

Exploratory Study of Karawang Regency Traditional Food as Culinary Identity

Nicky Fernando^{1*}, Myrza Rahmanita¹, Saptarining Wulan¹

¹ Trisakti Institute of Tourism, Indonesia

*Email: nicky_fernando17@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Purpose: This study was conducted to find out the traditional foods in Karawang Regency and find foods that can become the Culinary Identity of Karawang Regency.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This research uses the explorative qualitative method. with the main data validity test and supporting data source triangulation is used in this research. In this research, the questions asked to several sources that have been determined will be relatively the same and related to the object of research. This is done to ensure that the answers from the interviews between sources are the same. In addition, the material is analyzed and conclusions are drawn from the interview results.

Findings: The traditional culinary identity of Karawang Regency includes: jojongkong, green serabi, es walikota, ikan gabus pucung, kue gonjing, bolu kijang, soto tangkar, nasi liwet, kue ali, gegeplak, soto gempol, pepes walahar, kerupuk bontot, gandasturi, kue semprong, dodong hideung and rengginang ketan.

Research limitations/conclusions: This study only focused on the Karawang district, West Java.

Originality/value: The results of this study contribute to the Karawang Regency government to find traditional foods that are original and typical of Karawang Regency. In addition, it can be used as a reference in exploring traditional foods in certain areas and finding a culinary identity for the area.

INTRODUCTION

According to Davidson (2012), tourism is an activity that is needed by every individual in his life. Therefore, the current state of the tourism industry is important and needed. The variety of types of tourism today makes it easier for tourists to choose what they want, for example marine tourism, nature tourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism, educational tourism, religious tourism and culinary tourism. Food and tourism do not stand as inseparable concepts it is defined as a social phenomenon concerning food that is related to culture, social, environment, sustainability, economy, history, nation and society (de Jong & Varley, 2018). Food has an essential part for tourists, in addition to fulfilling their needs in meeting their needs, but also tends to fulfill their psychological needs from a social perspective. Instead of food being a basic need, food can actually provide motivation for tourists in choosing a destination (Mak, 2018). The global report on food tourism explains that many things can trigger tourists to visit culinary-based cultural tourism destinations. The experience of traveling in a tourist destination cannot be separated from the consumption of food during the vacation period. Food is an important part of a vacation, so a visit to a restaurant tends to be a peak experience for tourists (Andersson et al. 2017).

According to Tahiri et al., (2022), culinary tourism has essentially offered benefits at the regional entity level, namely; social inclusiveness, employment and poverty reduction, resource efficiency, cultural values, sustainable economic growth and appreciation in diversity and heritage. Since food generally contains many characteristics associated with a particular place or region, it can logically be considered as a form of destination brand identity. The link between food and tourism has now evolved, not only as a basic need of travelers, but it has also been used to differentiate each tourist destination by creating a distinct and memorable atmosphere. It also plays a role in determining a destination's identity.

Distinctive and consistent local food identity can help a particular destination gain a significant and long-term advantage in a highly competitive tourism market by differentiating the destination from other places (Lin et al. 2011). The phenomenon of the traditional food, usually involves recipes and techniques that are passed down from generation to generation. With the decreasing interest of the younger generation in making and consuming these traditional foods, will gradually become difficult to find and can even disappear.

Karawang is one of the regencies located in the West Java region which is known as a rice granary and has 15 typical karawang foods namely, jojongkong, green serabi, es walikota, ikan gabus pucung, kue gonjing, bolu kijing, soto tangkar, nasi liwet, kue ali, gegeplak, soto gempol, pepes walahar, kerupuk bontot, gandasturi and rengginang ketan. Karawang Regency also has culinary tours such as Serabi Kuntulanak, Pepes Walahar, Opak Ketan, Soto Gempol, Tahu Bumbu, and kue semprong (Susanto & Sasmita, 2023). However, at this time it is quite difficult to find traditional food originating from Karawang regency due to several factors that have resulted in the scarcity of traditional food, including changes in people's consumption patterns due to changing times and the influx of modern food so that it began to be used as an alternative to traditional food. From those 15 specialties, researchers have not found any iconic food from the Karawang area. Therefore, to preserve traditional food, efforts need to be made such as the introduction and promotion of traditional food to the younger generation, the development of traditional food production and distribution and support from the government and the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary Tourism

