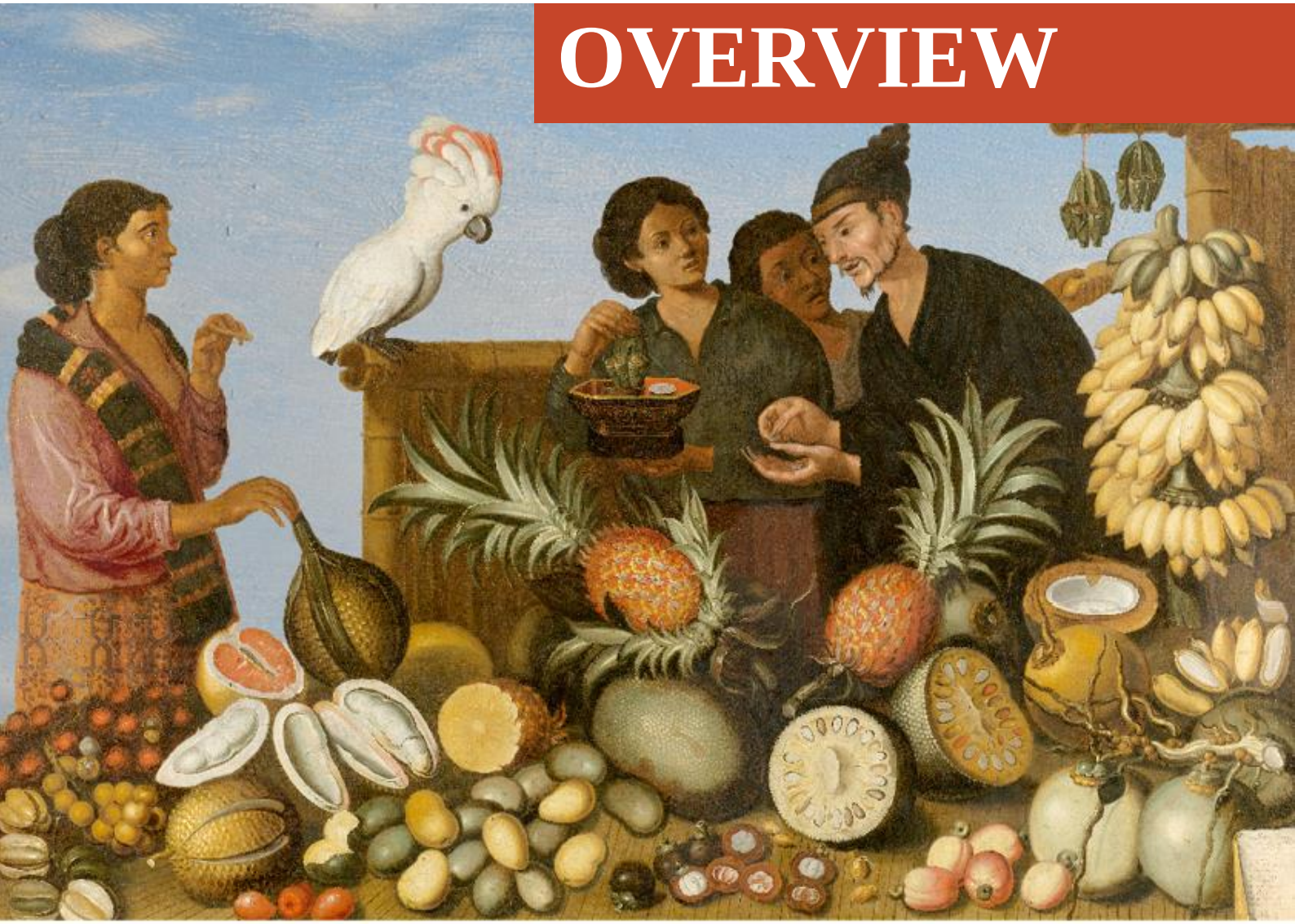
UNESCO Chair in World Food Systems

The 2nd February 2018

7th Annual Symposium

Food Journeys

OVERVIEW



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Introduction

The 7th Annual Symposium of the UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems (2 February 2018) was focused on 'food journey' issues—how do foods travel from a spatiotemporal viewpoint, and what are the associated cultural and culinary practices?

