

Grażyna Betlej-Furman

What is Dzikie Stoły (Wild Tables)?

Dzikie Stoły is a kind of a restaurant placed outdoors in different places. Every year we choose the best wild place in the Low Beskids. Every year we try to change the location. We bring tables and items people can sit on. Blankets, cubes of hay and straw, stumps. Then we bring food. The day of the event there is a lot of guests. The weather is always good. And then it happens - Afternoon filled with food, music, dance and workshops.

Why Dzikie Stoły takes place outdoors?

Because it has it in its name, wild. It has to be in a wild place, in a wild way. There is quite a lot of food and people. We don't have a room that would be big enough for all the guests but outside there are no limits.

What does one have to eat to feel like in Beskids?

That's a tough question. We all have our own cuisine, each one a bit different. Albeit we all use local products. Goat and cow dairy, fruits and vegetables we grow ourselves. This is food that grew here and was given to us by our animals.

What makes your cuisine stand out among the others?

We are the only agrotourism farm here who cook only vegetarian food. All preserves are handmade by us, we produce our own goat cheese. Whatever is on the table can't be bought in any store.

Is the place we eat in important?

Of course! Sometimes our guests ask for the recipe for something, make it at home and tell us it tasted different. There are few reasons for that. Here, we all sit together, have plenty of time. Food is ready, usually cooked on fire. You can smell it since the morning.

How much food do you need to feed all the guests?

We never can tell. It's always a huge problem. We want to prepare enough for everybody. This year we had about a hundred litres of soup alone. The table for cakes was four metres long. We all know that everything tastes better outdoors.

Who are the guests?

When we announce another edition of the Dzikie Stoły, tickets are sold out very quickly. People who attended past editions often come back. A lot of people come from near cities but during the Dzikie Stoły there are people from all across Poland as well.

Michał Kurek

Can you tell us what one can learn from cooking?

Most of all, cooking teaches us self-organisation, having fun, for sure, because it's an important part of cooking. Introduces us to new tastes and helps find our imagination. Often we just throw ingredients into the pot not really knowing what will happen.

Is cooking better than other forms of colleague bonding?

It's hard to say if it's better. Cooking is different. It focuses on cooperation, not rivalry. Preparing the meal together helps people to bond and to find a common language.

You run a Warsaw Culinary University for some time already. How do people react when something's not going well?

I think we all react in the same way. It's frustrating. I notice it during the workshops as well as at home. I'm sometimes frustrated too. We want to see the effects of our work, we get stressed and tense.

What cooking teaches us about work?

I organise those workshops for over a dozen years and that's my sociological observation that cooking teaches cooperation and coping with conflicts. I had the situation that a company booked the workshop and two people were at odds so much that the administrator recommended placing them in two different corners of the room. But after two or three hours those people had started conversating with each other.

Are there any other skills one can acquire during the workshop (except the cooperation) that are useful at the workplace?

Those useful at the workplace are mostly planning and method. While cooking people have to assign responsibilities, follow the recipe and sometimes improvise. So it's planning, self-, team- and time-management

During the workshop is there a time for a little craziness? Of course, participants follow the recipe, but can they add more raisins, change proportions a little?

When I was a kid, I was told to not play with the food. But now I tell people the exact opposite. Play, improvise. And if you want more raisins, add more raisins. Food you prepare is for you to like it. If you have fun making it it's going to taste better in the end. I'm a fan of Thai cuisine and Thais don't use recipes while cooking. They cook according to their taste and mood. If they have a recipe it's ended with 'add spices according to the heart'.

During the workshop, do you only cook or is there a time to sit together, eat the food and share it with each other?

There is no workshop without tasting. We're here not only to learn and spend time together but also to eat what we have prepared. So after all the cooking people should try the food just to remember the taste and maybe try to recreate it later.

What do participants tell after the workshop?

They're very happy, for sure. They have fun, ask about the recipes. During the workshop I don't give people the recipe, they have to listen to what I say and exchange information with one and another. Because sometimes someone won't hear or focus. People tend to remember more this way. I give the recipes at the very end.

What integrates people more? Workshop or feasting at the end?

I think both of those things are very important although the cooking relieves manners. I see how during preparing the food people take off the tie, the jacket and they finally can talk about something else than work-related content. Cooking is associated with home and family so people automatically move onto more private topics. They talk about kids and hobbies. They get to know each other on a completely different level.

Does a one-time workshop give long-term benefits?

Sure. We always learn something. Everything, even if we experience it only one time, gives us something for the future. And while cooking we learn how to mix the flavours or how to deal with those appearing emotions.

Do participants know what they are going to cook?

Not always. Sometimes they do but usually not because it's a surprise or a present. Some people don't even know where they are going and some know the topic but they find out the details when they're here. For example, there are tourists who come and know that they will be making pierogis. But they sometimes don't even know how exactly do they look. Or coworkers integration when people come knowing that there will be a workshop or a specific cuisine but usually they have no idea how the dish will look like. The process of discovering it tends to be quite nice.

Was there something that surprised you during one of your workshops?

Every workshop is a surprise. Every time there is something new, new people. I learn a lot myself. People add something from themselves creating the whole new world of flavours.

Were you cooking as a child?

I really wanted to cook since I was a little boy. My grandma used to throw me out of the kitchen because the help of a three-year-old is rather more mess than the help. But cooking was always a hobby of mine.

What would you tell to people who work as PRs to convince them that the culinary workshop is a great opportunity for the company?

This information should be directed not only to the PR but also to the human resources department because relationships between the colleagues and teams are worth strengthening. On one of the workshops, we even were showing the Japanese system of production management on the example of making pierogis. It's also an offer to the sales department because one can invite a client to the workshop like that to meet them on a different level or to the marketing department because it's the great advertising for the company.

Can food change something in life?

Food has changed my life. I was working in a completely different industry for a while and cooking was only a hobby but it became my way of life. Also, food connects people. On the first date with my fiancée we were eating from one plate.

As you cook yourself, what is your favourite meal?

I like Asian cuisine the most. Rice and everything added to it is the base of my alimentation.

Thank you a lot.

Mateusz from Conflict Kitchen

Hello, my name is Mateusz and I'm the main chef in the kitchen of the Conflict Kitchen, the place that is a foundation and a restaurant in Warsaw centre.

Who cook in your restaurant?

We have a pretty big group of cooks from all over the world. Here are with us Sultan from Afganistan, Sasha from Krasnodar, Zargan from Chechenya and me from Poland. We also have a lot of temporary cooks so it's hard to mention everyone.

What role does sooking plays in Conflict Kitchen?

It's mostly about the integration. Cuisine, food and cooking is so common language that it breaks the language and social barriers. I think that cuisines biggest role is strengthening the ties and educating people about other cultures.

Can cuisine tell us much about the culture of a specific region?

Of course. I think it's one of our main goals.

So we can tell that the table connects people.

For sure.

Are there any situations when this table tears apart?

It depends on people who sit at this table but I think it mostly connects people.

Who are your customers in Conflict Kitchen restaurant?

A lot of different people. Starting from people working in the nearest corporations, through the people who are linked to foundations about human's rights, to the people who smelled the food from the street and decided to come in.

Can one change something in life thanks to the food?

I think that the Conflict Kitchen is a very good example. A lot of people who were cooking here, who were new in Poland now do different things. They have learnt the language and got back to their previous professions.

What's the hardest in running the foundation?

The hardest thing is conducting a catering business. It is associated with a lot of adventures. For example, some time ago our kitchen has been flooded for three weeks. Also, the legal side of running a restaurant is not the easiest.

What do you consider your success?

I think it's the fact that we have been functioning for four years now.