

# Territorial Representation, Touristic Attractiveness and Promotion of Trappist Monks Beer in Belgium

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## ABSTRACT

The passion of part of the tourism demand desirous of discovering heritage, including gastronomic heritage and local produce, has encouraged public and private operators to turn to tourism with the aim of instilling new dynamics for development. In Wallonia there is an increase in tourism-related projects focusing on the promotion of local food products, especially abbey beers and cheeses. This article deals with case studies relating to the promotion for purposes of tourism of the Trappist beers from three Cistercian abbeys. After having demonstrated that beers are intimately linked to food-related representations and images associated with Belgium, we study the place occupied by Trappist beers in communications from tourism organisations. The results of surveys carried out amongst tourists show the important role played by food resources and Trappist products in the attractiveness of these destinations. We end with a consideration of the relationship between 'religious' food products, tourism, and regional attractiveness.

**Keywords:** Religious food product, territorial representation, Trappist monks, tourist perceptions, regional attractiveness, Belgium

## INTRODUCTION

The current passion of part of the tourism demand desirous of discovering heritage, in particular gastronomic heritage and local produce, has encouraged many public and private operators to turn to tourism with the aim of instilling new dynamics for development. Through the tourism-focused promotion of these food resources, these private and public operators are seeing new opportunities to enhance the attractiveness of their area in terms of tourism or possibilities of upgrading their range of services to tourists. Following the example of many rural areas in Europe, Wallonia has seen a recent increase in tourism-related projects focusing on the promotion of local agri-food products, especially abbey beers and cheeses.

This article deals with three case studies relating to the promotion for purposes of tourism of the Trappist beers (a Trappist beer is a beer brewed within an abbey by or under the oversight

of Trappist monks) from Orval, Chimay and Rochefort, three Cistercian abbeys situated in the south of Belgium.

After having demonstrated, via an analysis of tourist and culinary guides, that beers are intimately linked to food-related representations and images associated with Belgium, we will also seek to understand why these drinks are still so closely linked in Europe to Christian monastic communities. Thereafter we will also try to understand the way in which these monastic food products play a part, at their own level, in the production chain of regional tourist images; this will be done by analysing the rationale and details of the development of tourism focusing on Trappist beers in beer interpretation centres recently set up by the monks.

We will end the article by reflecting on the relationships between Trappist beers, tourism and the attractiveness of the region, based on the results of surveys conducted among tourists in the three areas selected for this study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Based on a body of mixed data (visual and written communications issued by tourists and monks, participant observation) our research focused, as a first step, on the place of beer, and more specifically monastic beers, within the food imagery and representations associated with Belgium. The research then turned to examining the discursive strategies associated with the three Trappist beers selected, and their areas of origin, based principally on works published about and by the Trappist communities of Orval, Chimay and Rochefort. From this perspective we sought to identify the various meanings of the textual and iconographic contents of these publications, as well as of the materials to be found in the museums managed by the monks.

We will try to distil the essential components and the ideological motivation on which these wide-ranging strategies are based. This then becomes an exercise in discerning the meaning behind these words and images used to construct a picture of the tourist landscape as it appears in tourist information and in museum structures. All these data (textual, visual, iconographic) were then analysed by systematically following the same interpretive framework, consisting in identifying and interpreting the socio-cultural and regional attributes on which these discursive strategies are based. But this body of images and texts cannot be considered as a self-contained corpus, and we need to be aware that the interpretation of text and images is meaningful only in the context of the rest of our body of analysis: observations in the field (the rituals of enthronement of new members of the gastronomic confraternities responsible for promoting Trappist beers), meeting local representatives, analysing tourism development strategies, tourist visits (museums dedicated entirely to the tourism valorization of Trappist beers), etc.

Next, after concentrating on analyzing the images planned for our three regions, we became interested in the tourists themselves who visit these places. By conducting surveys (mixed questionnaires with open and half-open questions) during school holidays (2011 and 2012) with 278 tourists who had come to visit the three regions, we tried to gain a better understanding of how the local food products, and more specifically food products made in monasteries, play a part in how the regions are portrayed, how attractive the places are.

