

**Cultivating Connections Beyond the Borders:
A Cultural and Historical Exploration of Osmiza/Osmica**

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Extended Abstract

Family firms represent the foundation of many economies, contributing significantly to job creation, innovation, and economic stability (Dangelico et al., 2019; De Massis et al., 2014). Understanding the dynamics of family firms, which often involve complex interplay between family values, traditions, and business management, can offer valuable insights into the success and longevity of these businesses (Cheong et al., 2015).

The present research is part of an ongoing project on the exploration and analysis of “Osmizas” as unique family firms situated at the crossroads of Italy and Slovenia. Osmizas, also known as “Osmicas”, are a unique and culturally rich phenomenon rooted in tradition and local

community life, these family-run establishments serve as places for locals and tourists to sample and savor homemade food and wine.

The history of Osmizas can be traced back to the 18th century when the Habsburg Empire, which ruled over the territories that now include Slovenia and parts of Italy, introduced a decree permitting farmers to sell their surplus wine and food without paying taxes. These sales were allowed for a period of eight days (the origin of the name "Osmiza," derived from the Slovenian word "osem," meaning "eight").

The tradition of Osmizas has been passed down through generations, with families continuing to open their homes and farms to visitors, offering them a chance to taste and purchase their homemade products. Historically, Osmizas were marked by a wooden sign, often adorned with a branch or ivy, indicating to passersby that the establishment was open for business. While the regulations have evolved over the years, the core concept of Osmizas has remained the same, focusing on the celebration of local food, wine, and community.

The motivation behind this research is to uncover the cultural, social, and economic value of Osmizas as family businesses, and to delve into their role in shaping the regional identity, fostering local tourism, and sustaining family traditions. By examining the case and history of Osmizas, we aim to contribute to the broader understanding of family firms, regional development, and local food systems, while shedding light on the uniqueness of these establishments. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to explore the historical development, cultural significance, and business paradigms of Osmizas, and to understand the impact they have on regional development and local food culture (García-Granero et al., 2020; Morris & Buller, 2003; Sims, 2009).

The role of regional development and local food systems has been well documented in the literature, highlighting their importance in fostering community resilience, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable practices. In this context, Osmizas serve as prime examples of how local food culture can contribute to regional development and the revitalization of rural areas. By weaving together insights about regional development and local food, this research seeks to understand the broader implications of Osmizas on their surrounding communities. Enriching literature on family firms, this research aims to explore the intricacies of Osmizas as a unique manifestation of family businesses and their ability to adapt and evolve in a changing socio-economic landscape.

Figure 1. Location of Osmizas/Osmicas: Straddling the Border between Italy and Slovenia



Osmizas can be found primarily along the border between Italy and Slovenia, as depicted in Figure 1. These establishments date back centuries, and are rooted in a long-standing tradition of opening one's home to the community to share the fruits of their labor. Osmizas play a crucial role in preserving local culinary traditions, fostering social connections, and promoting a sense of belonging among the local population.

To gain a deeper understanding of the development and business paradigms of Osmizas, we conducted a series of interviews with owners and patrons of these establishments. Utilizing a narrative approach, we sought to capture the rich tapestry of stories, perspectives, and experiences that underpin the operations and evolution of these family firms (Balzano & Vianelli, 2022; Riessman, 2002; 2008). To obtain a detailed understanding of the context and people involved in our Osmiza study, we delved into a variety of secondary sources alongside our primary research. This included reading numerous magazines and online blogs focused on regional food culture and traditions, engaging in informal conversations with local farmers and Osmiza owners, and studying relevant books to further explore the foundations and development of Osmizas. Additionally, we analyzed resources such as the <https://www.osmize.com/> website to complement our understanding of the phenomenon and its regional impact. This multifaceted approach allowed us to develop a well-rounded perspective on Osmizas and the communities they serve.

As we continue to analyze the interviews and histories of Osmizas, several interesting themes and empirical insights have emerged. For instance, many interviewees highlighted the

importance of balancing tradition with innovation, as they strive to preserve their heritage while adapting to changing customer preferences and market dynamics. Some interviewees also emphasized the role of intergenerational knowledge transfer in maintaining the longevity and success of their businesses, with family members learning valuable skills and expertise from their elders. Additionally, the sense of community and belonging that these establishments foster was a recurring theme, as Osmizas serve as important social hubs where locals and tourists alike can share stories and experiences over good food and wine.

Osmizas also served as spaces where local artisans and producers could showcase their products, fostering a sense of pride in the region's craftsmanship and resources. This sense of community extended to the tourists who visited, as Osmizas provided them with a unique and authentic experience, allowing them to connect with the local culture and engage with the people behind the products. Moreover, some interviewees highlighted the role Osmizas play in promoting environmental stewardship and supporting local economies. By sourcing ingredients from nearby farms and producers, Osmizas contribute to the sustainability of their communities, reducing the need for long supply chains and promoting a farm-to-table ethos. The establishments also create job opportunities for family members and locals, further bolstering the region's economic resilience.

Through these empirical insights, it becomes evident that Osmizas are much more than simple food and wine establishments. They embody the delicate interplay between tradition and innovation, serve as crucial links in intergenerational knowledge transfer, and foster a strong sense of community and belonging. In doing so, they contribute significantly to the cultural, social, and economic fabric of the regions in which they are situated.

In conclusion, with this ongoing research we aim to shed light on the unique phenomenon of Osmizas, offering valuable insights into their historical development, cultural significance, and business paradigms. By examining these family firms through the lenses of regional development and local food culture (Rezaei et al., 2022), we contribute to a broader understanding of the role that such establishments play in shaping community identity and fostering sustainable development. However, it is important to recognize the limitations of this study, which include the possibility of selection bias in our interviews and the potential for cultural nuances to be lost in translation. Further research could explore the impact of Osmizas on regional tourism, as well as investigate the ways in which these establishments adapt to challenges such as shifting consumer preferences and changes in the local ecosystem.

Keywords: Osmiza; Osmica; family firms; local food culture; regional development; narrative inquiry.

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