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CROSS-BORDER CUISINE: FOOD CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN THE *EUREGIO*

Abstract

This paper explores the shared past and segregated present of Low German food culture in the *Euregio*, Europe's first Euregion. Specifically, it highlights the cross-border history of heritage foods such as *Heißwecken* or *krentenwegge*, *Mettwurst* or *metworst*, and *M/moos* in Westmünsterland (region Westphalia) and the adjacent Dutch region of Twente.

Background

Borders and languages are formal and informal dividing lines between territories, jurisdictions, and peoples.[1] The Germany-Netherlands border is about 570 km in extent. From the North Sea to the tripoint between Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, the dividing line is the result of numerous wars, disputes, agreements and treaties such as the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815). In the 19th and 20th centuries, 'old' and new nations used language and food to display the uniqueness and authenticity of their territory. In the German-Dutch borderland, nation-building divided the 'shared experiences' and foodways of ethnic groups.[2] After World War II, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany sought to prevent war, destitution, and famine through unification. In the wake of the Treaty of Rome (1957), the nations established the

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1 Reference to this study: Karin Vaneker: Cross-border Cuisine: Food Culture and Heritage in the *Euregio*. In Anikó Báti and Patricia Lysaght (eds.): *Living Eating Habits, Revitalized Foodways and the Concepts of Tradition and Food Heritage.* Budapest: ELTE RCH Institute of Ethnology – Museum of Ethnography, 2025. pp. 177–190.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61380/978-963-567-084-0-9

2 Pekelder, J. – Simal, J.L. – Stienen, D.B. and Tarafás, I.: '*State-building and Nationalism in Modern History (ca. 1800–1900)*', in J. Hansen ed.: *The European Experience. A Multi-Perspective History of Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2023), 275–284.

European Economic Community (EEC). In 1958 the German-Dutch *Euregio* became Europe's first cross-border initiative to unify people, communities, and regions. Since the inception of the European Union (EU) (1993), similar initiatives have established over 100 'Euregions' in 27 EU member states and their neighbouring countries. Among other things, these frameworks aim to safeguard and protect food heritage, but they commonly fail to acknowledge that transnational communities share the language of food. Or, as an EEC policy brief states, 'Food heritage does not reflect national borders.'[3]

History

Today, the *Euregio* encompasses 129 municipalities and regional governments. Since 1985, its headquarters are located at the Gronau-Enschede border crossing, between the regions Westphalia and Twente. Gronau is the second biggest city in Westmünsterland with a population of about 50,000, while the adjacent Enschede is Twente's largest city with over 160,000 residents. The transnational history of Westmünsterland and Twente is reflected in their natural environment, linguistic heritage, and foodways. The rather flat and rural area is part of the European Sand Belt, a formerly glaciated area with widespread areas of ground moraine and outwash. Early farming emerged during the Neolithic and included hunting and fishing, animal husbandry, and small patches of primitive cereals in forests. From the Iron Age until the start of the Middle Ages, forest farming was common, with foliage and 'tree hay' from ash *(Fraxinus)* and ivy *(Hedera helix)* used as animal fodder. From the start of the Common Era, cereals such as rye, spelt, and oats were grown on arable land and domestic animals grazed in meadows. Cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, and goats were fed hay as winter fodder. Until the late Middle Ages, settlement pressure and deforestation resulted in a landscape scattered with raised bogs and wetlands, with meadows on dry and wet soils, winter rye on better-drained soils, buckwheat on the poorest land, and commercial oak forests for timber, fuel, hunting, and pannage.[4] Until modern times, the rural area heavily depended on subsistence

