duchess of Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla. This cake has a hazelnut-based crust, is filled with zabaione cream (yolks whipped with sugar and Marsala liquor) and covered in chocolate ganache. Chocolate cream tufts with a candied cherry on top are specific as ornaments.

A dessert typical of the winter period is *spongata*, more precisely *Spongata di Corniglio*, mentioned in 11,03% of the answers. It is a dessert with ancient origins made of a soft dough that becomes crunchy through baking, filled with no less than 15 ingredients: honey, raisins, walnuts, cinnamon, sweet wine, candied fruits, etc.

Then there is *sbrisolona* (8,2%), a dry cake typical of a neighbouring area (Mantova), obtained from a mixture of wheat flour, almond flour, corn flour, eggs, whole almonds. *Torta Susanna*, a cake with ricotta cheese cream filling put in a baking pan spread with tender dough and covered with chocolate ganache, gathered 6,89% of the respondents' reckoning, and *tortelli dolci* (cookies made of tender dough filled with jam or chocolate) 6,2% of the responses. When it comes to biscuits and cookies, *Le scarpette di Sant'Ilario* (The little shoes of Saint Ilario, the protector of Parma) were mentioned in 3,4% of the answers, even if they are cooked just on the Saint's Day, on January 13. Other answers included a dessert based on chestnut flour, *castagnaccio* (2,06%).

However, the answers received do not show a strong orientation towards a certain dessert that could be considered representative by a significant percentage of respondents. This result, in conjunction with the fact that 52,4% of the participants (of which 68,4% have no connections with Parma) did not know to give any answer, indicates that desserts are

insufficiently known or that they are not as representative for Parma as the elements enumerated at the beginning of the questionnaire as characteristic foodstuffs.

Wines

Regarding the wines that accompany the dishes on the tables of Parma, the answers concentrated, in descending order, as follows: Lambrusco - 44,82%, Malvasia - 28,27%, Bonarda and Fontana, each with 3,44%, Barbera - 2,75%, Gutturnio - 2,06%.

This time as well, a high percentage (42,75%) did not know to indicate any local wine. Therefore, the hypothesis initially launched, according to which the types of food, the desserts, and wines specific of Parma would be very well-known by the consumers, was not confirmed after the processing of the answers received.

4.5. Ingredients and foodstuffs from Parma in the menus of restaurants from Parma and Italy

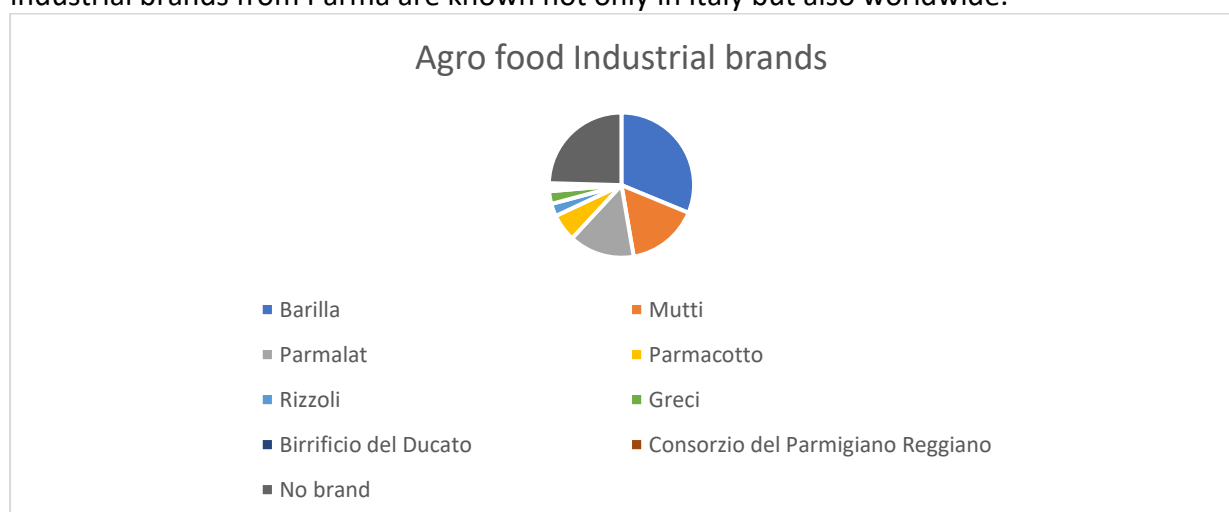
As restaurants represent the main channels through which the foodstuffs are spread, in a natural state or incorporated in certain specialties, we developed the next series of questions with the purpose of checking the level of familiarity with the foodstuffs of Parma in the menus of the restaurants from Parma and Italy.

For the first question, “Have you ever been in a restaurant with cuisine from Parma?”, 64,1% of the respondents answered affirmatively, while the rest – 35,9%, negatively.

For the second question, “Did you identify among the menus of the restaurants from the Province of Parma, local foodstuffs, ingredients, or dishes?”, the affirmative answers were in a majority percentage of 72,7%. Very high (81,4%) is also the percentage of positive answers to the same question regarding the entire Italian territory (“Did you identify foodstuffs, ingredients or dishes from Parma in the restaurants from other Italian regions?”). It thus results that restaurants are a good channel to sell the foodstuffs from Parma and that these are signalled correctly in the menus and recognised as such by the consumers.

Brands from the Local Food Industry

In writing the last question of the questionnaire, we started from the hypothesis that the industrial brands from Parma are known not only in Italy but also worldwide.



As it can be seen from the above graphic, the most known industrial brand from the food field from Parma is Barilla – worldwide leader (45,5%), followed by Mutti (23,4%), Parmalat

(21,3%), Parmacotto (8.9%), Rizzoli- there are two companies of fish processing Delicium Rizzoli and Rizzoli Emanuelli (4,1%), Greci (4,1%), Birrificio Del Ducato (1,3%), Consorzio Parmigiano Reggiano (1,3%).

Of the total number of those who filled in the questionnaire, 35,8% did not mention any industrial food brand, 82% of these having no connection with Parma.

Conclusions

The great number of people that identify Parma with elements that belong to the gastronomic area represents a practical indicator that this Italian province has a strong identity brand, developed around the food industry. In addition, an excellent knowledge of the main local foodstuffs, representative at a national and international level for the entire area, has been emphasised. Thus, the names of the products have a great contribution, as they are geographical indications, without the respondents necessarily knowing that these are registered and protected at a European level. The answers provided also indicated the fact that in the menus of the restaurants in Parma and from other regions of the country there are products, ingredients, or dishes typical of Parma which are recognised and indicated as such. The names of the main industrial brands of foodstuffs are also very popular among respondents.

However, some elements typical of the gastronomy of Parma still remain less known to the potential consumers. That is, dishes of the the main courses, of which just fresh stuffed pasta enjoy notoriety, and the desserts of this area, of which none particularly stands out, perhaps just *Torta Duchessa*, that reminds of Maria Luigia, Napoleon's last wife, Duchess of Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla. Neither the wines are sufficiently well-known, a better promotion of the entire set of local products being necessary, which should include, besides food, also wines.

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