## **FOOD AND TOURISM STUDIES**

Over the last 30 years, numerous projects have been devised with the idea of making tourism part of rural development policies and strategies. The special place occupied by tourism can be explained by the fact that this sector is expected to play a particular part in progress across the

board, encouraging the local economy, protecting and making the most of natural and cultural traditions, as well as strengthening regional attractiveness and identity. Giving tourism this kind of role is part of a political and economic context where rural areas are changing in their search to find new ways to develop. In their wholehearted encouragement of regional competition between towns or rural municipalities, these strategies aimed at tourists regularly stress the idea that tourism is now being viewed, by numerous public organisations, as the future hope for rural regions. It is true that developing the tourism business over the last three years has led many rural areas in Europe to treat tourism as their strategic focus of development. As numerous analysts have pointed out, the main components of current trends in tourism must be combined with the concept of authenticity that tourists particularly associate with the unique nature of regional identity, local culture, regional gastronomic traditions, etc. Research into what tourists are looking for shows that the consumption of local products as part of holiday tours provides a partial response to some tourists' quest for authenticity. The research findings indicate in particular that local food and gastronomy are a core element of a destination's intangible heritage, and that the consumption of these local specialities can provide tourists with a truly authentic cultural experience (Bessiere 1998; Van Westering 1999; Poulain 2000; Du Rand et al. 2003; Kim et al. 2009; Sims 2009; Grasseni 2011).

Multiple studies have found that many tourists are attracted to regional foods because of their desire to have a unique experience and that such foods in turn contribute to a perception of a local distinctiveness (Quan and Wang 2004; Kivela and Crofts 2006; Espeitx Bernat 2007; Everett and Aitchison 2008; Sims 2009). Hu and Ritchie found that food was the fourth most important factor—after climate, accommodation and scenery—shaping the way tourists perceive the attractiveness of a destination, while other publications underline the important role of consuming locally farmed produce as part of the holiday experience, something which greatly influences the tourists' positive perception of their stay (Hu and Ritchie 1993). According to numerous authors, more and more people are now travelling for reasons of gastronomy (Ryan 1997; Hall and Sharples 2003; Long 2004). As a result, food tourism, in its broadest sense, has gained a higher profile as a pull factor in destination marketing (Hjalager and Richards 2000; Boniface 2003; Cohen and Avieli 2004). Food tourism is a possible competitive advantage and it can be a core element in the branding of a country or destination by marketers. Food is considered as an essential element in building a destination brand (Hashimoto and Telfer 2006), because food is often intertwined with the social, cultural and natural characteristics of a specific region. A strong and desirable identity, established by linking food attributes to a given place, can not only signify a destination's uniqueness but also promote the regionality of food to tourists (Hall et al. 2003). It has been argued that a unique and memorable 'food identity' can contribute to the sustainable competitiveness of a destination (Fox 2007). Hashimoto and Telfer (Hashimoto and Telfer 2006) point out that the food of a specific place is essential to the latter's success as a tourism destination. For some authors, enhancing tourists' impression of local food products not only permits diversification of the local tourist resources but also extends the season; they point out in particular that many restaurants and events depend on local foods to help alleviate any adverse consequences of a seasonal pattern of tourist arrivals (Scarpato 2000; Hjalager 2002; Kivela and Crofts 2009; Sims 2010).

Even though research into 'food tourism' has not attracted much attention from social science researchers until now, as tourism and gastronomy are only gradually achieving the status of subjects suitable for academic research (Hjalager and Richards 2000; Santich 2004; Csergo

and Lemasson 2008), we can now see growing involvement by researchers in 'tourism studies' relating to food tourism. Whereas a lot of research in tourism studies involves the originality of the place, with this attribute being represented by symbols or an atmosphere considered to be specific to the place, paradoxically very little research has concentrated specifically on the role of local agrifood products when constructing images of a tourist destination (Frochot 2003).

Along the same lines, we can also note that food products of religious houses products as an aspect of culinary heritage has received relatively little attention. More specifically, the role of religious food products as motivators and determinants of destination choice has been little discussed in the tourism research literature.

#### Brewing know-how and beers in Belgium: touristic and sociocultural highlights

Food plays a part in the way socio-cultural "otherness" is seen and portrayed, and is therefore a marker of socio-cultural identity, since dining habits can afford insights into ways of life, helping people understand differences between their own culture and those with which they come into contact. Food can be seen as a symbol, a sign of communion, a class marker and an emblem of a specific place, and thus as powerful emblems of identity. In this sense, food and local food products are also cultural artefacts serving as real markers of local and social identities.

