

A Survey on the Perception of Foods of the Russian Speaking Communities in Italy

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Food has been recognised as an effective way of cultural interchange, and a key factor for the development of new uses and products for both the host places and the migrant communities. In this respect, traditional foods are presently viewed as an opportunity for both consumers and SMEs. Traditional foods become ethnic foods outside the places of origin, and these two concepts belongs to different perception levels. Russian speaking migrants (Ukrainians, Moldavians, Russians) represent one of the more numerically relevant and faster growing communities in Italy. They recently started to develop spontaneous commerce of several goods, among which food occupies an important place. Their migration flux is however relatively recent, compared to other communities, and their foods habits are still almost unknown to Italians.

Aim of the research. A survey was started in Italy, aimed at improving mutual food knowledge, and investigate how this could contribute in opening new production opportunities. The research included: a) a comparative descriptive survey in Italian and Ukrainian cities; b) an Ukrainian/Moldavian focus group (16 attendants) in Bologna, aimed at the individuation of the importance of numerous plant foods and their tradition; c) a questionnaire survey addressed to Italians aimed at monitoring general information, perception of specific foods and neophobia level. Point c) and b) represent the subject of this contribution.



Methods - Two different structured questionnaires were submitted in Bologna at the Russian speaking immigrants in Italy and at the Italians.

The first questionnaire allowed the individuation of sixteen motivated people, with which the basic information retrieved was discussed in three focus group sessions.

The Italian questionnaire consisted of an introductory part and three sections of questions (a, b, c):

Introductory part - Request of general individual information (age, sex, scholar level, profession; travels to Ukraine, Russia, Moldavia and Belarus)

a. General neophobia test (1-5 scale for each statement. Score range: 10-50)

- a1. I frequently try new foods
- a2. I do not trust new foods
- a3. If I do not know what a food is, I will not try it
- a4. I like foods from different countries
- a5. Ethnic foods look too strange
- a6. I try new foods at dinner parties
- a7. I am afraid to eat things never tried before
- a8. I am very particular about food I will eat
- a9. I eat almost everything
- a10. I like to try new ethnic restaurants

b. Information / awareness, with seven questions (possible answers no / yes; do not know for b4, b6, b7; scores: yes=2; do not know=1; no=0. Score range 0-7).

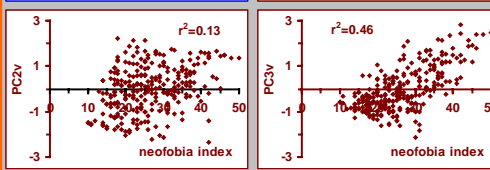
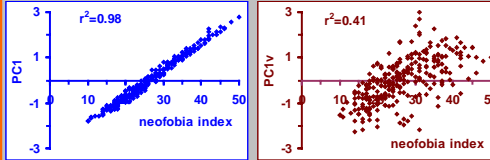
- b1. Are you aware of the presence of Russian-speaking immigrants?
- b2. Are you aware of the presence of small ethnic markets of these communities?
- b3. Did you ever visit these markets?
- b4. Are you interested in them / in visiting them?
- b5. Do you know traditional foods of the Russian-speaking immigrants?
- b6. If "yes", are you interested in introducing them in your diet?
- b7. If "no", are you interested in knowing and trying them?

c. Specific interest for representative foods (scores: yes=2; do not know=1; no=0. Score range 0-20). Ten traditional dishes were synthetically described:

- borsch
- pirashki
- vareniki
- ponchyki
- pampushki
- kalvā
- kasha
- siemacki
- bliinii
- kvass

b. Structure of neophobia index among the Italians

PC1 represents a general factor, correlated with all the neophobia items, almost exactly reproducing information contained in the neophobia index (not rescaled). The varimax rotated principal components (PCsv) split the information contained in PC1 in two components: in fact, PC1v and PC3v are respectively



related to the positive (reversed items) and negative (not reversed items) attitudes to food, and explain almost the same variance amount; PC2v is itemed to the two generic items of food attitude (a8 and a9). Rotated PCsv had individually slight correlation to the neophobia index, but represented it very well in a multiple regression ($R^2=0.99$).

c. Interest on traditional dishes and sample Italian population structure

Gender: differences only in the case of kasha and ponchyki, with female more interested.

Age: low interest in vareniki of the over 65 year-old class; higher interest of young people in pirozhki and kvass.

Education: lower interest of primary level for all the dishes, except ponchyki.

Visit to eastern countries: affects most unusual foods (borsch, pampuski, kalvā).

neophobia: ponchyki are appealing also to neophobic people.