Marie-Laure Navas, Deputy Director for Training and Scientific Policy at Montpellier SupAgro, opened the meeting by presenting the UNESCO Chair as a, "knowledge-sharing platform, dovetailing information, research and innovation," thus epitomising the philosophy of Montpellier SupAgro.

While explaining that, "eating is a political act," **Patrick Caron**, CIRAD Director General in charge of Research and Strategy, and Chair of the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition, first stressed the duality between, "the tension, demonization, anxiety, junk food eating," and wellbeing. He then pointed out the paradoxes that come with urbanization and the growing distance between points of food production and consumption. For instance, "as global awareness of this problem increases, local solutions are being increasingly sought," and "proximity is becoming the target as distances increase."

Finally, **Damien Conaré**, Secretary General of the UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems at Montpellier SupAgro, discussed the main remits of the Chair, which he described as "a platform for dialogue and exchange between research and advocates of change." He then introduced the food journey topic, i.e. foods that travel via humans and their migrations, while pointing out that "the world food topic reflects the great global cultural and ethnic melting pot."

Geographers, historians, nutritionists, sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, representatives of associations, the private sector and publishing agencies, as well as entrepreneurs, all talked at the conference, thus giving the audience a well-rounded overview of the subject.

Shared and inherited cooking

Kamal Mouzawak, owner of *Tawlet* restaurant in Beirut, where refugee Palestinian and Syrian women are cooks, calls himself a culinary activist. He is also founder of *Souk el Tayeb*, the first organic farmers' market in Beirut, while managing the Make Food Not War association.

"Lebanon is a country of mixed and diverse peoples, customs and cultures, and of different and common viewpoints. It is part Christian, part Muslim, where some women wear veils while others wear bikinis, some men work the land while others exploit the sea, some are inspired by the Western world and others by the East. The first farmers' market, *Souk el Tayeb* (literally 'the good market'), emerged in 2004 in this cultural diversity setting. The market—which supports small-scale rural farmers in their quest to maintain their traditions and identity—is held every Saturday and Wednesday afternoon in Beirut.

The Food and Feast project was set up in 2007 to promote Lebanese diversity through food festivals that are organized yearly in different villages. Farmers and their specialties are thus promoted in their villages, e.g. a tomato festival may be held in one village,

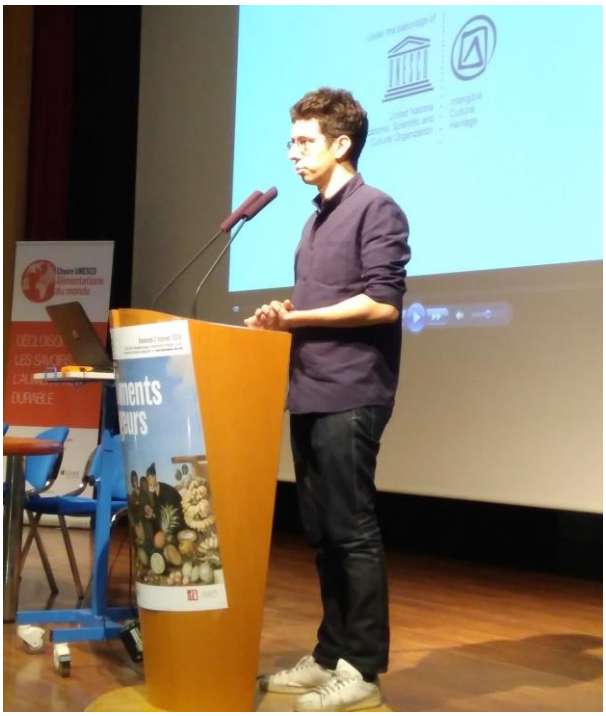
In 2009, a third project was launched in the city of Beirut: *Tawlet*, which means 'table' (people eat at the kitchen table, not in the dining room), is a farmers' kitchen where women from different regions come to cook their traditional dishes. Meanwhile, the project has been extended to five other Lebanese regions where farmers' kitchens have now been launched.

"Finally, in addition to tasting traditional dishes in villages, why not stay over and sleep in an old typical house of the region and soak in the local atmosphere?"
Kamal Mouzawak also founded the Capacity Building Program, which is geared especially towards training the most needy farmers (e.g. from Palestinian camps).

All of these projects help Syrian and Palestinian refugees express themselves through cooking, cultural exchange and recipes, while also enabling them to be involved in remunerative activities.