Although our identity is built by and through the way in which others see us, as we construct the identity of a person based on what he or she eats, not all foods have the same powers of identification and representation. In this respect it seems that beer occupies an important place in discussions about how Belgium and its inhabitants are portrayed, identified and seen in tourist and culinary publications. An article by Gueorgieva, analyzing images and portrayals of Belgium in the written press in Bulgaria, which she considered to be "one of the main sources creating stereotypes as well as forming the opinions of citizens", we learn that "images of Belgians in the Bulgarian press are associated with beer, arts and culture" (Gueorgieva 2008). In another study, beer appears, "after chips and the national flag", as the third symbol of 'Belgian-ness', with 70% of the 1105 people questioned thinking that foreigners associated Belgium with beer (Lefebure 2005). Belgium's gastronomic reputation thus seems most closely linked to its know-how in terms of beer production, although this reputation may also be due to the large beer consumption in this country.

A brief analysis of a few tourist guides or publications about Belgium confirms that the portrayals of the country are often associated with beer, as can be seen from a few extracts: "Belgium is a country where people know how to laugh, brandishing a tankard of beer"; "Belgium, a sort of living museum of the art of brewing. Nowhere else is there such a wide variety of beers..." ([Collective Michelin] 2002). The Lonely Planet, for its part, devotes around a dozen pages to the topic of beer in Belgium and stresses in particular the importance of monastic beers: "Belgium's most famous tipples are the abbey-brewed Trappist beers, gold or dark in colour, smooth in taste and dangerously strong" (Elliott 2010: 113).

As far as the zythologue Michael Jackson is concerned, "no other European country has beer whose character is as complex as the best Belgian ones. No other country has indigenous beers which are so diverse and special. [...] No country has the elegant cafés dedicated to beer that can really be compared to those in Belgium" (Jackson, 2006). Considered as "the home of beer" in tourist as well as culinary publications, Belgium can use this asset as an important resource in terms of promotion and tourism strategies. Evidence of this, for example, is the

important campaign to promote tourism in Wallonia abroad, which started in 2002: “Wallonia. Lively warmth”, based on four main themes, one of which is closely linked to Belgian beers. Interest in beer in Belgium, both in terms of demand and the associated tourism, seems to be growing steadily: “you only need to look at the increasing number of activities associated with tourism, leisure or trips on the subject of beer” (Lefébure 2005). When various publications devoted to beer in Belgium, were analysed by Lefébure, we saw that numerous guided tours devoted to this topic are continually taking place and that “more and more tourist attractions and organisations offer all-inclusive tickets including a visit to a brewery [...]. Tour operators, especially foreign ones, also offer numerous holidays on the subject of beer. Not to mention the innumerable holidays and beer festivals, which bring together a public which is increasingly large and disparate” (Lefébure 2005). The promotional strategy based on the relationship between Belgium and its beers, both nationally and internationally, is nothing new. The Belgian pavilion at the 1958 World’s Fair in Brussels was already promoting this association in its section entitled “Beer-making and joyful Belgium 1900”, a sort of national folk-art centre consisting of 150 cafés, breweries, restaurants, dance clubs and other festive places.

It is in this context that we should understand the submission by Belgium, on 31 March 2014, of an application file for “Beer culture in Belgium” to be included on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. The fact that Belgium produces “more than 1000 types of beer and has the largest choice of authentic, local and typical beers in the world” constitutes one of the principal arguments invoked by those who filed the application. Certainly this process is also part of a tourism and commercial perspective, as can be seen from this brief excerpt from a press release by the Belgian Ministry of Culture responsible for this file. The communiqué highlights the potential series of effects of recognition by UNESCO: “it can be expected that recognition of Belgian beer culture by UNESCO would, in addition to the enhanced renown it would bring to our brewers (even if it should be noted that this recognition is quite different from commercial propaganda), lead to greater visibility for Belgium’s rich heritage on the world stage, which in turn would most certainly have a positive impact in terms of image, reputation and tourism in particular”.

The stage is set: beer is considered a characteristic feature of Belgian identity and culture, to the point that it is a part of its gastronomic heritage and renown. The application process for recognition of Belgian beer by UNESCO fits with the recent worldwide trend of treating gastronomy as part of a region’s heritage.

