

Lived Experiences of Local Food Artisans in Preserving Traditional Gastronomy for Food Tourism Development in Sarrat, Ilocos Norte

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ABSTRACT

Food tourism serves as an important tool for cultural identity preservation and regional destination promotion. However, rapid shifts in youth lifestyles, commercial homogenization, and economic pressures threaten the survival of traditional gastronomy. This study investigated and documented the lived experiences and perceptions of local food artisans regarding the preservation of traditional gastronomy for food tourism development in Sarrat, Ilocos Norte. The study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design based on Colaizzi's seven-step analysis. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews (lasting 45–65 minutes) and virtual kitchen observations were conducted with eight (N = 8) key local food artisans—including tupig makers, heritage cooks, and legacy bakers—with at least 10 years of culinary experience. Data analysis revealed five major thematic clusters: (1) Traditional Daily Rhythms and Authentic Preparation Practices; (2) Emotional Fulfillment, Familial Pride, and Identity in Heritage Cooking; (3) Generational Transmission Challenges, Higher Education, and Youth Disinterest; (4) Tourism Demands, Economic Inflation, and Uncompromising Quality; and (5) Fear of Cultural Extinction and Aspirations for LGU Institutional Support. The results indicate that youth disengagement from traditional cooking methods and supply chain bottlenecks heavily impact the sustainability of Sarrat's intangible gastronomic heritage, even as local artisans maintain high devotion to culinary authenticity despite slim profit margins. The study underscores policy implications highlighting the need for formal LGU youth apprenticeships, raw material agricultural subsidies, and dedicated cultural vending spaces to safeguard local foodways for future generations.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Gastronomic Tourism, Local Food Artisans, Phenomenological Study, and Sarrat Ilocos Norte

INTRODUCTION

Food tourism plays a critical role in destination marketing and cultural preservation within domestic and global tourism landscapes. Traditional and native foods are central to Philippine heritage, fostering community cohesion, supporting tourism development, and sustaining cultural identity (Fernandez, 2019). In Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, traditional culinary offerings—most notably tupig, sapin-sapin, rice puto, nilapet, and patupat—represent enduring symbols of regional identity passed down through generations (Etrata, 2021). However, these traditional foodways face risks of decline due to commercial homogenization, rapid industrialization, and changing socio-economic aspirations among younger generations (Abaño et al., 2021; Alejandro et al., 2022).

While Ilocano cuisine receives broad public appreciation, local home-based producers, traditional cooks, and food artisans remain underrepresented in hospitality and tourism literature, revealing a distinct Population Gap (Etrata, 2021). Furthermore, a knowledge Gap exists regarding the place-based mechanisms through which traditional culinary knowledge is transmitted and the specific operational hurdles these cultural anchors encounter (Sta. Maria-Abalos, 2021). This is compounded by a Practical Conflict Gap, wherein food artisans must balance historical preparation methods with the operational pressures of modern tourism, creating a friction between cultural authenticity and commercial viability (Cruz & Roldan, 2024; Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2022). Finally, a Methodological Gap persists as existing regional scholarship leans

heavily toward quantitative surveys, with few qualitative inquiries exploring the nuanced lived experiences of local artisans (Etrata, 2021).

Without qualitative documentation, Sarrat's traditional foodways risk fading from institutional memory. To address these scholarly gaps, this study explores and documents the lived experiences and subjective perceptions of local food artisans regarding traditional gastronomic preservation and food tourism development in Sarrat, Ilocos Norte.

Research Questions

Primary Question:

What are the lived experiences of local food artisans in preserving traditional gastronomy for food tourism development in Sarrat, Ilocos Norte?

Specific Sub-Questions:

1. What narratives describe the experiences of local food artisans in maintaining traditional food preparation practices in Sarrat?
2. What generational and knowledge transmission challenges do artisans face in preserving heirloom recipes based on their narratives?
3. What operational and economic conflicts do artisans experience when balancing traditional culinary methods with tourism demands?
4. What deep-seated cultural realities of these food artisans are uncovered through their narratives?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences without statistical intervention. To maintain analytical objectivity, the researcher practiced *epoche* (bracketing) by self-reflecting and intentionally setting aside prior professional assumptions in hospitality management, allowing the findings to emerge directly from the participants' transcribed accounts.