According to Long (1998) culinary tourism refers to intentional exploratory participation in 'other people's' ways of eating participation including the consumption, preparation, and presentation of food items, cuisines, eating systems, or eating styles that are considered to belong to the culinary system rather than one's own. Culinary tourism is a tourism activity related to food and drink in order to increase knowledge and travel experience, and strengthen social relationships, and express lifestyle (Stone et al. 2018). Culinary is one of the tourist attractions in a tourist destination, which provides an experience for tourists who come to experience the taste and culture of a destination (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Further explains by Putra, (2021) that any tourism activity that involves visiting restaurants and tasting and eating on-site and in an interesting destination arena can be said to be culinary tourism, where food and beverages are a determining factor in choosing a tourist destination in the region.

Traditional Food

According to Widyartini (2020), traditional food is defined as common food that has been consumed for generations, consisting of dishes that suit human taste, do not conflict with the religious beliefs of local communities, and are made from locally available food ingredients and spices. According to Rocillo-Aquino et al., (2021) traditional means something that follows the ideas, norms or customs of the past; and it is relative to tradition (from Latin traditional and this in turn from trader, meaning to convey and refers mainly to the dissemination of news, literary compositions, doctrines, rites, customs, made from generation to generation. In other words, it suggests the idea of transmitting or conveying something, which can be knowledge, theories and practices, behaviors, attitudes to ensure continuity between generations. describes tradition as memories that historically become aware of themselves.

Further explain in Rocillo-Aquino et al., (2021), traditional food has four dimensions, which are: place, time, knowledge, and cultural significance. First, food to be considered traditional, it must have a clear place, whether it is local, regional, or national, hence many of them are given a designation of origin or a geographical indication. The importance of this dimension is seen in those that carry the name of a region. In addition, it is for this aspect that many are also called local, regional or origin food. In this physical space, people's territorial-cultural relationships converge, so the complexity of this dynamic makes it difficult to demarcate places, because we are a mobile society. That is why there are usually problems in spatial boundaries, because food-producing cultures are not always organized geopolitically, which sometimes makes it difficult to clearly distinguish territorial boundaries (Lestari, 2018). Food ingredients and spices are available around the local environment, have flavors that match the tastes of the community, do not conflict with the religion, beliefs, and beliefs of the local community. Therefore, food can be said to be traditional if it contributes to the history and distinctiveness of a place (Madison, 2012).

Second dimension is time alluding to the definition of tradition which is the transmission of something from generation to generation) definitely requires a long time for this process to take place. According to the literature reviewed, at least 25 years or one human generation is considered necessary for the transmission of knowledge to be considered traditional. This is certainly not a problem, as many foods are usually inherited from ancestors; that is, they have been produced and transmitted from the first societies, thus becoming part of this

cultural emblem. Krisnadi (2018) defines traditional foods as a combination of representations, concepts, theoretical and practical knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes accepted by a group or society to ensure continuity between the past and the present. Traditional foods emphasize the generational transmission of knowledge, as well as the use of local raw materials and the fact that these can have a denomination of origin and a strong connection to the region. Traditional foods are products that are frequently consumed or associated with certain celebrations and or seasons, usually passed down from one generation to another, made accurately in a certain way according to gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing or manipulation, distinguished and known for their sensory properties and associated with a particular region (Van Wastering, 1999). Due to its abundant natural resources and favorable geographical location, Indonesia has a wide variety of cuisine rich in spices. In addition, most traditional dishes in Indonesia still use recipes passed down from generation to generation, so the flavors remain consistent (Hardiansyah et al., 2022).

Third dimension is knowledge, the theoretical and practical knowledge passed down from generation to generation and involved in the development of these foods are fundamental, as they define tWhat (raw materials to be used), How (production techniques and processes), and Who (the person in charge of elaboration). Therefore, some traditional foods are also called artisanal, because the work is generally manual or uses little machinery. The problem is that in recent times, especially since the industrialization of food, these practices and techniques are not given much attention, as they are considered unsafe due to the lack of production protocols and standards, so many are slightly modified. Etale and Siergrist, (2021) emphasizes traditional food naturalness by the production of the products characterized by the use of natural raw materials, a low level of industrialization, and a low content of chemical additives in the final product. Traditional food is closely related to culture, and everything feels natural in its presentation and serving. Each traditional Indonesian food has its own story and philosophy behind the ingredients and the way it is made (Krisnawati, 2022).