## **BELGIAN BEERS AND MONASTIC IMAGES**

Although Belgian skill and worldwide fame with regard to brewing involve numerous types of beer, this country’s reputation is based mainly on special beers (requiring long fermentation), and more specifically beer made in monasteries. Abbey beers are the fastest growing segment of the Belgian beer market, but only a few of these abbey beers are still produced in monasteries today (Persyn et al. 2010; Deconinck and Swinnen 2012). Among the monastic orders still really involved in the brewing sector in Belgium nowadays, the Cistercian monks of the Strict Observance (commonly known as Trappist monks), brew beers considered to be among the best in the world, judging by their high prices and the awards won in international competitions. Other abbey beers are based on old recipes from monasteries or represent an attempt to brew

'abbey-style' beers in commercial breweries, a central strategy of the larger brewing companies (Wayens et al. 2002; Persyn et al. 2010).

The reputation for excellence enjoyed by the abbey beers is probably due to the important role the monks played in the Middle Ages in northern Europe in the process of producing beer and in the boom in breweries. In the Middle Ages, a number of processes for improving crops and animals, progress in farming and brewing methods as well as in the distillation of alcohol are attributed to the abbeys and the monks of Northern Europe (Vander Straeten 2007; Persyn et al. 2010; Poelmans and Swinnen 2011; Deconinck and Swinnen 2012). Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the brewing industry underwent further changes as a result of a series of scientific discoveries – notably including the research carried out by Pasteur – which would have a significant impact on beer production and consumption. Mechanization and the use of steam engines as well as the introduction of refrigeration made it possible to control the environment within breweries. These developments coincided with the research conducted on yeast and the fermentation process that made possible the production of the Pils, a beer that is steady, reliable and of high quality and can be produced all year round and at lower cost. The technique of low fermentation (Pils) spread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, revolutionizing the brewing sector: pale lager came to dominate the global market.

The impact of these technical and scientific developments would sharply reduce the role and influence within the brewing sector that monastic communities had enjoyed during the Middle Ages. But the expertise acquired by the monks had won them a reputation that would continue through the ages: the medieval image of the brewer monks has endured despite the technological and scientific evolutions of the brewing sector.

The monastic associations of a beer are thus still often regarded today as a mark of quality. It is therefore not surprising to note that contemporary communication strategies employed by numerous brewers in Northern Europe make widespread use of religious references, evoking the images that appeal to the monastic or more generally religious imagination to convince people of the quality of their products, even if in reality there is no connection whatsoever between them. The image of monks in itself appears to guarantee confidence, serving as a sort of guarantee of provenance; a product originating at an abbey and having been made by the hands of expert and kindly monks would seem to have as its distinguishing feature the fact that they devote their lives to spirituality, without seeking personal gain, an aspect that sets them apart as producers from those who seek profit and follow the demands of production, even at the expense of quality. More generally, this image of quality associated with monastic foodstuffs creates a link at the symbolic level between "fine drinking" and "fine dining" on the one hand, and the monastic world on the other. The monks we see on the advertisements and media used by agrifood companies often corresponds to the romanticized image of the monk in medieval Europe: a man who can be easily recognised from his paunch, his cowl and his tonsure and is perceived as a *bon vivant* who loves to eat and appreciates the good things in life. The association of food and drink with the monastic world has great appeal, and hence this image is often used by secular companies in their advertising in order to boast of the qualities of a product. But in reality, the use of such sales strategies, using the image of the monk in marketing or advertising is a sensitive issue for Trappist monks, for they are perceived as tools of the consumer society and of capitalism, the very thing the monks challenge and are meant to have left behind, including within their own internal economy. Conducting marketing campaigns would, according to the Trappists, be to find themselves firmly back in a system of which they wish to remain on the



margins. This refusal to be part of the whole economic system and of a 'productivist' society is signalled by a distinctive type of production and sales strategy: no promotional offers that urge impulse buying, no advertising in the media, etc.

If, for ethical reasons, the Trappist monks do not advertise, they nevertheless have to design strategies of their own if only to find a way to sell their food products. In this context, it is not surprising therefore to observe that Trappist monks in the regions under study favour indirect strategies for doing so, using several different forms of cultural mediation such as discourses that focus on monks and their food products in cookery books, interpretative centres or cultural activities organized by gastronomic confraternities responsible for the promotion of Trappist beers. By relying on these forms of cultural mediation, the monks preserve the appearance of being beyond any marketing endeavours, while also ensuring that the prestige and renown of their products is made known.