3 European Policy Brief, CoHERE: 'Food as Heritage' (European Commission, Ares [2019]1263186 – 25/02/2019).

4 Hüppe, J. and Pott, R.: 'Die Hudelandschaften Nordwestdeutschlands' ('Wood pasture landscapes of northwest Germany'), *Abhandlungen aus dem Westfälischen Provinzial-Museum für Naturkunde* 53 1/2 (1991); Beinlich, B. – van Rehmen, K. – Hill, B.T. and Poschlod, P.: 'Das Schwein als Wegbegleiter des Menschen – ein kulturhistorischer Überblick' ('The pig as a companion of man – a cultural-historical overview'), *NNA-Berichte* 18/2 (2005), 4–11.

farming based on labour from humans and livestock, with variable annual yields.[5] Initially based on the local production of flax, the textile industry flourished from the mid-19th century until well into the 20th century, and common cross-border activities included corporate co-operation, trade, labour migration, and smuggling. Since the decline of the textile industry in the 1970s and 1980s, the border has lost its significance as a dividing line. Simultaneously, the revival of economic, social, and cultural relationships has resulted in a daily stream of trucks carrying typical Dutch and German agricultural goods and foods across the *Euregio* border. Each day, numerous inhabitants of the region cross the border for study, work, shopping and leisure. As a result, most border crossers are familiar with each other's language, culture, and foodways. Still, their shared food heritage is commonly not acknowledged, with dishes defined either as German or Dutch, Twents, or Westphalian.[6]

He who governs the territory decides its foodways

Westmünsterland and Twente's shared documented history begins with the Saxon Wars (772–804). The forced conversion of the Saxons to Christianity by Charlemagne (c.742–814) drastically altered the lives of the Low-Germanic-speaking peoples. The Frankish ruler partitioned his realm into missionary districts, governmental entities, and dioceses, including Utrecht (est. c.777) and Münster (est. c.805). The bishops of these dioceses were answerable to the metropolitan archbishop of the Cologne ecclesiastical province. The Westmünsterland-Twente area is first mentioned in Carolingian documents of abbeys and monasteries, including from Prüm, Werden, and Damenstift Vreden, which kept records of their properties and revenue from lands, farms, and estates. While the Saxons assimilated into their new faith with the sacrament of the Eucharist and the custom of saying grace for their daily bread, innovations such as three-field rotation, cattle power, and metal technologies improved cereal harvests and contributed to a 'cerealization' of high medieval

5 Beek, R. van – Gouw-Bouman, M.T.I.J. and Bos, J.A.A.: 'Mapping regional vegetation developments in Twente (the Netherlands) since the Late Glacial and evaluating contemporary settlement patterns', *Netherlands Journal of Geosciences* 94 (2015), 229–255;Meures-Balke, J. and Kalis, A.J.: 'Landnutzung in Prähistorischer und Historischer Zeit im Vredener Land' ('Land use in prehistoric and historical times in the Vredener Land'), *Beiträge des Heimatsvereins Vreden zur Landes und Volkskunde* 69 (2005), 83–90.

6 Porciani, I. ed.: *Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2020), 4–6.

society.[7] With bread and wine and commensality at the core of religion, the Christian liturgical calendar with abstinence, fasting, and feasting had a profound effect on eating habits and the consumption of gruel, pancakes and breads.[8] By the High Middle Ages, Westmünsterland and Twente formed the border between the prince-bishoprics of Münster and Utrecht. To till the fields, peasants used the plow, and cereal harvests were typically ground in water-powered mills. Grain's storability allowed for the emergence of towns with artisan and merchant guilds and the expansion of the Hanseatic League or Hanse (c.1158–1669). This transnational trade network influenced the development of the Low German language and the culinary traditions of northern Europe with commodities such as salt, wheat, herring, and spices, and products such as beer, wine, and butter.[9]

Bad Language?