Fourth dimension is cultural an relevant aspect that gives these foods great significance is their ritual and symbolic character, which is closely linked to the essence of each culture as products consumed or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons. This suggests that such foods are consumed not only for nutritional motives, but also provide symbolic value related to the customs, ideas and uses of the cultural complex to which they belong, thus this cultural content gives meaning to traditional foods. Therefore, this aspect is a clear distinction that must be considered in the distinction of traditional foods.

The typical food of a region in Indonesia is an asset and cultural heritage for both the people in the area and the country of Indonesia (Ketaren, 2021) the typical food of a region, it can be seen from various perspectives such as history, philosophy, and eating culture. The history of a person or group includes everything that has been done, tried, and expected to happen at some point in the past (Elsty & Nahdiah, 2020). According to Widyartini (2020), traditional foods can be categorized into several types. The first is the main meal, which serves as the primary component of a menu and is prepared in the largest quantity. It is specifically designed to satisfy hunger. The second category is side dishes, which complement the main meal and are intended to enhance appetite. These side dishes are divided into several forms, including those with broth, moist non-soupy options, fried items, grilled foods, and varieties of sambal (spicy condiments). The third category is jajan pasar or traditional market snacks, which are consumed throughout the day for enjoyment rather than to relieve hunger. These snacks are not bound by specific time, place, or portion size and often serve to supplement nutrients that may be missing from the main course and side dishes. Lastly, the fourth category includes drinks, such as wedang (traditional herbal or spiced beverages), which function primarily to entertain or quench thirst.

Culinary Identity

The concept of culinary identity described Ondieki et al., (2017) the cultural elements include religions, history, and level of ethnic diversity, innovations, capabilities, traditions, beliefs and values. The tourism industry is not only the environment it is also affected by cultural culinary heritage. Tourism is a way to promote the traditions and customs. Eating habit is a matter of culture, a product of codes of conduct and the structure of social relationships. At the same time, identity encompasses aspects that differentiate one individual from another, emphasizing uniqueness. In this context, Frez-Muñoz, (2021) views culinary identity as an expression of cultural and ethnic distinctiveness shaped by demographic and geographical elements, where food becomes a symbol of place and tradition.

Harrington (2005) outlines six core elements that define a nation's culinary identity. First is the geographical landscape, which includes local cooking tools, staple ingredients, and agricultural products influenced by natural and ethnic environments. Second are historical influences, such as traditional cooking methods and the origin of food ingredients (Yulia et al. 2022). Third is ethnic diversity, which contributes to the preservation, fusion, and innovation of cuisines over time. Food serves as a symbol of individual and collective identity, influencing social status and cultural belonging. Fourth is culinary etiquette, which reflects the eating culture shaped by social relations and local values. Fifth is flavor profiles, including the five basic tastes which are sweet, sour, bitter, salty, and umami. Where factors like food appearance, aroma, and texture play vital roles. Lastly, the recipe

element captures the uniqueness of ingredients, preparation methods, tools, and presentation that make each region's traditional cuisine distinct.

In light of the background and problem formulation previously discussed, a conceptual framework has been developed and is illustrated in the accompanying figure. To ensure the research yields relevant and scientifically valid results, it is essential to incorporate references from prior studies that align with the research topic, as listed in the table below. The novelty of this study lies in how it builds upon and differentiates from previous research. By drawing from earlier scholarly works, this study enriches the theoretical foundation and expands the academic discourse. What sets this research apart is its focus on identifying the culinary identity of Karawang Regency, an area that has not been extensively studied in this context. The study aims to explore and document traditional foods as key markers of culinary identity, offering a more in-depth and targeted analysis compared to existing literature.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with an exploratory method. Exploratory research according to Stebbins (2001) is research on problems that have never been traced, have never been studied by others so that even in the darkness the exploratory researcher still tries to find the problem that is or will be researched. This research examines topics that are still rarely discussed so it is difficult to predict what will be found in the field, therefore this research is conducted in an exploratory qualitative way. This research discusses the exploration of traditional food as an identity in Karawang Regency, in order to have a culinary identity so that it can introduce the traditional food of Karawang Regency to a wide audience by using culinary identity as the spearhead.