## **CULINARY MEDIA RELATING TO THE MONASTIC WORLD**

In recent years, food-related media and books have become a veritable fad in Belgium, as elsewhere in Europe. Not only magazines and newspaper columns but also television programmes and entire channels devoted to cookery have sprung up; cookery blogs inundate the web, and countless images and discussions of food and dining have made cuisine and taste omnipresent in the media. In Belgium, some of these publications, TV programmes and culinary blogs focus specifically on monastic beers and, more particularly, on those brewed by the monks of Trappist communities. The Trappist monks in turn, at least in Belgium, are particularly attentive to the information that is spread about them and generally ask for a right to be consulted when books or newspaper articles devoted to them are to appear. Along the same lines, they attribute great importance to the images and visual representations of monastic life, as is evident from this testimony of a monk from the Trappist monastery of Chimay: "all the visual images have been carefully examined: the proportions, haziness, human intervention, etc. We even determined the precise measurements for the site of the logo, the position of the coat of arms, the placement of shading on both paper and on-line materials! This might appear punctilious, but when we think about the abuses that we have seen in some cases, it is far from excessive." (Groff and Leroy 2011: 80).

Like other types of media, therefore, these publications participate in constructing and circulating positive images of monasticism and of the places associated with these drinks, as well as promoting, on a different scale, the renown not only of these beers but also the eponymous territories where they are brewed.

In addition to information on the history of the products, the works in question also deal with the historical aspects relating to the monastic community as well as the geography of the sites where the monasteries are located. They can, in some cases, resemble travel guides, as attested to by the following passage from a book about the Notre-Dame de Saint-Rémy Abbey in Rochefort: "The Notre-Dame de Saint-Rémy Abbey lies hidden in the depth of the valley. Its full-bodied Trappist beers produce multiple and subtle aromas. It is said that the monks robes blend into the landscape of the region and the nearby forest (Voluer 2012: 17). A book titled *Voyages et rencontre aux sources de la trappiste de Chimay* [Travels and encounter at the sources of the Trappist beer of Chimay], published to mark the 150th anniversary of the

brewery at Chimay, includes numerous references to the region, which is described as follows: “Here the entire history of Europe can be read between the lines of the valleys and rivers, cities, farms, abbeys, castles and isolated hamlets” (Groff and Leroy 2011: 28). The book also stresses the role played by the monastic communities, and in particular the Cistercian houses, in the economic development of part of Europe. Thus, in addition to providing information on the region and its products, such publications also discuss the identity of the producers: “*Rooted in the society of South Hainaut, this community has always lived in close solidarity with the surrounding population. At the end of the period of the great visionaries, monks with enormous competence in industrial and financial matters as well as in theological and spiritual questions applied themselves, after the two world wars, to rebuilding not only the community’s own economy but also that of the entire region*” (Groff and Leroy 2011: 41). In the same vein, the book goes on to stress “the pioneering and highly courageous work undertaken by the monks to clear the land [...] According to those who took part in the venture, the area was frequented by wolves and was sometimes covered with fog until the month of July” (Groff and Leroy 2011 : 58). Similarly, the book on Orval beer, titled *Saveurs d’Orval*, not only contains the basic recipes for the Trappist products but also devotes numerous passages to the history of the Abbey and a detailed description of the brewery.

## **THE GASTRONOMIC CONFRATERNITIES AT THE SERVICE OF THE CULTURAL IMAGE OF TRAPPIST BEERS**

The gastronomic confraternities associated with Trappist beers that were analysed for the purposes of this article do not count among their ranks any employees of the breweries or members of the monastic communities in question, but are made up entirely of people from outside the production entities. The members who are enthroned, that is, inducted into the confraternity, are ‘ambassadors’ recruited by the confraternities to attend and participate in various gastronomic events within or beyond the borders of the region or country, so that the products may be promoted to tourists both *in situ* and outside their places of origin – namely, the sites associated with Trappist beers.