The earliest form of Low German, Old Saxon (Old Low German), is generally regarded as closely related to Old English (Anglo-Frisian). Old Saxon writing was mainly restricted to monasteries until about 1050, and was first written down in monastic texts such as *Genesis* and *Heliand*, a poem narrating the life of Jesus.[10] From around 1200 onwards, Old Saxon evolved into Middle Low German, gradually becoming the lingua franca of the Hanse. By the 15th century, the forerunner of Modern Low German dominated nearly all writing and reduced the use of Latin to the internal sphere of the church and science. After the Protestant Reformation and fall of the Hanse, High German slowly replaced written Low German; by the 18th century (Age of Enlightenment), Low German had lost all status and was considered the tongue of backward peasants.[11] In the Dutch Republic (1579–1795), the restraints of Calvinist philosophy banned eating from public life and reinforced a plain and frugal diet. Concurrently, Holland's Golden Age provided fertile ground for a united

7 Bartlett, R.: *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 152–156.

8 Albala, K. and Eden, T. eds.: *Food & Faith in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7–19; Jones, M.: *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 251–274.

9 Jahnke, C.: 'The Baltic Trade', in Harreld, D. J. ed.: *A Companion to the Hanseatic League* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 194–240.

10 Breitbarth, A.: 'Negation in the history of Low German and Dutch', in D. Willis, C. Lucas, and A. Breitbarth, eds., *The History of Negation in the Languages of Europe and the Mediterranean, volume I: case studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 190–238.

11 Breitbarth: 'Negation in the history of Low German and Dutch'; Langer, N., 'Low German', *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 16/4 (2004), 281–301.