Grandmas project

Jonas Pariente is the director, producer and creator of the participatory webseries Grandmas Project that was launched in 2013. He discussed how his project unfolded. The overall aim is to highlight, through short films, the importance of culinary culture over time, the transmission of this culture through the generations, and finally the social side of cooking.



In 2013 he began inviting directors worldwide to make an 8-min film on their grandmothers cooking and serving a food recipe. All of the films produced are archived on the grandmasproject.org platform with a description of each recipe. Transboundary aspects, individual stories, unique cultural features and culinary specialties are presented to highlight similarities between different cultures and how food dishes can bond people.

The series—as its name indicates—only features grandmothers. "Why not grandfathers?" asked one of the spectators. Jonas Pariente explained that the identities of his two grandmothers (an Egyptian Jew and a Polish Jew) were transmitted via cooking. This personal story then became a collaborative project aimed at understanding his roots in a changing world, and also gaining insight into his threefold culture, i.e. French, Slavic and Mediterranean.

By showcasing his grandmothers, he realised that the differences between them did not just concern the different languages they used, but were also reflected in their cooking habits—different ingredients, spices and recipes—which is the basis of the identity of all cultures.

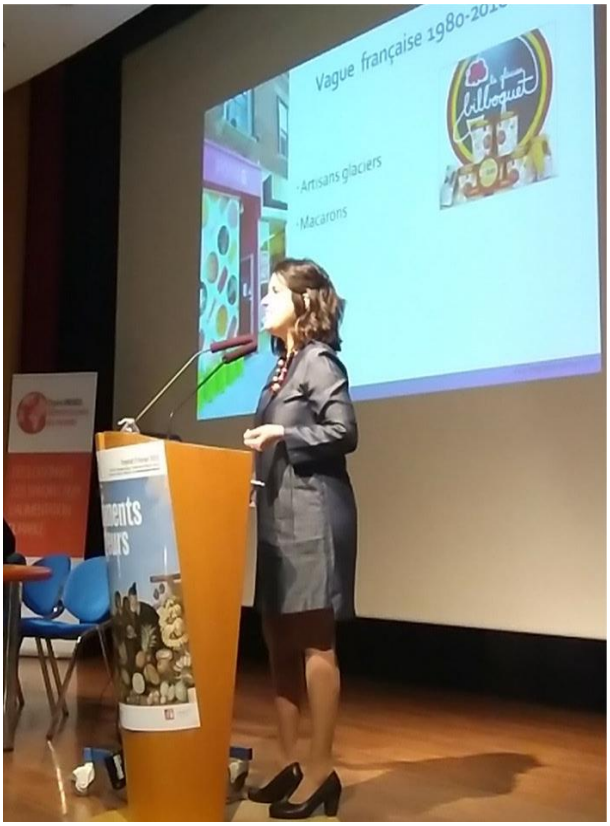
Session 1: Migrations, flows and hybridizations

Foods travel along with the different ways of cooking and eating them. “These are integral universes that travel,” said **Laurence Tibère**, a sociologist at the *Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès*, who moderated the first session. Adaptations, hybridizations and inventions are pivotal to cooking and enable us to travel on spatiotemporal levels.

Montreal: how immigrants impact food culture

Marianne Lefebvre, a Montreal-based dietician, Founder and President of the *Intégration Nutrition* association, explained how immigrants impact food culture in Montreal, where a unique gastronomic mosaic prevails.

The multiethnic city of Montreal hosts a highly diverse range of cultural communities from around the world which, over the ages, have forged a city with a unique gastronomic flavour. Every year, thousands of people leave their countries willingly or by force and choose the province of Quebec, and especially Montreal, as their new homeland. Immigrants—represented by 120 cultural communities—currently account for a third of the population of this province. In addition to these newcomers, Quebeckers from previous generations continue to revel in the cooking of their ancestors while also welcoming this modern and fragmented new cuisine. The literature reveals that following their arrival in Quebec, the nutritional health status of newcomers deteriorates year after year, with their lifestyles being influenced by various environmental, economic and sociocultural changes, and by the local food space.



The world in our cups – breakfasts over the last three centuries

Christian Grataloup, geohistorian and Emeritus Professor at *Université Paris Diderot*, traced the history of breakfasts by focusing on the origins of three iconic breakfast commodities—coffee, tea and cocoa.