The induction of new members of gastronomic confraternities for the Trappist beers of Rochefort, Chimay and Orval is conducted by a Chapter that is open to the public (local residents and tourists interested in local folklore). During the Chapter meeting, the new members are ritually enthroned. Beyond these rituals, the gastronomic confraternities also hold events relating to local folklore (cultural and tourist activities, markets for local produce, etc.) both within and beyond their region of origin. During the enthronement rituals, those officiating emphasize the historical depth of Trappist beers, stressing the continuity between these products, the history of the monks and the Middle Ages. The monk’s brewing expertise is presented as a long standing heritage, as if drinking a Trappist beer somehow linked the contemporary consumer with that tradition. Indeed, at the heart of these festivities, references to the past, to tradition and its prestigious aspects are widely mobilised by means of a ritual that places the Trappist beer at centre stage with a view to demonstrating its authenticity. The aim is first and foremost to create a gastronomic world of the senses that seeks to distantiate it from an industrial, manufacturing or even urban image that is perceived as inauthentic. It does so via a staging of the tradition, highlighting “the material culture of appearance [...] where the form can convey the substance”



(Warnier and Rosselin 1996 : 192). As is the case with the luxury industry or the art market, what counts is not so much to talk about beer and the conditions for its production, but to produce discourses that valorize the product, placing it in a context, endowing it with an idealised meaning (Bourdieu 1980). These confraternities are therefore distributors of cultural models for promoting the local region, and play their part in generating symbolic value for Trappist beers.

## **MUSEUMS: INTERPRETING THE MONKS AND THEIR FOOD PRODUCTION**

Given that the Trappist monks of Rochefort are not directly involved in campaigns to market their beers, the analysis of the logics and discursive strategies emanating from the Trappist monks thus focus on two museums inaugurated in 2012 and dedicated entirely to the tourist promotion of Trappist beers: the MuséeCommun Abraham (Orval) and the EspaceChimay. The creation of these two institutions is not only part of the elaboration of tourist and monastic imaginaries that contribute to reinforcing the attractiveness of the areas to tourists, and also attests to the growing interest of the Trappists themselves in the potential of tourism.

The principal descriptors and qualifiers around which the discursive strategy is structured consist of terms such as tradition, authenticity, brewing know-how and trade secrets. But while the monastic actors communicate abundantly about these values, which are traditionally found in communications about food products and rural spaces, it is also true that at Chimay and Orval the monks do not limit themselves to the retrospective image with which they are traditionally associated, but also affirm, in parallel, their contemporary approach in using innovative tools, both as far as the beer brewing processes are concerned and in terms of the logics and modalities of tourist mediation. The museums are thus enhanced by means of numerous videos, touch screens, “latest generation” audio guides, and contemporary sound environments. New information technologies are in fact widely used to offer tourists a visit that includes a virtual dimension. Entertaining teaching materials inform visitors about the different aspects of the beer production process (fully automated bottling and labelling process, efficient scientific laboratory, etc.). Furthermore, the recently developed “EspaceChimay” application, freely downloadable from the iTunes App Store, offers additional videos, images and other information on Chimay and the region that can be consulted in the museum by smartphone via a bar code, to supplement the interpretive panels on site. Possible walks near the abbey are also suggested using a geolocating approach. Certainly these are very sophisticated tools, attesting to a willingness to place the monks squarely in the contemporary world.

An important part of the itinerary through the EspaceChimay is, moreover, devoted to questions about the complex process of beer brewing and to the role played by the monks and by science. Thus, among the many images which tourists can observe within these museums, a monk regularly appears, recognisable from his robe and cowl, supervising the preparation of the brew or deep in discussion with a brewing engineer. These images draw the public’s attention to the monastic actors themselves, and points to their active role in the production. These representations of the monks also emphasise their scientific mastery, and thus contribute to presenting the Trappist breweries as particularly innovative, up-to-date laboratories as regards brewing techniques and know-how. The complexity of the production process is also stressed,

and hence the high degree of expertise required. To this end, the Trappist monks make abundant use of scientific references: images of scientists in lab coats, Bunsen burners, etc.