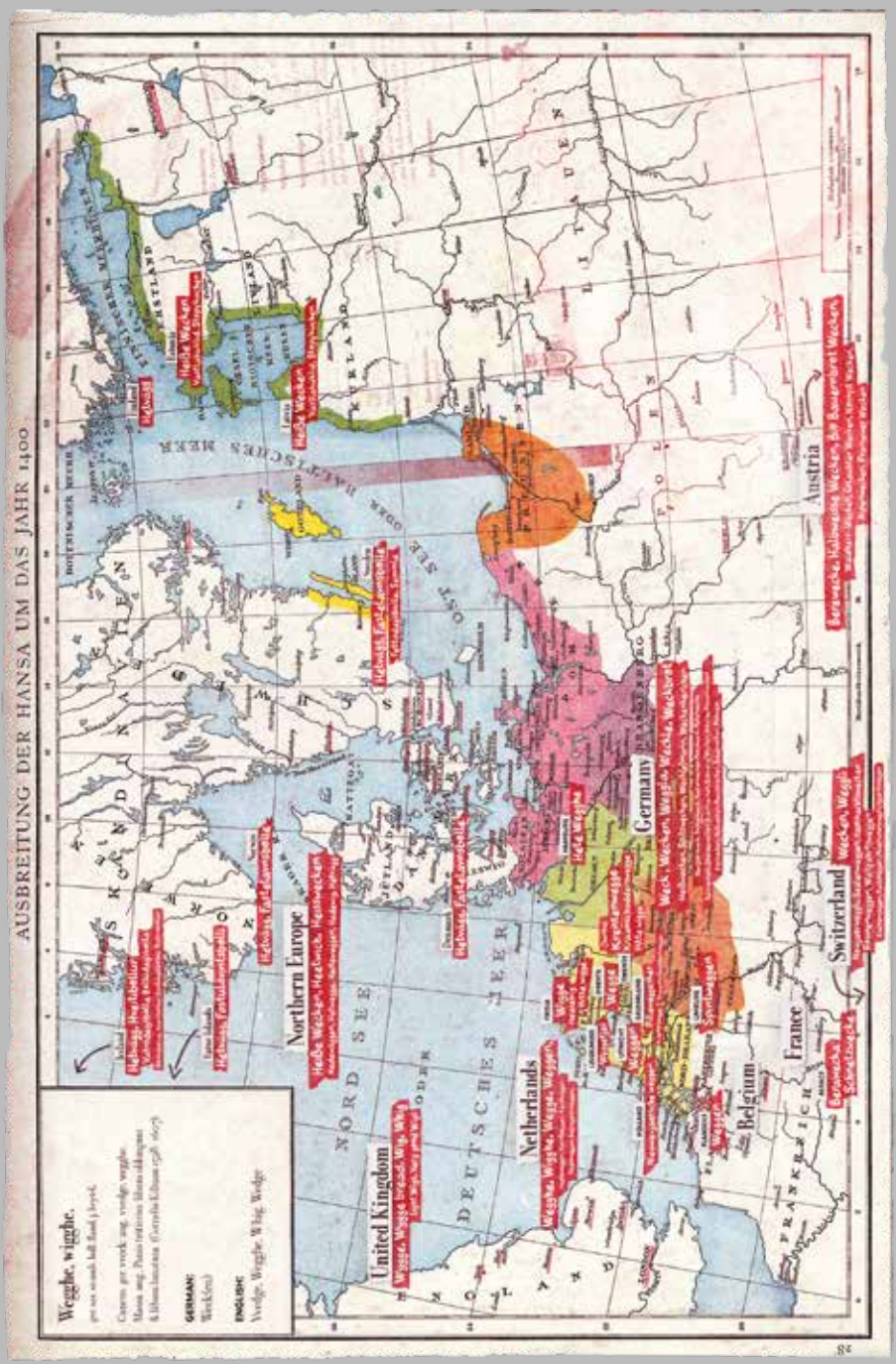

Fig. 1. From 'wegghe, whigghe' to Weck(en) and wegde. (Illustration: Frank Bemthuis)

Dutch language. After the defeat of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna created new German and Dutch nations. German nation-building put Germanness back on agendas and was rooted in medieval traditions, including processions, masses, banquets, and feeding the poor. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, the Belgian secession (1830) resulted in a national crisis about Dutchness and an expansion of economic, scientific, and cultural ties with the Germans. The great social changes in the 19th century created opportunities for German and Dutch middle-class women to provide domestic education. The multitude of recipes from elite cookbooks and oral tradition were written down in text and household cookbooks. Men lent prestige to elite cuisines, such as French culinary culture, with historical and linguistic descriptions of banquets, food, and produce. Cuisines that did not meet the standards were labelled as primitive or backward. Even before World War II, Low German culture was embraced by German and Dutch pan-Germanists and folklorists as being part of the greater Germanic ideology and National Socialist context. Post war, the ideas, myths, and beliefs became firmly rooted in culture and institutions.[12] From the 1960s onwards, institutionalised language purism led to a massive erosion of Low German culture and dialects. However, since 1992, Low Saxon is protected and promoted by a European treaty, and nowadays it is spoken by about 1.8 million Dutch and 2.5 million Germans. Nonetheless, the debate about its low status continues.[13]

Low German culinary heritage

From the 1600s onwards, large numbers of Protestant Low Germans migrated to the New World for religious or economic reasons.[14] Migrants speaking Hamburger and other Low German dialects contributed many words and foods to the all-American cuisine, including cake, cook, cookie, hamburger, headcheese, mettwurst, waffle, and wiggs or wedges.[15] Cuisines in Westmünsterland and Twente were similarly

12 Ginkel, R. van and Henkes, B.: 'On peasants and "primitive peoples": moments of rapprochement and distance between folklore studies and anthropology in the Netherlands', *Ethnos* 68/1 (2003), 112–134.

13 Adler, A.: 'Language, or Dialect, That Is the Question. How Attitudes Affect Language Statistics Using the Example of Low German', *Languages* 6 (2021); Braat, E.: 'Low Saxon in the Netherlands: Efforts put into protecting, promoting and stimulating the language after signing covenant "Nedersaksisch"' (Tilburg University, M.A. Thesis, 2020).

14 Vaneker, K.: 'Mrs. Vanderbilt's Puffert: How Humble Dutch Fare Climbed Up the American Social Ladder', *Food, Culture & Society* 17/3 (2014), 451–472.

