

Article

Traditional Food Vendor-Producer Innovation Capabilities

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Abstract: Nowadays, introducing innovations is treated as a necessity to ensure market survival. However, this may be difficult, especially for food entrepreneurs whose innovations are strongly connected with tradition. The main aim of this study was to assess the innovation abilities and potential of traditional food producers in the context of the classic dilemma of innovation-and-tradition interplay. The surveyed food producers were from five Polish voivodeships belonging to the European Culinary Heritage Network. The study conducted 70 semi-structured interviews. The respondents were divided into two groups: the innovative and non-innovative groups. The statistical significance of the differences between the two groups was tested using a two-independent-samples *t* test. A comparison revealed significantly different average results for the following variables: general managerial education, business duration, sources of knowledge about traditions, profits and earnings, and own product brand. For the remaining variables (employment, sales range, financial capital sources, business goals in total, and own business), no significant differences were found between the mean results. Both tested hypotheses were verified to be valid. The vendors-producers of traditional food in this study showed innovative abilities and untapped innovation potential.

Keywords: food festival; traditional food producer; food tradition; innovation



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1. Introduction

The unpredictable, uncertain, and rapidly changing environment forces modern enterprises to rethink and adapt their operations to ensure their survival while meeting customers' tastes and maintaining the high quality of the products they offer. The issue of innovation as a strategy for long-term market survival is often raised. Innovations are defined differently—depending on the discipline they concern. Therefore, Baregheh et al. [1] proposed a multidisciplinary definition—according to which, innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organisations transform ideas into new or improved products, service, or processes in order to advance, compete, and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace. In accordance with Stanisławski and Lisowska [2], the innovation potential and the ability of its use for the company's development, referred to as innovation capacity, have a direct impact on the level of business innovation. This potential is the sum of the resources inside the company and the external resources to which the company has access.

Despite the importance of innovation to maintain a position in the market, not all enterprises introduce innovative solutions. Hence, researchers are interested in the differences and similarities between innovative and non-innovative enterprises. Hilkevics and Stefenberga [3] emphasise that the specificity of innovative business is its connection with academic activities. Personnel management is an important success factor in a non-innovative business, and in an innovative business, it has become the main success factor

(due to greater risk and pressure). The administrative cycle consists of the same stages in both groups of enterprises. However, due to adapting to the changing environment, innovative enterprises often formulate tasks for short periods. Non-innovative enterprises operate mainly on the basis of long-term plans. Differences in financial management are primarily associated with higher risk and greater profit for innovative businesses. Radomska and Sołoducho-Pelc [4] have a similar opinion, emphasising that the factor inhibiting the development of enterprises is the decreasing tendency to take risks. In the research of Lesáková et al. [5], both innovation leaders and non-innovative enterprises perceive financial resources as the most important factor in innovative activity. In financial terms, de Carvalho et al. [6] indicate the main difference between innovative and non-innovative enterprises. This is higher efficiency of innovative companies, for which it means the ability to better withstand periods of crisis. Undoubtedly, the lack of financial resources limits the innovative abilities of enterprises, which is why public support is important in this respect. However, innovative enterprises seem to need support for investments in training, and non-innovative enterprises—for investments in software [7].

According to Platero-Jaime et al. [8], the entrepreneur's socio-demographic factors do not differentiate innovative and non-innovative enterprises to a significant extent. Differences between these groups result primarily from factors related to the organisation and operation of the enterprise. Lesáková et al. [5] present similar findings, pointing out that without a well-created vision and clearly formulated goals, innovative activity is limited; therefore, innovation management is part of the business strategy of innovation leaders, while non-innovators focus on other tasks. In addition, Gallardo and Scammahorn [9] emphasise that innovative entrepreneurs are much more sensitive to location, and especially to communication accessibility.

Introducing innovation can be difficult and create tensions in enterprises with an established tradition for which innovation is the core. Moreover, additional barriers to introducing innovations in these enterprises may be their size (too small enterprises), their non-managerial nature (problems in the cooperation and networking of various industries), and the owner's age (with new generations being more inclined to innovative activities) [10–12]. In addition, family businesses appear to be in a privileged position when it comes to innovating on the basis of tradition because their internal nature offers opportunities to establish, maintain, and nurture links with the past. Therefore, family businesses provide an excellent context for explaining the opportunities underlying innovation through traditional strategies and identifying the management practices and solutions that non-family businesses can learn to innovate successfully [13].

A specific group of producers in the food sector consists of traditional food producers. This is due to, among others, the characteristics of traditional food, which are understood as products produced by residents using traditional production methods and recipes [14]. This production method is considered sustainable [15]. Traditional food producers are usually small companies whose market survival is challenged by competition. They compete not only with other SMEs but also with large food-producing corporations. Their functioning is largely based on a kind of dialogue with consumers who are increasingly aware of nutrition [16,17]. In relation to traditional food producers, forms of sales are an important element that connects with customers. Food festivals are of great importance as platforms for presenting traditional food products, enabling direct contact between producers and consumers [18–21]. It should be emphasised that for some vendors-producers of traditional food, festivals are often the main place for selling products and the only place for some producers. From this perspective, food festivals support not only the development of traditional food products but also local development [22–25]. Moreover, food festivals fit into the concept of sustainable development by shortening the food supply chain, building consumer awareness or promoting local resources, and supporting tradition and culture [26–29].