The itinerary through the museum of the Espace Chimay in particular emphasises the monks' ability to fit in with the current trends as regards environmental issues, by means of images showing their use of energy-efficient technologies (the abbey's and brewery's heating system using solar panels, geothermic sources, etc.). The Trappist monks seek to convey to the world that they are present in contemporary society, as one can hear from the testimony of the abbot of the Chimay community: "the monks are at the frontline of progress. For evidence, just look at how the monastic communities have developed and improved agricultural techniques over the centuries prior to industrialisation ... And then, use of renewable energy fits naturally with the idea of communion with the natural world and respect for the world God created. Monks, throughout the ages, have used navigation routes, studied hydrological systems, built mills and worked on improving agricultural techniques, and this pioneering spirit continues to this day" (Espace Chimay). Through this form of tourist mediation, centred both on the technologically and scientifically innovative dimensions and on an environmental ethic, the monks lend the Trappist products a distinctive quality and an identity.

As indicated above, while the monks place themselves within the forms of modernity, they also continue to play the tradition card. The narrative and visual content of their tourist mediation valorises the traditional elements, conveyed notably by a display of objects and images (antique wooden beer barrels, old stainless steel brewing tubs, historical images of monks working in the fields) to project the historical depth of Trappist beers. There is a desire to show that the monk producers, and therefore their production, are in direct continuity with a rich past and a long brewing tradition. The monastic beers of Chimay and of Orval are to varying degrees enmeshed with the territory from which they hail, being simultaneously rooted in a local and in a global space.

It is interesting to observe, for instance, the map of the world displayed in the first room in the Espace Chimay, made up of a multitude of Chimay beer glasses. By touching each beer glass on the touch screen next to the world map, the visitor can see and hear as many brief personal stories told by consumers from around the world, who share an affective bond with Chimay beer. Thus, the abbey beer, while firmly connected to the local territory, can easily be appropriated by consumers of vastly different geographical origins by means of anecdotes with which it is very easy to identify, since they refer to the product itself and not to its place of production. The message thus communicated about this product allows for an appropriation that may be considered universal in nature. Drinking and enjoying a Chimay thus comes down to drinking a beer endowed with a historical density in which the consumers themselves participate (and which as a result belongs partly to them), since it may potentially involve their own history as well.

Running parallel with this harnessing of discursive elements aimed at anchoring Trappist beers geographically, historically and socially within their eponymous territories, we can see within this interpretive approach the emergence of discursive strategies that draw on linguistic features that assimilate the products in question with veritable cultural objects. Trappist beers and the objects associated with them (posters, photos, bottle racks, antique glasses and bottles, etc.) are displayed in the windows of museums as if they were works of art to be protected because of their symbolic value. Journalists, zythologists and other beer connoisseurs devote articles and cookery books to the subject; the aesthetic and narrative framework of these publications

associate their subjects with artworks; artists and crafts people are mobilised to produce advertising posters or limited edition and numbered beer glasses prized by collectors (who are willing to acquire them at high prices); exhibitions are devoted specifically to the history of these products and associated items, for which auctions (similar to those for artworks) are held regularly. The result is that some consumers, both within and outside the territories in question, proudly display the logos of Trappist beers, whether on their skin in the form of tattoos, on their cars or on the rooftops of their homes. All this reflects not only an important attachment to these local products, but also a certain aesthetization of these comestibles by consumers themselves.

While these strategies are to be understood primarily within the context of the competition among the actors in the brewing sector on a global scale – who are prepared to use any means to highlight the distinctiveness and authenticity of their products – it is nevertheless the case that the tourist destinations from which these beers hail mobilize these resources as well and seek to profit from them. An analysis of the contents of tourist communications from three regions reveals the important place of Trappist beers within the promotional strategies of these destinations. These strategies rely upon the heritage elements and the prestige of the Trappist beers to emphasize the specificity and uniqueness of the areas. All of these strategies thus attest to a desire to utilize local food products as socio-territorial emblems at the service of communication and marketing materials that accentuate the distinctiveness of the territory and highlight its uniqueness as a tourist destination. This use of Trappist beers to promote tourism helps construct or reinforce social and territorial representations, and appeals to the imagination with images traditionally associated with rural areas; it also help foster a certain kind of tourism discourse. As we will see in the next section, the Trappist beers and the destinations studied help identify these areas with tourism and participate in promoting their renown. As a result, the tourist valorization of Trappist beers not only contributes to modifying the symbolic values associated with these products, but also to the tourist appeal of the areas in question.

## **THE TOURIST PERCEPTION**

After having demonstrated, via the analysis of tourist and culinary guides, that beers are intimately linked to food-related representations and images associated with Belgium, we will study the place occupied by food resources, and more specifically by Trappist beers, in the tourist perception and also the influence of the presence of these monastic products on the choice of these destinations.