Participant Selection & Data Saturation

Eight (N = 8) key local food artisans from Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Eligibility criteria required participants to have a minimum of 10 years of continuous practice in heirloom *kakanin* production, legacy baking, or traditional Ilocano heritage cooking. Sample size adequacy was guided by data saturation. Data collection continued until the 8th interview, at which point no new information, thematic variations, or novel codes emerged during analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were gathered via semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted either digitally or by phone, depending on participant availability. Interviews lasted between 45 and 65 minutes and were conducted in Ilokano and Tagalog to allow participants to express their experiences naturally. Interviews were supplemented by digital video tours and photographs of kitchen setups to contextualize traditional equipment usage. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Audio transcriptions in Ilokano/Tagalog were translated into English and cross-verified by a bilingual academic peer to ensure conceptual and cultural fidelity.

Data Analysis & Audit Trail

Transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological framework:

1. Reading all participant transcripts multiple times to gain a holistic overview.
2. Extracting significant statements directly relevant to traditional gastronomy preservation.
3. Formulating meanings from each significant statement while maintaining context.
4. Clustering formulated meanings into sub-themes and overarching thematic clusters.
5. Writing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon incorporating all identified themes.
6. Distilling the exhaustive description into a concise statement of the fundamental structure of the lived experience.
7. Conducting member checking by returning thematic summaries to selected participants to validate analytical accuracy.

Trustworthiness & Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness was established following Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria: credibility was maintained through member checking and researcher bracketing (epoche); transferability was supported via thick description of the research setting and artisan profiles; and dependability and confirmability were ensured through an audit trail linking raw quotes to final themes. Ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection. All participants provided informed verbal or digital consent. Direct personal identifiers were removed, and numerical codenames (Participant 1 to Participant 8) were assigned to protect anonymity. Data files are stored on password-protected cloud drives accessible only to the lead researcher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Profile Matrix

Identifier	Age & Gender	Barangay in Sarat	Culinary Specialty	Years of Experience	Interview Medium
Participant 1	59, Female	Brgy. 22, San Cristobal	Tupig, Sapin-Sapin, Linapet, Patupat, Pinakbet	45	Digital / Form
Participant 2	45, Male	Brgy. 24, San Roque	Tupig	10	Phone Call
Participant 3	42, Female	Brgy. 9	Tupig	10	Digital / Form
Participant 4	32, Female	Brgy. 6, San Leandro	Tupig	10	Phone Call
Participant 5	46, Female	Brgy. 6, San Leandro	Tupig	10	Digital / Form
Participant 6	34, Female	Brgy. 19, Sto. Tomas	Tupig, Sapin-Sapin	10	Phone Call
Participant 7	56, Female	Brgy. 5, San Vicente	Tupig, Sapin-Sapin, Puto	40	Phone Call
Participant 8	52, Female	Brgy. 6, San Leandro	Tupig, Sapin-Sapin, Puto	35	Phone Call

Table 1: Participant Demographic and Operational Profile Colaizzi's Method Audit Trail

Extract / Significant Statement (Ilokano/Tagalog)	Formulated Meaning	Theme Cluster
"Panag riing iti nasapa tapno agidasar... panag pespes ti niyog, panag singlag, panag punas ti bulong, panag bungon, ken panag luto..." (P1)	Artisans undergo early-morning manual labor routines that follow strict sequential steps necessary for authentic output.	Theme 1: Traditional Daily Rhythms & Authentic Preparation Practices
"Naaramid nga karraang para ti tupig, dalikan met iti pagkiwaran... Agbaliw ti raman na nu mailuto ti gasul." (P7)	Ancestral fuel and tools (clay stoves, charcoal) are viewed as essential flavor components that modern gas stoves cannot replicate.	Theme 1: Traditional Daily Rhythms & Authentic Preparation Practices
"Naragsak latta uray narigat... isu ti nangalak ti panagpaadal kadagiti annak ko." (P7)	Physical labor and financial hardship are offset by deep emotional pride in supporting family education through heritage craft.	Theme 2: Emotional Fulfillment, Familial Pride, & Identity
"Haan da kayat kase nakaturpos da met ti kolehiyo." (P3)	Formal higher education shifts youth career choices away from manual, fire-based culinary work.	Theme 3: Generational Transmission Challenges
"Agbaliw ti raman na no magatangen iti canned coconut milk ta awan ti ladek na." (P1)	Substituted commercial ingredients alter authentic flavor profiles, reinforcing artisans' refusal to compromise quality.	Theme 4: Tourism Demands, Economic Inflation, & Quality
"Adda kuma programa wenno suporta para iti kabataan... tulong ti rekado ken adda met naited a puwesto..." (P3, P8)	Artisans perceive urgent needs for LGU-backed youth training, raw material subsidies, and dedicated vending spaces.	Theme 5: Fear of Cultural Extinction & Aspirations for LGU Support