A morning meal (breakfast) following the nocturnal fast is common to all societies. Europeans nevertheless have, since the early 18th century, gradually become accustomed to having this first meal served with hot drinks made using tropical raw materials, i.e. tea, coffee and chocolate, including a substantial amount of sugar, which for a long time was also a commodity from overseas. Western European societies therefore had to establish long-distance maritime links in search of land under climates that differed from the temperate conditions at home. In the late 17th century, the wealthier social classes (since these products from remote lands were generally expensive) drank tea, coffee and chocolate.

Consumption of these beverages, especially in the morning, then spread to the urban working classes of Western Europe during the 18th century, and much more extensively during the 19th.

Breakfast is indeed a driver of broad-ranging social change, as took place during the Industrial Revolution. Associated with urbanization (including the spread of local bakeries and the invention of the French baguette and pastries), this morning meal is a key element in the timed daily organization in schools, factories, offices, barracks, etc. In France, the adjective '*petit*' (small) was tacked on to the name of this morning meal (*petit déjeuner*), while the dinner meal shifted from midday to the evening.
The transition from rare exotic beverages to their mass consumption involved simultaneous intensification of production, which the transatlantic slave trade facilitated. The development of economies geared solely towards fulfilling the demand from 'northern countries' gave rise to the 'developed' and 'subdeveloped' country concept. Our breakfasts are therefore tied closely with global inequality.

Nomadic diet of the Fulani

Salamatou Sow, sociolinguist at the *Université Abdou Moumouni* (Niger), discussed the nomadic diet of Fulani people—zebu cattle herders who constantly wander throughout Africa in search of water and grazing land for their animals.

The diet of these nomadic Fulani people includes elements that they produce themselves and commodities found in markets during their wanderings.

Millet is their main staple cereal, which they prepare in different ways. They make couscous, which is dried and stored for at least 3 months and then usually prepared by steaming. This millet couscous, or so-called *latchiri,* is popular throughout the Fulani community, from Senegal to Sudan. Tea is an important beverage in their diet and is generally consumed (along with dates) by adults, while children eat tea leaves dipped in sugar.

Cassava semolina, or so-called *gari* (which means 'flour'), was introduced by coastal inhabitants in 1954 to help these Fulani people cope with the great famine in the Sahel. According to Salamatou Sow, this diet is beneficial "for the belly and the mouth" but also has a symbolic significance. In Niger, for instance, red millet is known for its strengthening qualities—it is nourishing but also considered to convey certain virtues. This food is served during marriages and other ceremonies to bind families, while sometimes being offered as alms or placed alongside a container of milk as a gift to appease the Fire Goddess.

Millet thus has three features—it is nourishing and helps boost strength, it is sacred and creates a connection with the deities via offerings, and it also binds links between people when offered as alms.

Discussion – Plant journeys and travels through meals

This discussion, moderated by **Damien Conaré**, revealed how foods can travel in the form of separate ingredients, in this case as plants, or combined, cooked and accompanied by all practices implemented to prepare a meal.

Plant journeys and major discoveries

Michel Chandeigne, publisher, translator and contributor to Jose Mendes Ferrão's book *Le voyage des plantes et les grandes découvertes*, traced the journey of many plants over the ages.

It is widely known that tomatoes, potatoes and corn came from the Americas—the 'New World'—and were brought back to Europe by Spaniards. But the fact that almost all food crops changed continents in the 16th and 17th centuries, thus drastically altering food habits and agricultural practices in tropical areas, is often overlooked. This first globalization phenomenon—the extent of which is still underestimated—was mainly impelled by Portuguese shipping on the maritime trade route to India, with seeds and plants being disseminated at stops in Madeira, the Azores, Brazil, São Tomé, Angola and Mozambique, and then Goa and Malacca—the Far East trading hub. The Portuguese held a monopoly over these intercontinental maritime links throughout the 16th century.

Meanwhile, Spaniards were trading with Central America, and then the Acapulco-Manila trade route opened around 1565. Soon thereafter, typical Asian plants like coconut, mango, sweet orange, etc., were found in West Africa and the Americas, whereas many American plants such as pineapple, peanut, pumpkin, guava, bean, papaya, cashew, etc., emerged on other continents. This included chilli peppers, which were introduced in Asia at Goa, where this crop subsequently had a major impact on food practices, while cassava, after its introduction in São Tomé in 1550, quickly became the main staple food on the continent.