Minarelli et al. [30] indicated the need for further research on the innovation of SMEs in the food sector, particularly on the issue of cooperation as a determinant of

innovation and in relation to a better understanding of interactions related to innovation. De Massis et al. [13] identified several research gaps referring to innovation through tradition, including the need to take into account various sources of knowledge from the past and their impact on product innovations and to examine the micro-foundations of the possibilities of innovation through tradition and the factors influencing the possibilities of innovation through tradition between different enterprises. Banterle et al. [16] and Gellynck et al. [17] indicated the need for further research on the market orientation of traditional food producers. These research gaps are taken into account in the present article.

Against this background, the aim of this study was to assess the innovation abilities and potential of vendors-producers of traditional food in the context of the classic dilemma of innovation and tradition interplay. On the basis of the literature review, two research questions were formulated:

Q1. What are the main differences between innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food?

Q2. Do non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food have innovation potential and to what extent?

In addition, the paper offers a fertile agenda for enriching the innovation potential of food producers and vendors at food festivals in Poland by formulating a set of practical recommendations and avenues for further development and change. This paper contributes to the literature about food producers' entrepreneurial dilemmas, orientation, and development, and to a wider understanding of the function of food markets and festivals as the main distribution channels for this set of procedures. It also provides proxy information for food market adjustment and change to ongoing challenges related to changes in global food supply chains, which became fragile owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and wars in the Ukraine and Middle East.

The article is organised as follows: Section 2 contains a literature review. Section 3 presents the materials, methods, and research sample. Section 4 describes the results. Section 5 includes a discussion of the results. Section 6 elaborates on the study conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. *The Importance of Tradition for Innovation*

One way to overcome the difficulties arising between tradition and innovation is to treat innovation as an extension of tradition. By improving and renewing traditional processes, firms may be able to maintain their market positions [31]. Although traditions and innovations may be perceived as opposing concepts [32], traditions cannot be considered as a barrier to innovation, but rather as opportunities; traditions play an important role in the process of creating innovations [33]. This is also confirmed by Palmi and Lezzi [34], who suggested that tangible and intangible resources derived from tradition are the driving forces of innovation. De Massis et al. [13] emphasised that rejecting the old and making room for the new can significantly limit the innovative potential of enterprises and prevent the use of the benefits of knowledge acquired in the past. Loyalty to tradition and the pursuit of innovation can help companies develop successful products or services, but they can also hinder organisational growth [35]. However, Vrontis et al. [36] confirmed that the combination of tradition and innovation, resulting in new, improved, or adapted products and processes, is key to achieving and maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage. In particular, family businesses that rely on mature knowledge can use it more effectively to derive value from innovation [37]. This is due to the fact that family businesses have a better ability to manage old knowledge because their conservative nature allows them to establish close and long-term links with tradition, thus better storing, recovering, and using knowledge resources from the past and introducing innovations [33]. This was confirmed by Floris et al. [38], who proved that the source of the success of family businesses in creating innovations is the use of deeply rooted knowledge about family and local traditions. It should be emphasised that firms operating in traditional industries may approach innovation in different ways. Taking into account the target market (local and international)

and local legitimacy (low and high), Floris et al. [38] observed four ways of approaching innovation: radical innovations, embodiment of tradition, reinterpretation of tradition, and retro-innovations. In this way, family businesses have shown that innovations can actually result from tradition.

De Massis et al. [13] developed the concept of a new product innovation strategy called innovation by tradition and distinguished its key components: sources of past knowledge (tradition of the company itself or its territory), forms of future knowledge (raw materials, product marks, production processes, assumptions, values and beliefs), type of product innovation strategy implemented using knowledge from the past (innovation of the functionality or meaning of the product), and key opportunities underlying innovation through tradition (internalisation and reinterpretation, which enable the assimilation and sharing of knowledge in the organisation to create product innovations). Traditions can come from various sources: the company itself, a specific period, the past of the industry, and the destination [39]. The recombination of sources of tradition can contribute to the creation of innovations in the field of products and services, management, processes, and marketing [34]. However, Leroy et al. [40] drew attention to four components regarding the sources of tradition: the temporal component, geographical component, know-how, and the importance. Moreover, examining the sources of innovation in the example of the food sector (fermented meat), the authors noticed that the main innovations were introduced in the technological process, allowing for shortening the production time, saving energy, and reducing the amount of waste and costs. On the basis of research on the traditional carp sector in Poland, Raftowicz and Le Gallic [41] showed a huge innovative potential in the sector, especially in the field of alternative ways of marketing products for small- and medium-sized farms. Guine et al. [42] reported that in the food sector, traditions have an important value, mainly because they are rich in ethnic elements, local ingredients, traditional recipes, and social acts (the act of eating and sharing). Moreover, according to the authors, in the field of innovation through tradition, the food industry is looking for new products that, on the one hand, will follow modern trends and meet the needs of modern consumers and, on the other hand, will retain the valued traditional identity. In addition, according to Rey et al. [43], cooperation (membership in a network/consortium) has a positive impact on the introduction of innovations in the traditional industry, improving operational and financial results and the environment in which the consortium companies operate. However, Dettori's [44] research showed a negative relationship between customer-perceived quality and innovative traditional products in traditional industries embedded in closed contexts. Nevertheless, creating innovations through tradition, which is understood as introducing innovations using old competencies and resources, can bring many benefits [45]. Vallone and Iannone [12] identified the following as the most important benefits of combining tradition and innovation: a long-lasting source of competitive advantage, acquiring and developing skills and abilities through experience, refreshing and repositioning the brand in the market, opportunities for self-analysis, consistency with past and future development planning, and the possibility of searching for new ways of adapting to changing market needs.