15 Long, L. M.: 'American Cuisine, Existence Of', in Thompson, P.B. and Kaplan, D.M. eds.: *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics* (New York: Springer, 2014), 121–129.

shaped by geography, dialects, conflicts, and religion. For centuries, eating habits such as praying for the daily bread or gruel, and monotonous one-pot meals of local grains, cabbages, root vegetables and a little pork, ruled the rural area. Midwinter, Carnival, and Easter feasts included sausages, pancakes, eggs, waffles, and refined breads. During the Reformation, the life of peasants and commoners deteriorated through epidemics, bad harvests, spiking cereal prices, and armed conflicts. In 1592 Pope Clement VIII erected the Holland Mission to protect the Catholic faith and, from 1672 to 1678, the prince-bishop of Münster waged war with his Dutch Calvinist arch-enemy. He built Catholic mission stations along Westmünsterland's border to supply religious care for Dutch Catholics. The downfall of the Dutch Republic in 1795 brought about religious freedom, but in the newly-minted kingdom, institutional discrimination against Catholics continued. From 1848 to 1984, a law banned public Catholic processions, funerals, and feasts such as Carnival, Easter, and Midwinter.[16] Simultaneously, quintessential foods and dishes such as *Heißwecken* or *krentenwegge*, *Mettwurst* or *metworst*, and *M/moos* came to reflect national, regional, religious, personal, and commercial values. The entangled histories of the pastries or breads, pork sausages, and borecole or curly kale shows that ideas about food, faith, and language do not reflect borders. The intensity of German-Dutch encounters shows the fluidity of borderland cuisines and on-going developments such as globalisation, localisation, and heritagization.

Twentse Krentenwegge and Heisswecken

Highly abstract philosophical questions, such as transubstantiation, dominated the Reformation. The transformation of consecrated wheat bread into the body of Christ is invisible, yet the question of faith caused a split between Catholics and Protestants who saw the body of Christ as nourishment for spiritual life. Faith also drove a wedge between Easter and Christmas loaves and rolls with and without currants, but these issues did not hinder their consumption, nor the spread of this culinary legacy across the Hanse. In the entire Hanseatic region and beyond, the Low German word *wig* or *wegge* unites a large family of pastries, breads, and rolls. From an elite bun or small cake of fine flour, the *wig*, *wigge*, or *wegge* became a wedge-shaped cake and evolved into pastry for both the bourgeoisie and the urban and rural poor.[17] Since the late Middle Ages, *Heißwecken* (lit. 'hot wedges') are sweet rolls, eaten warm to mark the

16 <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Processieverbod (Procession ban)> accessed 25 April 2024.
17 Kiliaen, C.: *Etymologicum teutonicae linguae* (Den Haag: Mouton, Den Haag, 1599, ed. 1972).

Fig. 2. Twentse Ros & 'wegge' | Sachsenross & Wecken. (Illustration: Frank Bemthuis)

end of Carnival and the start of pre-Easter fasting in northern Europe. Despite Calvinists denouncing the pleasures of commensality, by the 19th century, currant rolls and giant currant loaves had become a popular pastry in rural Twente. Traditionally served at festive occasions such as births, the *Twentse krentenwegge* became a well-known bread across the Netherlands in 1938, when a Twentse baker brought a loaf to Queen Juliana upon the birth of her daughter Beatrix of the Netherlands. As the regional symbol par excellence, since July 2023, the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage recognises its significance for Dutch culture, tourism, and government sectors.[18]

'Short prayer, long Mettwurst'

