

THE SAXON VILLAGE PRESERVES JOURNEY TO TERRE MADRE 2006

In October 2004, HRH The Prince of Wales was the keynote speaker at Terre Madre. His staff called us from Turin to say that the ADEPT Foundation really should make contact with Slow Food. Although we had heard of Slow Food, our knowledge was limited so I decided to join my local convivium to find out more. By chance I attended the inaugural meeting of Slow Food Oxfordshire in December 2004 where we were all asked to introduce ourselves, to explain our interests in joining and what activities we wanted to see for 2005. At this meeting I was asked to organise a food tour to Transylvania.

In January 2005 we visited Bra to learn more about Slow Food and to explain the objectives of ADEPT. We were lucky to have dinner with Paolo Di Croce and lunch with Carlo Petrini, President of Slow Food.

Through Slow Food Oxon I met food writer Geraldine Holt and she introduced me to Philippa Davenport, food writer for the Financial Times who visited Transylvania in May and her article published in late June generated world wide interest in the area. Gerladine also introduced me to Rosemary Barron who was visiting lecturer on food tourism at the Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management Department of Oxford Brookes University.

We invited Slow Food to visit Transylvania and in June were privileged to host Piero Sardo, President of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity and Lilia Smelkova who was responsible for Slow Food in Eastern Europe. She had encountered problems getting a food community from Romania to attend Terre Madre in 2004, and was pleased to make contact with a more proactive group. We looked at ten categories of food products, including pork, cheese etc but decided on the high fruit / low sugar jams as our symbolic product (relatively safe) to promote at Terre Madre 2006, but all products were written up to be included in the Ark of Taste. We had missed the 2005 jam making season, but Slow Food promised help in 2006 with production and marketing. During this visit Slow Food Sighisoara was formally established, the first convivium in Romania.

Ten members from Slow Food Oxon including Geraldine and Rosemary and two from Bristol including Kate Hawkins and Susie Smith, visited Transylvania in September 2005. The first two nights were in a hotel in the medieval walled citadel of Sighisoara and included attending the inaugural dinner of Slow Food Sighisoara. Then the tour group had two nights village B&B in Viscri, a World Heritage site. The group visited the jam producers, saw sheep being hand milked and then sampled the fresh cheese. They saw traditional bread making, visited local markets and drank local wines and home distilled schnapps. The final night was in a Bucharest hotel with a quick tour of the city followed by wine tasting and a range of local dishes in one of the top restaurants. In December we held a Slow Food evening at Oxford Brookes University to allow those not on the food tour to taste some of the food, wine and schnapps.

In February 2006 we ran the first course on elementary food hygiene (internationally recognised certificates are issued from the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health) and the participants became the founders of Saxon Village Preserves, our jam producer group.

We became a Presidium and offered a stand at Salone del Gusto, six producers would also be invited and Slow Food agreed to pay for 1,000 jars of jam to be shipped and to buy any not sold. A photographer was sent prepare a brochure for the presidium.

In early June, Serena Milano, Manuela Fissore and a SF fruit specialist visited Transylvania. Together with Maria Berza of Pro Patrimonio, and Gill Taylor and Sally Turnbull of ADEPT, over twenty types of jam were tasted to determine the best types and to identify the producers of the best types to be launched at Salone del Gusto. Three weeks later ADEPT hosted Carlo Petrini on a whirlwind visit when he met producers, tasted foods, met the Minister of Agriculture and held numerous press conferences.

All we had to do now was produce the jam. At first the ladies were reluctant, not believing that anyone would want to buy their jam - everybody produced their own jam! Jars had to be imported as suitably sized ones were not available locally - despite there being a glass factory nearby. Inevitably they became stuck in Customs when the haulage company mispresented the documentation. Instead of a 3-5 day transit, it was six weeks before they arrived and too late for the early wild fruits.

The presidium stand at Salone del Gusto was a huge success. The six producers and one chef who attended were over whelmed by the highly favourable reaction to their range of jams (apple and cinnamon, rose hip, rhubarb, and a selection of wild fruits). They returned home highly motivated and committed to produce larger quantities for sale in 2007.

Some of our jam producers were also recognised as a community of organic milk, cheese and bread producers and attended Terra Madre.

A blind jam tasting in the Scottish Borders resulted in the Saxon blackberry jam winning over some top brands in terms of flavour.

Eighteen from Saschiz Commune have since completed the 17 module training course run by ADEPT on agro tourism skills which included the RSPH food hygiene course. A dinner was held in Sighisoara on 29 November to celebrate the end of this course and brought together existing and new Presidium members. Experiences from Turin were exchanged and some food samples collected from other Presidia were tasted. The training courses will be run again in 2007.

Further food tours are planned for 2007 specifically for members of Slow Food UK. This will help to support the Presidium with the transfer of ideas, promote the area and help develop their fledgling agro-tourism industry by staying in their B&B accommodation and by spending some time (and money) in their area.

See www.fundatia-adept.org for further information or email info@fundatia-adept.org to contact the Presidium coordinators (Cristi Gherghiceanu or Jim Turnbull).