2.2. Capabilities and Main Determinants of SME Innovation

With regard to the determinants of innovation, many types can be found in the literature. Many authors refer particularly to small- and medium-sized enterprises. McAdam et al. [46] indicated four main factors that stimulate innovation in small- and medium-sized enterprises: leadership, lifecycle resources for innovation, culture for innovation, and historical prospects for innovation. The main factors of innovation are related to the intervening variables, which are knowledge acquisition and assimilation, business improvement and links. Leadership is particularly important in implementing innovation in SMEs. The leader's perception of the importance of innovation will influence the acceptance of innovation practices. Life cycle resources for innovation (SME life-cycle stage) are also positively related to the implementation of innovations. A culture of innovation should be characterised by the

openness of committed people. The historical propensity of SMEs to adopt innovations is positively associated with future levels of innovation adoption.

On the basis of a literature review, Saunila [47] concluded that many factors influence the level of innovation in SMEs, including leadership, knowledge development, entrepreneurial orientation, and external networks. Intermediary organisations can increase the innovation resources available to small businesses. However, the relationships established in the earliest phases of a company's life cycle are crucial in the development of innovative capabilities. Organisational rigidity and insufficient resources may limit innovation potential.

According to Lee and Lee [48], in small companies, the probability of introducing innovations is greater in the case of younger companies. However, for larger companies, older companies are more likely to innovate. The degree of foreign ownership is not a significant determinant of innovation. Medium-sized companies producing for the domestic market are more innovative. In terms of ownership structure, medium-sized joint-stock companies are less willing to introduce innovations. For medium-sized companies, greater market concentration is associated with a greater likelihood of innovation.

According to Oum et al. [49], the key determining factors of the improvement of the innovation capabilities of SMEs include larger company size, greater skill intensity, overcoming human resource shortages, and the ability to access external fund sources to finance capital expansion. Larger companies have greater access to not only financial but also human resources. Companies with educated staff will respond faster and build innovation potential. Moreover, SMEs with relatively large internal financial resources or access to external fund sources are more likely to engage in innovation activities than those that do not. Younger companies appear to be more innovative in terms of improving business processes and are among the most competent SMEs.

On the basis of a literature review, Martínez-Roman and Romero [50] rightly noticed that the factors that influence the innovativeness of SMEs can be divided into two main categories: the entrepreneur's personal characteristics (high level of education, motivation, leadership capacity, and risk-taking) and characteristics of the enterprise (size; risk tolerance; inter-firm cooperation; and collaboration with other agents of the value chain, such as clients, suppliers, distributors, and competitors).

Montañés-Del-Río and Medina-Garrido [51] investigated the importance of several factors in SME innovation. The authors examined gender, age, educational level, and informal investments in previous businesses in relation to the tendency to innovate when starting a business in the tourism industry. This relationship turned out to be statistically significant. Suárez et al. [52] analysed similar features and found that women-led SMEs introduce more innovations. The specific management style and female leadership, which are related to motivation, creativity, and knowledge sharing, are part of the generation of new ideas. Moreover, managers' higher educational level has a positive impact on innovation processes in SMEs, owing to its connection with the knowledge required in innovations. According to the analysis results, family businesses are less inclined to participate in innovative activities than non-family businesses. This is due to, among others, risk aversion and the simultaneous implementation of business and family goals.

However, Miller et al. [53] and Rondi et al. [54] emphasised that the innovative tendencies of family businesses are diverse, just like the companies themselves. Xinhua [55] expressed a similar opinion, encouraging further analysis of the impact of the family on innovation, taking into account the size of the company and differences in family composition and the legal structure of the company. In this trend, Heider et al. [56] claimed that greater investments in the specific resources of a family business (human and social capital, and patient financial capital) trigger a positive innovation circle. This is confirmed by the findings of Price et al. [57] that in the case of innovation, knowledge in family businesses is also important.

