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Kitchen counter tourism: experiencing the monastic world through cooking

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How does viewing and reproducing recipes from a cooking show impact potential tourists' sense of self and place? This paper is concerned with the creation of tourism imaginaries through the experience of monastic food by recreating recipes shared on a popular monastic cooking show in French, *La Cuisine des Monastères* on KTO TV, available on Youtube. This allows us to consider an example of applied armchair tourism, where viewers share in the monastic experience by cooking and eating like a monk or nun and therefore experience an 'Other' way of living through their kitchen and plate. Monasteries communicate very little (Paquier & Morin Delerm 2019), living a lot up to the imagination. Moreover, they are utopias (Séguy 2014) and heterotopias (Foucault 1984), places where elements of the dominant fast-paced capitalist culture are reversed, allowing dichotomies like sacred/profane, authentic/inauthentic, ancient/modern, slow/fast to form in people's minds - providing a fertile ground for the construction of tourism imaginaries (Graburn and Salazar 2014) that explain the growing interest in monastic life and apply to different elements of monastic life, including food. In *La Cuisine des Monastères*, the recipes are infused with powerful, heartfelt storytelling about monastic life, providing a window into the monastic world and cloister; establishing credibility; and creating a sense of intimacy with the audience. Food being both matter and symbol, it connects us to both the physical world based on sense-impressions and the spiritual world. By reproducing the recipes, viewers engage in an embodied experience of armchair tourism - experiencing smells, tastes, sensations that the monastic cooks experience themselves, allowing them to travel to the monastic world by *becoming* a member of the monastic community. Naturally, the creation of a strong tourist imagining through sensory experiences from afar heavily contributes to the representations people have of a place, like collection pieces of a 'musée imaginaire' (Malraux 1947), a staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973) that monasteries are weighed up against, especially if this experience translates into physical travel. This paper contributes to the research on monasteries, monastic food, tourism imaginings and the experiential aspect of armchair tourism. Drawing on comments from viewers who have reproduced recipes as well as semi-structured interviews with viewers and producers of the show, I explore the relationship between this form of embodied armchair tourism and the construction of tourist imaginings around monastic food and monasteries.