The traditional Low German saying 'Kort Gebet, lange Mettwurst' sums up the fantasies and dreams of a perfect life without long prayers and short sausages. Traditionally, the Shrovetide's 'vastel-avent' ('fast-evening') is celebrated with pancakes with mettwurst. From the 15th century onwards, the sausage from chopped pork meat is listed as the Low German compound word 'Metworst' or 'Mettwurst'.[19] In *Praktisches Kochbuch* ('Practical Cookbook', 1849), the German-Dutch author Henriette Davidis (1801–1876) explicitly stated that Westphalian Mett- or Bratwurst is made of marbled pork mixed with bits of fatty pork cut into small dices or cubes, not chopped or minced, to keep the sausages intended for smoking juicier. Up to 1942, her bestseller was reprinted 62 times, and from 1876 onward, translations of her reference work were adapted to the cultural environments of the Netherlands and the United States.[20] In Davidis' time, 'Met/t', 'Mettwurst" and 'Bratwurst' were already a large German family of chopped meats and fresh and smoked sausages. In the Netherlands 'braadworst' became the Dutch word for fresh sausages, while the term 'boerenmetworst' is used to highlight the farmers' *(boeren)* custom to smoke sausages. Both in Westmünsterland and Twente the word *Moos* means a dish of borecole, potatoes and (met)worst, but its preparation is divided by the German-Dutch border: in Westmünsterland ingredients like borecole and potatoes are recognisable, while in Twente they are mashed into a mash together,

18 Krentewegge from Twente <www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl/en/twentse-krentenwegge> accessed 25 April 2024.

19 Grzega, J.: 'Meat and Meta-Linguistic Sources – European Examples of Achieving Better Etymological Chronologies', *Journal for EuroLinguistiX* 17 (2020), 15–21.

20 Heinzelmann, U.: *Beyond Bratwurst: A History of Food in Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Fig 3. Moos (L. Brassica oleracea) & Mettwurst. (Illustration: Frank Bemthuis)

following the Dutch 'stamppot' habit of mashing potatoes with vegetables in one pot. In fact, 'stamppot 'boerenkool' has become an iconic national dish of the Netherlands, and a symbol of its bourgeois cuisine.[21] The humble hotchpotch[22] of mashed potatoes and borecole with a smoked sausage on top, is believed to be of medieval Holland origin, but in the confederal Dutch Republic, Holland was a sovereign state with Hollandic dialects. Regarding Dutch and English claims that their superior raw materials need no elaborate cooking techniques, Stephen Mennell concluded that 'the argument does not hold water'.[23] The desire to have a culinary identity in the Dutch kingdom shows that wishful thinking and food fantasies can result in confusion, incorrect chronologies and interpretations of Dutch cuisine. The national cuisine of the Netherlands was heavily influenced by fundamental distrust and puritanical views on culinary refinement – unlike in Germany, where the greater variety of cuisines and dishes have been absorbed into an overarching food culture and 'German' cuisine.[24] The food culture in the Low German borderland of Twente and Westmünsterland reflects the history of nations, languages, and borders. The marketing and promotion of their intangible culinary heritage as being uniquely Dutch, German, Twents or Westphalian, supports banal nationalism.[25]

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21 Mennell, S.: 'Eten in Nederland' ('Eating in the Netherlands'), *De Gids* 150/2–3 (1987), 199–207.

22 The overlapping term for 'mash pot' is 'hotchpotch'. *Stamppot* lit. means 'mash pot'; it is a new Dutch word, therefore people claim that it is of unknown origin. Also the Belgian Dutch word *stoemp*, always means 'mash pot'. In the Netherlands, *hutspot* ('hotchpotch') refers to a 'mash pot' that is always prepared with potatoes, carrots and onions. But the Belgian *hutspot* is not mashed. *Stamppot* and *stoemp* refer to anything mashed into potatoes or mashed potatoes is a 'mash pot' […] except for *hutspot*. Funny and very true: across the border, an older female caterer said: 'I was fed up with my Dutch clients, because all they wanted to eat was "baby food", aka "mash pot". "We" want to see the ingredients!' Re: one-pot dishes (stew, *Eintopf*), in most food cultures seeing the ingredients matters! In the Netherlands, very often, the ingredients are barely recognisable.

23 Mennell: 'Eten in Nederland' ('Eating in the Netherlands').

24 Heinzelmann: *Beyond Bratwurst: A History of Food in Germany.*

25 European Policy Brief, CoHERE, 1–14.

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