The food sector is traditionally considered to have the lowest ratio of research and development expenditure to added value. However, in recent decades, the business envi-

ronment has become more demanding in terms of technological inputs for reasons related to food safety, quality, and food market globalisation. This provides a strong incentive to innovate, especially for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that want to stay in business. Most enterprises operating in the food sector belong to the SME category, which is characterised by a low level of research potential [30]. Sadat and Nasrat [58] indicate that the limitation of innovative activities of SMEs in the food industry is usually the lack of financial capital, technology, and human capital—a problem that applies to large companies to a much lesser extent. However, Saguy and Sirotinskaya [59] indicate the innovative possibilities of the SME sector in the food industry, resulting from the specific features of these enterprises. A small scale offers unique opportunities, such as flexibility and speed of decision-making, business specialisation, and niche products. Additionally, flexibility and expertise give SMEs an advantage in building relationships and collaboration. Therefore, the contribution of the SME sector in the food industry to the innovation process may be significant. Baregheh et al. [60] point to the diversity of innovations in SMEs in the food sector, emphasising that profiling this diversity constitutes an important contribution to knowledge about innovation and should constitute the basis for further qualitative and quantitative research. It is also worth adding that although each innovation is different, different types of innovations in SMEs from the food sector are interconnected, creating a common environment. According to Capitanio et al. [61], the internal factors of innovation include the company size, entrepreneurial knowledge, and experience of the company, and some organisational features related to the management-ownership relationship and structure of decision-making processes. In the field of traditional food, product innovations that combine ‘old components’ into new products are important. In relation to process innovation, the purchase and use of new equipment to produce traditional products more efficiently are important. In addition, new technologies are used in sales operations [62]. In the food sector, beyond company size, Minarelli et al. [30] paid attention to cooperation. The authors emphasised that cooperation may turn out to be a driver of innovation. This is broadly understood as cooperation with other entities in the food chain, such as competitors, suppliers, and customers. Similarly, Rey et al. [43] pointed out the importance of the networks and associations of small food producers. In terms of innovation, this provides the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences, and to achieve common goals.

3. Materials, Methods, and Research Sample

According to Minarelli et al. [30], most enterprises in the food sector belong to the SME category, which is characterised by a relatively low innovation level. However, for the purposes of this research, two research hypotheses were formulated:

H1. *Vendors-producers of traditional food have innovative abilities.*

H2. *Vendors-producers of traditional food have untapped innovation potential.*

The research includes enterprises that produce and sell traditional food, understood as high-quality food, produce using traditional methods, constituting an element of the region’s cultural heritage and local identity. ‘Traditional’ means documented as having been in use in the domestic market for a period capable of being passed down from generation to generation, which period shall be at least 30 years [63]. Another criterion for selecting respondents is their participation in food events as vendors.

The research was conducted at the turn of 2021 and 2022 on a sample of vendors-producers of traditional food belonging to the European Culinary Heritage Network. The network includes farmers, producers, and restaurants from various regions of Europe. The common denominator is the connection with a given region, its heritage, and culinary traditions. The European Culinary Heritage Network brings together 46 regions from 13 countries, including 10 regions in Poland: the Kuyavian-Pomeranian, Lower Silesian,

Masovian, Lesser Poland, Opole, Pomeranian, Warmian-Masurian, West Pomeranian, Greater Poland, and Świętokrzyskie voivodeships.

The list of respondents was based on information about vendors-producers of traditional food posted on the websites of the Regional Culinary Heritage of individual regions. The surveyed food producers came from five voivodeships belonging to the European Culinary Heritage Network: Świętokrzyskie, Greater Poland, Lesser Poland, Pomerania, and West Pomerania.

The study conducted semi-structured interviews [64]. The respondents received a form created using the Google Forms tool and answered questions via a telephone conversation. The questions included in the questionnaire were closed, semi-open, and open. Some questions used a 5-point Likert scale [65].

A total of 70 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The surveyed group of respondents was diverse in terms of the analysed characteristics. In terms of business duration, the youngest company was 3 years old, and the oldest was 44 years old. The surveyed vendors-producers of traditional food had been operating for an average of 17.5 years. The largest group of respondents were micro-enterprises (80%), small enterprises (16%), and large enterprises (4.3%). This means that the entire surveyed sample belongs to the SME sector. As many as 71% of the respondents were family businesses. Product sales cover mainly regional (77%), local (61%), national (50%), and, less often, international sales (11%). Most respondents produced their products themselves (94%) using their own crops and raw materials (73.5%). The research respondents are directly related to culinary traditions, including craft, family, regional, and local traditions.

With regard to innovative abilities, the respondents were divided into two groups: the innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food. The groups were separated based on the answers provided by respondents to the following questions: whether they introduce new or improved products for sale and whether they introduce new or improved production or delivery processes. Additionally, respondents who confirmed then answered questions about what was new and what improvements they had introduced in terms of products, production processes, or deliveries. Due to the specific nature of the activity, product and process innovations were included. The statistical significance of the differences between the groups of innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food was tested using a two-independent-samples *t* test [66]. Additionally, to confirm the results of the average analyses presented, a binary logistic regression analysis was carried out with the binary variable of innovative (1) and non-innovative vendor-producer of traditional food (0) as the dependent variable [67].