Visits to eastern countries	borsch	vareniki	pampuski	kasha	blinii	pirozhki	ponchyki	kalvā	siemacki	kvass
yes	52.8	69.4	63.9	55.6	63.9	72.2	75.0	44.4	52.8	47.2
do not know	19.4	2.8	11.1	19.4	8.3	8.3	5.6	22.2	8.3	22.2
not interested	27.8	27.8	25.0	25.0	27.8	19.4	19.4	33.3	38.9	30.6
no	34.0	68.0	38.1	59.1	51.8	65.2	64.8	36.8	45.7	31.6
do not know	11.7	7.3	13.4	12.1	13.8	9.3	12.1	15.4	15.8	15.8
not interested	54.3	24.7	48.6	28.7	34.4	25.5	23.1	47.8	38.5	52.6
	8.8*	1.1 ns	9.0*	1.5 ns	2.0 ns	0.7 ns	1.9 ns	2.8 ns	1.5 ns	6.1*
Neophobia	borsch	vareniki	pampuski	kasha	blinii	pirozhki	ponchyki	kalvā	siemacki	kvass
not neophobic	71.7	87.0	52.2	76.1	78.3	87.0	71.7	56.5	63.0	47.8
interested	10.9	4.3	13.0	15.2	4.3	4.3	15.2	21.7	10.9	17.4
do not know	17.4	8.7	34.8	8.7	17.4	8.7	13.0	21.7	26.1	34.8
not interested	17.4	8.7	34.8	8.7	17.4	8.7	13.0	21.7	26.1	34.8
medium	32.8	69.9	42.6	56.3	53.0	66.7	64.5	37.7	47.0	35.0
interested	15.8	6.6	14.8	13.1	13.7	9.8	10.9	15.8	16.4	19.1
do not know	51.4	23.5	42.6	30.6	33.3	23.5	24.6	46.4	36.6	45.9
not interested	51.4	23.5	42.6	30.6	33.3	23.5	24.6	46.4	36.6	45.9
neofobic	18.5	46.3	27.8	51.9	33.3	46.3	66.7	24.1	31.5	16.7
interested	3.7	9.3	7.4	11.1	18.5	11.1	9.3	11.1	13.0	7.4
do not know	77.8	44.4	64.8	37.0	48.1	42.6	24.1	64.8	55.6	75.9
not interested	77.8	44.4	64.8	37.0	48.1	42.6	24.1	64.8	55.6	75.9
	44.0**	20.3**	11.4*	11.4*	20.4**	19.6**	3.4 ns	18.7**	12.3*	21.0**



Results. a. Summary of answers of the Italian questionnaire

Structure of the Italian respondents to the questionnaire and values of the information, interest and neophobia indices. Range 0-100 (rescaled).

	number	neofobia	indices awareness	interest
Gender				
male	129	40.7±22.0	42.5±20.5	55.4±30.8
female	154	42.5±20.5	39.6±18.6	58.7±28.4
Significance		ns	ns	ns
Age				
20-35	92	35.4±19.3 b	40.3±18.3	62.8±25.2
36-45	111	39.8±21.1 b	40.9±19.2	55.5±32.2
46-65	64	41.9±19.2 b	43.9±21.6	55.6±31.1
>65	16	66.3±16.9 a	31.9±17.2	42.8±20.1
Significance		**	ns	ns
Education				
primary	64	56.1±19.9 a	30.7±21.1 b	38.8±25.2 a
secondary	113	39.6±19.5 b	42.1±18.7 a	59.0±16.2 b
university	106	31.7±17.5 c	45.8±17.0 a	66.3±30.5 b
Significance		**	**	**
Visits to eastern countries				
yes	36	33.1±17.9 b	54.3±17.6 a	66.1±32.5 a
no	247	41.4±21.1 a	39.0±19.0 b	55.9±28.9 b
Significance		*	**	*

• neophobia slightly increased with age, with significantly higher values in the over 65 class. neophobia also progressively and significantly decreased with education level, and was lower in people who visited the eastern countries.

• The awareness of eastern European migrant activities was lower in people with only primary education and higher in people who visited the eastern countries.

• The specific interest index had similar pattern with respect to the effect of visits to eastern countries, and was significantly lower in the less educated people.

Results - The Russian Speaking focus group

• **Bread** is the subject of the most relevant dietary changes in Italy; the richness of Ukrainian and Russian types cannot be found; rye and buckwheat are considered as or more important than wheat

• **Vegetables:** celeriac, root parsley and kohlrabi are considered important and almost absent in Italy; generally, highly perishable vegetables are less known; quality differences related to higher variability in potatoes, and stage at harvest of zucchini and cucumbers are reported; Florence fennel and artichoke are almost unknown.

• **Condiment plants and spices** are well known and appreciated; parsley, coriander, mustard, horseradish, hot pepper, bay leaves and particularly dill are rated among the more important; dill is considered hardly obtainable in Italy fresh, dried or in sauces.

• **Home medicine:** ample knowledge still widespread; species more known: rose, camomile, linden, marigold, hawthorn, dandelion.

• **"Minor" fruits** (raspberries, currants, gooseberry, cornelian cherry, chokeberry, pomegranates) are considered almost as important as major fruits, and almost unavailable in Italy, or available as specialties, at high prices; some of them are not present on the Italian market (Viburnum, sloe, sea buckthorn).



Conclusions

• The food tradition of Russian speaking communities can actively stimulate the development of new interests and products in Italy and in the countries of origin, offering the opportunity of differentiation of small-scale agriculture, processing and trade either in Italy and in Eastern European countries;

• In the Italian population information is important for the appreciation of new food habits, and mainly depends on education and age.

This work represents part of BaseFood project.



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