Table 2: Excerpt of Data Transformation via Colaizzi's Seven-Step Method

Theme 1: Traditional Daily Rhythms & Authentic Preparation Practices

Participants describe their daily routines as disciplined rituals rooted in manual tradition. For Sarrat's tupig and kakanin artisans, preparation requires pre-dawn wake-up times and continuous sensory regulation. As Participant 1 noted: "Panag riing iti nasapa tapno agidasar... panag pespes ti niyog, panag singlag, panag punas ti bulong, panag bungon, ken panag luto..." (Waking up early to prepare ingredients, manual coconut pressing, oil extraction, wiping banana leaves, wrapping, and cooking...) Participant 7 emphasized reliance on traditional implements over modern electrical appliances: "Naaramid nga karraang para ti tupig, dalikan met iti pagkiwaran ti kakanin... Agbaliw ti raman na nu mailuto ti gasul." (We use roasting grills for tupig and clay stoves for stirring rice cakes; the taste changes completely if cooked on LPG gas.)

These accounts demonstrate that traditional tools—such as uling (charcoal), galba (galvanized sheets), dalikan (clay stoves), and silyasi (iron vats)—are regarded by artisans as essential to flavor integrity. There is strong resistance to adopting modern LPG gas or electric ovens due to the belief that wood-fire smoke provides a distinct flavor signature tied to Sarrat's local identity. The manual labor involved in pressing, cleaning, wrapping, and monitoring fires represents an informal mechanism of cultural preservation (Fernandez, 2019).

Theme 2: Emotional Fulfillment, Familial Pride, & Identity in Heritage Cooking

Despite physical exhaustion (bannog) and high heat exposure (pudot), participants expressed strong

emotional commitment to their craft. Heritage cooking provides both economic sustenance and personal purpose. Participant 7 shared: "Naragsak latta uray narigat... isu ti nangalak ti panagpaadal kadagiti annak ko." (I am happy despite the hardship because this is our livelihood; through this, I put my children through school.) Participant 6 noted the validation derived from customer satisfaction: "Tay ibaga ti customer nga awan iti kupas na ti raman... maparagsak met daytoy puso mi." (When customers say the flavor hasn't changed at all, it makes our hearts happy.)

While macro-economic models often classify small-scale producers strictly as micro-entrepreneurs, these narratives reveal a deeper psychological connection. The food prepared is linked to civic pride and generational identity. Personal satisfaction (ragsak) helps reframe material labor into meaningful cultural work. This aligns with Sta. Maria-Abalos (2021), who observed that traditional Ilocano cooks derive self-worth from community validation and recipe continuity.

Theme 3: Generational Transmission Challenges, Higher Education, & Youth Disinterest

A major concern identified by participants is the widening generational divide between older artisans and younger community members. Knowledge transmission historically occurred through domestic observation and informal instruction (Participant 4: "Ipakpakita mi no kasano ti ar-aramiden mi"). However, educational attainment and modern career options have shifted youth aspirations away from manual food trade. Participant 3 cited higher education as a factor altering youth interest: "Haan da kayat kase nakaturpos da met ti kolehiyo."

(Because they are college graduates, they do not want to pursue this manual work.) Participant 7 described social stigma and physical discomfort as barriers: "Ti kang runaan na aya ket, tay rigat, tay pudot, tay bain da nga no makita da isu da iti sabali nga kabataan ken uyawen da... No daduma kuna da pay: 'nanang, tatang, aginana kay nga agluto ken aglako ti kakastan no makaadal nak.'" (The main barriers are the hardship, heat, and embarrassment when peers see them selling... Sometimes children say: "Mother, Father, stop cooking and selling once I graduate.")

These findings reflect a socio-economic paradox in rural areas. The earnings generated from artisan cooking fund higher education for the younger generation, which in turn leads those graduates away from fire-based manual production. Peer stigma associated with street vending further accelerates this separation. This aligns with what Sta. Maria-Abalos (2021) describes as "cultural drift," where traditional practices decline alongside shifting educational and digital lifestyles. Without structured interventions, heirloom recipes risk disappearing as the current generation of artisans retires.