4. Results

The group of vendors-producers of traditional food who introduced innovations included 49 surveyed enterprises (70% of the total). This proves the fact that innovations were introduced despite the production of traditional food products based on old recipes. The second group of respondents declared that they did not introduce innovations. This group included 21 surveyed enterprises (30% of the total). Table 1 presents the sources of innovation in the group of innovative vendors-producers of traditional food. The data show that customers are the main driving force. Their opinions are important for almost 90% of innovative respondents. Innovations through tradition are mainly product innovations, and their recipients are customers. These innovations are introduced to increase (or maintain) sales. Another source of innovation is participation in festivals, fairs, and training. More than half of the innovative vendors-producers of traditional food indicated this source of innovation. Participation in various events is an opportunity to expand knowledge and exchange experiences. It also enables the establishment of contacts with other producers, including competitors. Hence, for almost 45% of innovative respondents, observing competition is a source of innovation, and for 39%, innovation is the result of cooperation. Own experience (12%) and media (10%) were considered slightly less important in implementing innovations.

Table 1. Sources of innovation among innovative vendors-producers of traditional food.

Variable	Percentage (%)
Customer opinion	89.80
Participation in festivals, fairs, and trainings	53.06
Observing the competition	44.90
Cooperation with other producers	38.78
Own experiences	12.24
Media	10.20

Source: Own survey.

Both the innovative and non-innovative groups were compared in terms of different characteristics. The fact that an entrepreneur does not introduce innovations does not mean that he does not have such opportunities. The analysis results are presented in Table 2.

The educational level of the general manager is also an important feature. The data in Table 2 show that in the group of innovative managers, more than 60% had a higher educational level and almost 33% had secondary education. However, in the group of non-innovative managers, more than 52% had secondary education and less than 29% had higher educational levels. It follows that education promotes innovation. This is related to, among others, knowledge and human capital.

The next analysed feature is related to business duration. According to the data obtained, among innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, the largest group were quite young enterprises operating in the market for less than 10 years. These are companies that often do not yet have an established position in the market and, to stay in the competition, introduced new products that attract customers. Moreover, the relatively short period of operation contributed to the fresh perspective of managers. The second largest group of innovative vendors-producers of traditional food were enterprises operating in the market for 20 years or more. In this group, experience and opportunities (including finances) contribute to the willingness to introduce innovations. On the other hand, among the non-innovative enterprises, the oldest ones were by far the largest groups. In this case, the lack of innovation is determined by the already-established number of customers and the well-known brand of recognised products.

In terms of employment, micro-enterprises are the largest group among both innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, dominating the entire study group. However, micro-enterprises are more flexible in adapting to market needs, which makes some of them innovative. On the other hand, they have fewer resources, which may limit their innovative abilities. A characteristic feature of the surveyed sample was the significant share of family businesses, both in the innovative and non-innovative groups. This is because the traditions and old recipes used to produce products largely come from old family traditions (oral and written). Moreover, the surveyed entities were dominated by micro-enterprises that offered self-employment or employed family members.

In the group of innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, most enterprises operate in the regional market. Supra-local coverage requires additional maintenance expenditures, which may explain the innovative option. In the case of non-innovative enterprises, the largest group operates in the local market. Local coverage makes it easier to recognise the market and to establish a group of regular customers.

In terms of financial capital sources, both the innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food commonly used their own savings and profits from business activities. Among innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, subsidies from the European Union and repayable funds from banks and institutions were used more often. Non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food were more willing to use non-repayable national funds. In the case of innovative respondents, external financial resources were allocated for development. In the case of non-innovative respondents, non-refundable national funds were used to stay in the market.

Table 2. Comparison of innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food.

Variable	Innovative Producers	Non-Innovative Producers
	Percentage (%)	
	General manager education	
Essential vocational	6.12	19.05
Medium	32.65	52.38
Higher	61.22	28.57
	Business duration (years)	
Less than 10	36.73	23.81
10–15	18.37	4.76
15–20	14.29	14.29
20 and more	30.61	57.14
	Employment	
1–9 employees (micro)	77.55	85.71
10–50 employees (small)	20.41	4.76
50 and more employees (medium)	2.04	9.52
Family business	73.47	76.19
	Sales range	
Local	59.18	66.67
Regional	85.71	57.14
National	48.98	52.38
International	12.24	9.52
	Financial capital sources	
Own savings	89.80	76.19
Family sources	16.33	9.52
EU grant and subsidies	36.73	19.05
Grants and other non-repayable national funding	14.29	23.81
Profits from business activities	48.98	47.62
Funds from bank and financial institutions	28.57	14.29
	Cooperation and networks	
With other producers	67.35	71.43
Network membership	100.00	100.00
	Sources of knowledge about traditions	
Family traditions	61.22	90.48
Old recipes	65.31	66.67
Trainings and workshops	38.78	4.76
Cookbooks and guides	32.65	14.29
Other vendors and manufacturers	22.45	4.76
Internet	24.49	9.52
Other	16.33	4.76

Source: Own survey.