The first part of the questionnaire concerned the way they looked upon the regions they had visited in their free time. This was an open question, formulated as follows: “In your opinion, which characteristics represent this region the most?” The people who were asked this question could give four answers.

**Tables 1:** Territorial tourist representations

Local food products	239
Abbeys, monks, monasteries	335
Cultural activities	152
Strolls, rambles, rides	199
Ambience: peace and tranquillity	187
Total references	1112

Locally-produced food in general – and more specifically beers produced in Trappist monasteries – occupies a significant place in the way the tourists we interviewed perceived these regions. Indeed, by analysing the various terms mentioned spontaneously by tourists as illustrations of the character of these destinations, it became clear that “local products” category has quite a significant role to play, as out of the 1112 references, 239 specifically related to this category. Furthermore, by focusing the position occupied by beers produced in Trappist monasteries within the 239 terms used for “local products” category, 180 references specifically related to this category.

The tourist perception of these regions is currently based mainly on socio-cultural and natural elements and on the sporting activities carried out here. Responses relating to perceptions of these areas reveal that these destinations are also strongly associated with the presence of Trappist abbeys (335 terms of the 1112 cited by the tourists). However, although Trappist food products are perceived as being emblematic of the regions visited by these tourists, they had little influence overall on the choice of destination made by the tourists interviewed and seem mainly to have been an extra element in the visit. Indeed, 179 out of 278 people (60% of the people questioned) said that they had not been influenced very much, if at all, by the presence of these products, 53 of the 278 people questioned said that they had been “quite influenced” and 46 “completely influenced” by the presence of these products. Whereas until the middle of the twentieth century these monasteries were mainly visited for religious reasons, nowadays we can see that in secular western societies people visit these sites as tourists.

Monasteries are attractive places from the point of view of tourism as, apart from their signification and religious dimension, they are interesting in terms of architecture, history and the natural landscape on which they were built. The attraction of this type of place is part of a huge movement to increase tourism and preserve the heritage of religious sites and objects. Finally, among the aspects that make these places attractive, we should mention the significant influence the monks seem to possess.

Indeed, in the course of the numerous visits we made to the various Trappist monasteries, we noted that the monks themselves are a great source of attraction, and for the same reasons as the other aspects associated with the history and heritage of these places.

Thus the attractiveness of these religious food and drink products for tourists cannot be separated from the other components which tourists associate with the abbeys, which crystallise a wide range of interests and images.

## **CONCLUSION**

In light of the great enthusiasm for both tangible and intangible local materials that can be observed both in Belgium and in other European countries, local agrifood products are presently the object of strategies and campaigns aimed at enhancing their value for tourism. As numerous blogs, TV programmes, cookery books and tourist guides on Belgium attest, beer and in particular monastic beer plays an important role within the food imagery and cultural identities associated with this country. Until recently these products were considered solely from a commercial standpoint as regards the agrifood sector.

An analysis of the discursive strategies found in these publications and other forms of mediation regarding Trappist beers reveals processes of authentication conducted through the

production of images and discourses that place particular emphasis on respect for ancestral methods and local know-how transmitted from one generation to the next, as well as on the geographical roots of these comestibles. The communication strategies employed in the process are further reinforced by the emphasis placed on the identity of the beer producers, that is, the Trappist monks.

The reputation for excellence enjoyed by Trappist beer rests on a construction of symbolic values based largely on the social identity of its producers. In this sense, and following the logic of advertising rhetoric, which privileges appearances, it is the monastic habit that helps construct the references and qualities associated with Trappist beer and thus endows it with significant added value. Through abundant communications emphasizing both the traditional and the modern, as well as the socio-cultural and geographic attributes of Trappist beers, the monks employ strategies of differentiation within a brewing industry and a tourist sector that are particularly competitive, thereby participating in shaping the territorial representations of these destinations.

Although Trappist beers are part of the imaginative world and representations of the territories studied here, surveys conducted among tourists suggest that the latter do not visit a given place specifically because of the presence of those products. As with other local agrifood products, the Trappist beers from Chimay, Orval and Rochefort thus appear first and foremost as an additional attraction during a visit, whereas the chief appeal of those regions lies in their natural features, religious and architectural heritage and leisure-time activities they offer.

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