Theme 4: Tourism Demands, Economic Inflation, & Uncompromising Quality

Increased visitation around Sarrat's historic points of interest, such as Sta. Monica Church, has expanded market demand for local food products (Etrata, 2021). However, artisans report operational challenges related to rising raw material prices, supply shortages, and external pressures to speed up production. Participant 1 explained how substitute ingredients threaten product quality: "Medyo kase no nangina unay... Agbaliw ti raman na no magatangen iti canned coconut milk ta awan ti ladek na." (When prices are high... the flavor changes if you buy canned coconut milk because it lacks genuine coconut curd/ladek.) Participant 8 described the logistics of sourcing traditional inputs: "Adayu nga baryon ti pagalaan dagituy nga kasapulan... kasla tay bulong ti dippig ken kayo." (We have to go to far-flung rural barangays just to source essential materials... like specific dippig banana leaves and hardwood fuel.) Despite customer requests to expedite cooking or alter recipes, participants expressed a firm commitment to traditional methods. Participant 7 emphasized: "Haan, ta mamati kami nga no agpapada dapat iti raman ken haan nga malipatan iti tao, isu nga no maminsan ag-ngato iti presyo ti asukar, ket bumassit met ti kita mi." (No, we don't take shortcuts because we believe consistent flavor builds customer loyalty. Even when sugar prices spike and lower our profit margins, we maintain our exact process.)

While heritage literature cautions against "staged authenticity" and quality degradation in expanding tourism markets (Cruz & Roldan, 2024; Dela Cruz & Ramos, 2022), Sarrat's food artisans prioritize recipe fidelity

over short-term profit. Rather than adopting cheaper substitutes or shortening cook times, artisans absorb price increases for glutinous rice, sugar, and coconuts. This economic pressure demonstrates that preserving culinary heritage without external structural support imposes a heavy personal cost on local producers.

Theme 5: Fear of Cultural Extinction & Aspirations for LGU Institutional Support

Artisans expressed concern over the potential loss of Sarrat's culinary traditions as older producers retire and raw material sources become less accessible. Participant 1 noted: "Maawan iti pakaammuan ti Sarrat nga agararamid ti tupig ket haanen nga mapadasan ti sumaruno nga henerasyon." (Knowledge of traditional tupig making in Sarrat will be lost, and future generations will not experience it.) Participants voiced a desire for proactive municipal support, structured youth training, and designated selling locations.

Participants 8 and 5 suggested municipal actions: "Adda kuma programa wenno suporta para iti kabataan ken dagitay awan pagubraan na nga isuro da kanyada iti panag-tupig..." (There should be LGU training programs for youth and unemployed residents to learn traditional tupig preparation...) Participant 3 added: "Tulong ti rekado ken adda met naited a puwesto kadakami tapno ag tutuluy kuma nga promotion..." (Assistance with ingredient subsidies and designated stalls for us to enable continuous promotion...)

These findings illustrate how cultural preservation requires institutional backing alongside community pride. Participant recommendations suggest that structured youth apprenticeships, ingredient supply support, and permanent vending spaces near heritage sites can help sustain food tourism over the long term. Modern heritage management frameworks similarly emphasize supporting living cultural bearers to preserve intangible foodways (Cruz & Roldan, 2024; Fernandez, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Sarrat's local food artisans remain committed to maintaining traditional culinary practices handed down through generations. This work serves as both an emotional touchstone and a primary source of livelihood. However, the long-term sustainability of this intangible heritage is challenged by youth disinterest, socio-economic shifts, rising raw material costs, and rural supply chain constraints. Artisans consistently prioritize recipe authenticity over commercial expediency. Based on participant accounts, safeguarding Sarrat's traditional foodways requires structured local interventions beyond tourism marketing.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the lived experiences and suggestions reported by the participants, the following policy implications and strategic actions are recommended:

1. **Establish LGU-Sponsored Youth Culinary Apprenticeships:** Integrate traditional kakanin and tupig preparation techniques into local Senior High School Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) tracks and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) skills workshops.
2. **Develop Agricultural Supply Chain Subsidies:** Create local agricultural initiatives connecting food artisans directly with regional farmers for key ingredients such as coconut, dippig banana leaves, and glutinous rice.
3. **Construct Dedicated Heritage Food Stalls:** Designate well-ventilated cultural vending areas near key historical sites in Sarrat for registered traditional food producers.
4. **Enact Local Cultural Heritage Ordinances:** Establish formal municipal recognition and support mechanisms for local food artisans as recognized custodians of intangible culinary heritage.

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