Attention should be paid to the answers regarding cooperation with other producers. Both innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food are characterised by a high percentage of cooperation. However, more cooperation was recorded in the non-innovative group (more than 71%). This cooperation may result in innovations in the future.

In terms of the differences between innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, the sources of knowledge about traditions were analysed. In both study groups, family traditions and old recipes dominated. Among the non-innovative respondents, more than 90% continued family traditions passed down from generation to generation, and almost 67% used old recipes. The remaining sources were less popular, not exceeding 15%. A greater diversity of sources was observed in the group of innovative respondents. The most frequently used sources were old recipes (61%) and family traditions (65%). Training and workshops (almost 39%), as well as cookbooks and guides (almost

33%), also had a relatively high percentage. All analysed sources exceeded 15%, and the respondents also indicated other sources such as their own ideas or literature. Innovations require inventiveness, hence the difference between the researched groups.

Table 3 additionally includes the business goals of the activity. The more entrepreneurially oriented option is represented by innovative vendors-producers of traditional food whose own brand of products and profits and earnings were particularly important. Entrepreneurial orientation favours the introduction of innovations that may translate into profits in the future. For non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, being their own boss and running their own business were more important. Perhaps, they valued independence more than profits and earnings. Business orientation does not limit the possibility of achieving non-business goals. Innovative producers assigned higher ratings to all non-business goals.

Table 4 contains the results of the comparison of the two study groups in terms of the statistical significance of the differences (due to the inability to determine average values, cooperation and networks were not included). The results of the comparison of the groups of innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food were significantly different in terms of the following variables: general managerial education, business duration, sources of knowledge about traditions, profits and earnings, and own product brand. For the remaining variables, no significant differences were found between the mean results. Therefore, the analysis revealed that these groups are characterised by both differences and similarities, without a clear advantage. In addition, the interviews showed that some respondents who had not been innovative so far considered the possibility of introducing innovations as the main barrier, pointing to their financial situation and access to external sources of financing. However, as many as 43% of the non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food used non-returnable sources. Therefore, this group of vendors-producers of traditional food have untapped innovation potential.

Table 3. Comparison of the business goals of activity between the innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food.

Variable	Innovative Producers	Non-Innovative Producers
	Average *	
Own business	4.33	4.38
Profits and earnings	4.67	4.33
Own brand of products	4.77	4.48

* 1—definitely not, 2—rather not, 3—neutral, 4—rather yes, 5—definitely yes. Source: Own survey.

Table 4. Innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food: statistical significance of the differences in average values.

Variable	Innovative Producer	Non-Innovative Producer	Statistical Significance
	Average		
General manager education *	3.55	3.10	Significant ($p < 0.01$)
Business duration (years)	15.49	22.33	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
Employment (employees)	6.44	10.38	Not significant
Sales range **	2.59	2.38	Not significant
Financial capital sources ***	4.27	3.76	Not significant
Sources of knowledge about traditions ***	2.35	2.00	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
Own business ****	4.33	4.38	Not significant
Profits and earnings ****	4.67	4.33	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
Own brand of products ****	4.77	4.48	Significant ($p < 0.10$)

* 1—primary, 2—essential vocational, 3—medium, and 4—higher; ** 1—local, 2—regional, 3—national, and 4—international; *** Diversity of sources (average number of sources); **** Likert scale: 1—definitely not, 2—rather not, 3—neutral, 4—rather yes, and 5—definitely yes; Source: Own survey.

In order to validate the findings from the mean analyses, reported in Table 4, a binary logistic regression analysis was performed with the binary variable of innovative (1) and non-innovative vendor-producer of traditional food (0) as the dependent variable, and with all variables from Table 4 as independent variables. The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant, ($\chi^2 = 55,136$, p -value < 0.01), indicating that the model was able to distinguish between innovative vs non-innovative producers. The model as a whole explained between 35.2% (Cox and Snell chi-squared) and 499% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in the dependent variable and correctly classified 85.7% of the cases. The results confirmed the results from the mean analysis to a large extent. Table 5 contains the logistic regression coefficients with standard deviations (S.E.) and Wald statistics. The results show that general manager education, sources of knowledge about traditions, and profits and earnings have positive significant effects on being an innovative producer (all $p < 0.05$). Further, employment has a weak negative impact on being an innovative producer ($p < 0.10$). All these four effects confirm the findings from the mean analyses in the previous section. However, business duration had no significant impact on being an innovative producer ($p > 0.10$), which contradicts the finding from Table 4.

Table 5. Logistic regression, impact on innovation production as dependent variable (Value 1 = innovative producer, 0 = non-innovative producer).

Variable 1	Beta	S.E.	Wald
Constant	−15.1	5.38	7.88
General manager education *	1.49 **	0.65	5.24
Business duration (years)	−0.04	0.03	1.64
Employment (employees)	−0.05 *	0.03	3.49
Sales range	0.16	0.47	0.12
Financial capital sources	0.39	0.41	0.92
Sources of knowledge about traditions	0.89 **	0.37	5.85
Own business	−0.57	0.54	1.11
Profits and earnings	1.18 **	0.59	3.92
Own brand of products	1.33 *	0.71	3.49

For explanation of variables, see Table 4. Source: Own survey. * = Significant at 10% level, ** = significant at 5% level.