In cultural research, respondents or informants play a central role, as they are individuals who possess deep knowledge and direct involvement with the subject of study (Sinha & Hasan, 2014). The informants in this research were selected through purposive sampling based on several key criteria:

1. Long-term involvement in the cultural or culinary field under investigation;
2. Ability to provide spontaneous and insightful information based on lived experiences;
3. Active participation and engagement with the community or institutional setting relevant to the research focus;
4. Availability and willingness to participate in interviews without requiring extensive preparation;
5. Involvement in topics or domains that remain under-researched, adding original value to the study.

The research drew upon a complete selection of relevant stakeholders as the research population, ensuring a holistic perspective. This diverse group of informants ensures that the research is grounded in authentic, multidisciplinary perspectives that reflect both institutional and local community voices. The following informants role (Table 1) contributed their insights.

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent code	Affiliation / Position	Description of Role
Respondent 1	Department of Tourism and Culture (DISBUDPAR), Sub Coordinator of Tourism Destination Development	Responsible for developing tourism strategies and cultural preservation in Karawang
Respondent 2	Representatives of Karawang Cooperative and MSMEs Office	Provide insights on the role of MSMEs in traditional culinary identity
Respondent 3	Representative of Karawang BKSDA (Natural Resources Conservation)	Shares perspective on environmental and heritage conservation related to tourism
Respondent 4	Chairman of the Karawang Creative Economy Forum	Discusses the integration of traditional culinary with creative economy initiatives
Respondent 5	Head of Walahar Village / Local Government - Village Level	Provides a grassroots viewpoint on local food heritage and community engagement
Respondent 6	Owner of Hj Emin's Pepes Jambal Stall / Culinary Business Actors Generation	Contribute direct knowledge about traditional food practices and intergenerational preservation efforts
Respondent 7	Owner of Semprong Amoundy / Culinary Business Actors	Contribute direct knowledge about traditional food practices and intergenerational preservation efforts

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were found that Karawang Regency is rich in traditional culinary heritage, identified five Traditional Foods which include Green Surabi, Ali Ring Cake, Liwet Rice, Pepes Jambal Walahar, and Kue Semprong. This data was obtained by referring to the theory proposed by Rocillo-Aquino et al., (2021). The theory proposes indicators that are relevant in this study, namely Place, Time, Knowledge, and Cultural Meaning. It is important to note that through the application of these indicators, this research has successfully identified the existence of Traditional Foods that have cultural and historical value in Karawang Regency. The depth is illustrated through an understanding of the Place and Time in which these foods evolved, the Knowledge inherent in the process of making and consuming them, and the Cultural Meaning associated with these foods in the context of the lives of the people of Karawang Regency. All these elements form a rich and valuable culinary identity for the region.

In the context of this research, it was also found that there are two foods that have the potential to become Culinary Identities, namely Kue Semprong and Pepes Jambal Walahar. Thus, the results showed that the Traditional Foods that gained status as the Culinary Identity of Karawang Regency were Pepes Jambal Walahar and Kue Semprong. In the process of determining this Culinary Identity. The results of this study have implications for the development of traditional food theory, especially the theory of Karawang Regency's culinary identity. Ideas regarding the concept of socialization to a wide audience and business people so that Karawang Regency will soon be famous through its traditional food.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of analysis and discussion it can be concluded that Karawang Regency has five foods that can be used as traditional foods typical of Karawang Regency, namely: green surabi, liwet rice, kue ali agrem, pepes jambal walahar and kue semprong. it also found that food that was able to become the culinary identity of Karawang Regency, namely pepes jambal walahar and kue semprong.

This research has some limitations, first, it is only focused on the exploration study of traditional foods as culinary identity in Karawang Regency, Second there are some shortcomings in supporting documents. Future researchers should increase the scope of their research so that food that has become a culinary identity can be introduced so that it becomes an identity that is known throughout Indonesia, as well as internationally. This research is only focused on finding traditional foods and making them food that qualifies as a culinary identity in Karawang Regency. Moreover, future research should re-categorize existing food into several classifications that have been written, namely Legendary Food, Iconic Food, Famous Food and Popular Food. It would also be nice to socialize existing food to every element in the Karawang Regency area so that this food can be recognized and can continue to survive in this modern era.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

There is no conflict of interest in this research.

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