5. Discussion

Based on the research conducted, it was possible to distinguish the characteristics of innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food. The proposed model turned out to be statistically significant. Business duration is an ambiguous feature regarding the differences between the innovative and non-innovative groups. The results of the mean analysis (a significantly differentiating feature) and binary analysis (a feature with no impact on being innovative) are contradictory. However, in the group of surveyed enterprises, the relatively young enterprises were more innovative. At the same time, micro-enterprises pre-dominated in this group. This is consistent with the findings of Lee and Lee [48] that in small companies, the probability of introducing innovations is greater in the case of younger companies. These are companies that often do not yet have an established position in the market, need regular customers, and have managers who have not yet developed a routine. The second largest group of innovative vendors-producers of traditional food were enterprises operating in the market for a long time. In this case, innovation was facilitated by experience and related skills. The importance of these factors in the food sector was indicated by Capitanio et al. [61]. Experience is also particularly important in the production of traditional products according to old recipes.

The presented research shows that education, especially higher education, promotes innovation. Both the results of the mean analysis and the binary analysis indicate a positive impact of this feature on being innovative. Martinez-Roman and Romero [50] reached conclusions similar to those of Montañés-Del-Río and Medina-Garrido [51]. Education builds human capital, which is extremely important in the innovation process. In addi-

tion to knowledge and skills, higher education is associated with a greater awareness of development opportunities.

According to the results of the average analysis, the size of enterprises does not statistically differentiate the studied groups, while the results of the binary analysis indicate a weak negative impact of this feature on being innovative. The results of the conducted research indicate that most vendors-producers of traditional food, both in the innovative and non-innovative groups, were micro-enterprises. However, Oum et al. [49] and Capitanio et al. [61] believed that one key factor of innovation is the size of the enterprise because larger units have greater access to resources, allowing them to build innovative potential. This situation may be confirmed by the fact that in the innovative group, more than 20% were small enterprises but were larger than micro-enterprises. In this study, medium-sized enterprises constituted a small percentage, and large enterprises were not recorded at all in the study group. Despite the smaller resources, micro-enterprises were more flexible. In many cases, this made it easier for them to adapt to changing customer needs and market conditions.

With regard to employment and employee structure, it should be emphasised that a characteristic feature of the surveyed sample is the significant share of family businesses, both in the innovative and non-innovative groups. Many studies have been published in this area, but their findings are not conclusive. Some authors have emphasised that family businesses are less innovative, owing to their lower tendency to take risks and combine business and family goals [52]. Some believed that the innovativeness of family businesses is diversified because these companies are diversified [53,54]. Our findings are consistent with the assumption of the diversified innovativeness of these companies. It is difficult to arrive at a clear answer without knowing the internal structure of the company and its specifics.

Sales range turned out to be a statistically insignificant feature in terms of differences between the innovative and non-innovative groups. However, the innovative group was definitely dominated by vendors-producers of traditional food operating in the supra-local market, especially regional ones. This is partly in line with Lee and Lee's results [48], which indicated that in the manufacturing sector, medium-sized companies producing for the domestic market are more innovative. The differences in the findings may be due to the fact that the examined group of vendors-producers of traditional food was composed of only a few domestic companies and medium-sized companies.

Sources of financing are also important for investment activities. Oum et al. [49] mentioned the possibility of external sources of financing among the key innovation factors. Our findings confirm this. Among the innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, almost 80% used external financing, including 51% from non-refundable opportunities. This provides companies with new opportunities for market expansion and development. This does not mean that the non-innovative group did not use external funds; rather, this means that their use of these sources was lower at 57% (total) and 43% (non-refundable), respectively. In the future, this may contribute to the pro-innovation policy in these enterprises. However, the analyses conducted did not show a significant relationship between the number of financing sources and innovation or its lack.

The respondents showed a significant tendency to cooperate with other producers. Most of them conducted such cooperation. The non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food had a higher percentage of cooperators. Martinez-Roman and Romero [50] pointed out the importance of cooperation with other companies. Therefore, it can be assumed that cooperation in a group of non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food may lead to the introduction of innovations in the future, all the more so because all the surveyed enterprises were associated with the Culinary Heritage Network. According to Rey et al. [43], this provides an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences and to achieve common goals in the field of innovation.

Entrepreneurial orientation is also considered an influencing factor of the level of innovation in SMEs [47]. According to our findings, business goals were more important

for the innovative than for the non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, especially in the field of profits and earnings and own-brand products. Both the results of the mean analysis and the binary analysis indicate a positive impact of profits and earnings on being innovative. This is a motivation to take innovative actions that help an enterprise stand out in the market and achieve its business goals.

Research results have confirmed that traditions may come from various sources [39]. This feature turned out to be statistically significant for innovation in both the mean and binary analysis. Diversity itself can be a source of innovation. This is particularly important in the production of traditional food, where traditions are associated with ethnic elements, local ingredients, and recipes [42]. Through innovation and research, vendors-producers of traditional food improve their products and production and distribution methods, adapting to market needs. Owing to this, they could maintain their market position [31]. In terms of family knowledge, on the one hand, the results confirmed that it is a source of tradition and innovation, and therefore success, consistent with the results of Floris et al. [38]. On the other hand, among the non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food, more than 90% refer to family traditions passed down from generation to generation. This dissonance may be related to the desire to maintain high-quality products as closely as possible to tradition, both in terms of ingredients and production and distribution methods. This in turn reflects the views of Magistretti et al. [33] that the conservative nature of companies operating on the basis of family traditions allows for maintaining close and long-term ties with tradition. This may contribute to innovation in the future.

As a result of the analyses, both tested hypotheses were verified to be valid. The interviews showed that 70% of the surveyed vendors-producers of traditional food introduced innovations in their activities. In addition, they differed in their nature and sources. The main sources of innovation for this group of respondents are customers; competitors; cooperating companies; and participation in festivals, trainings, and fairs. Innovations cover various spheres of activity, including both products and production and distribution methods. This means that vendors-producers of traditional food have significant innovative capabilities (confirming H1). However, 30% of the respondents admitted that they did not introduce innovations. For some respondents, no such need was found, owing to the specific nature of traditional food production based on old recipes. However, some of these respondents admitted in the interviews that they would like to introduce innovations to adapt to market conditions and maintain a competitive position. Differences and similarities between the groups of innovative and non-innovative vendors-producers of traditional food indicate the existence of unused innovation potential, which may be activated in the near future, owing to, for example, subsidies (H2 confirmed).

The presented research was focused on understanding the unique position of traditional food producers on the market. These producers must balance their traditional practices with innovation in a way that respects both aspects. This can create tension between the two, which are inherently conflicting. However, previous research has demonstrated that these elements can be linked symbiotically when carefully considered. Compared to studies in other fields and locations, this research fills a gap in the academic discourse surrounding innovation through tradition in traditional, less-industrialised, low-growth industries. Additionally, research has shown that entrepreneurship is highly contextual, and context impacts entrepreneurship.

The presented research has limitations. First, the limited sample size might have caused difficulties in formulating generalisations. However, this size was influenced by the data collection method, which was a semi-structured interview. Though time consuming, it allows for the collection of detailed data. Generalising findings to other locations without properly considering the entire entrepreneurial ecosystem is not justified, given that this study's research is rooted in a particular context. Moreover, only the opinion of vendors-producers of traditional food were examined, without taking into account the opinion of consumers, who were the key recipients of innovative activities. Hence, future research should include consumer research, non-financial reasons for not introducing innovations,

the impact of cooperation diversity, and public support and its importance for vendors-producers of traditional food. This research direction will provide a more complete picture of innovation in traditional food production.

6. Conclusions

This research shows that vendors-producers of traditional food have innovative abilities and untapped potential in this area. The specificity of the innovative activity of the surveyed group of entrepreneurs resulted primarily from the specificities of the traditional food sector and the sector of small- and medium-sized enterprises, which include the surveyed producers.

The good practices in innovative activities include following customer opinions. This helps the enterprise adapt to market demand and thus achieve business goals. Another good practice in innovative activities is participation in festivals or workshops. The festival is a platform that enables the exchange of information and experiences, and meetings with clients, competitors, and cooperators. Workshops allow for deepening knowledge and skills. Good innovation practices also include keeping an eye on the competition, which may help the enterprise maintain its position in the market, and following current trends. It is also good practice to cooperate with other producers. It allows for the exchange of knowledge and experience, and the sharing of risks.

On the basis of the research conducted, a list of features that favour innovation among traditional food producers can be provided. Young enterprises with well-educated managers are more prone to innovation. In the group of vendors-producers of traditional food, innovation was also supported by diverse sources of knowledge about traditions and a focus on profits and earnings, as well as building one's own product brand. Therefore, innovative vendors-producers of traditional food combine tradition with modernity and non-business goals (e.g., family) with business goals. Generally, there are three key factors that contribute to innovation in the companies analysed. These are the education level of the owner, the length of time the business has been operating, and the diversity of sources of knowledge about traditions. These findings suggest that innovation is a result of a powerful combination of knowledge, experience, and an open mindset, which are all typical traits for entrepreneurial success. Therefore, it is recommended that less innovative companies focus on expanding the range of inputs for their daily operations, which can be formal (education) or informal (self-education) in nature. By doing so, along with gaining more experience, they should be able to achieve more innovative outputs.

The study found that individuals who are more innovative tend to be better educated, have more experience, and draw knowledge from a wider range of sources. Therefore, the policy implications from this research are clear: there is a need to train traditional food producers in the opportunities that innovation presents and encourage their 'entrepreneurial orientation', which may be obscured by their lifestyle priorities. This approach would enable more businesses to effectively combine traditional values with the necessity of innovation, resulting in a stronger, more competitive position in the marketplace.

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