A few important crops, such as coffee, watermelon and oil palm, were exported from Africa. Sugarcane, of Asian origin but acclimatized in the Mediterranean Basin since the Middle Ages, was exploited on an almost industrial scale as early as the 15th century, first in Madeira and São Tomé, and then in Brazil—this phenomenon gave rise to the beginning of the mass deportation of African slaves to the New World.

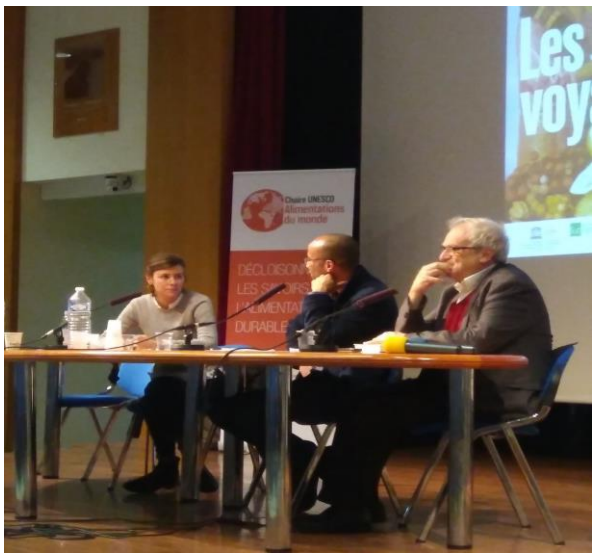
Very Food Trip and Refugee Food Festival

Marine Mandrila, a young entrepreneur, undertook a 'very food trip', during which she stopped in 18 countries and filmed meals that were cooked and shared with local people. She is also co-founder of the Refugee Food Festival, whereby restaurant kitchens are entrusted to refugee cooks.

At the end of their academic studies, Marine Mandrila and her boyfriend—both food lovers—decided to explore the world with the intuitive view that food and cooking serve as a key crossroads for cultural exchange. Their aim was thus to meet and share meals with 'ordinary' people in many countries. They left with just a camera and backpack with the intention of meeting local inhabitants, especially at markets, and eventually share a meal with them. This 'very food trip' led to the publication of a cookbook in the guise of a travel notebook.

Marine Mandrila and her boyfriend also founded the Refugee Food Festival, which was held for the first time in June 2016, with the dual purpose of changing the way refugees are viewed, while helping them integrate the workforce in their host country.

She decided to ask some restaurant owners in Paris to provide refugee chefs and cooks with access to their kitchens to enable them to prepare a meal, thus ultimately creating a moment of cultural exchange with guests. This took place in ten Parisian restaurants and involved eight cooks of five different nationalities.
A methodological kit was also developed on the basis of this first successful experience to provide guidelines to citizen volunteers for organizing a Refugee Food Festival in their towns under the umbrella of this project. By June 2017, 13 towns in France and elsewhere in Europe had participated in the festival.

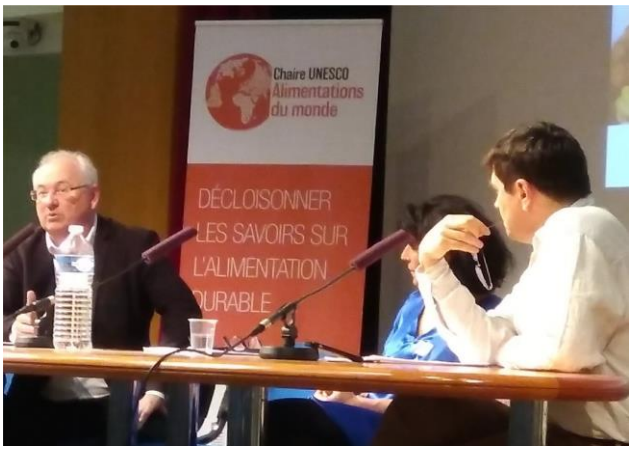


Session 2: Dissemination, trade and delivery

According to **Nicolas Bricas**, socioeconomist at CIRAD and Director of the UNESCO Chair on World Food Systems, who moderated this second session, "globalization does not just involve the movement of goods, there is also a free flow of recipes."

The food industry's last-mile delivery challenge

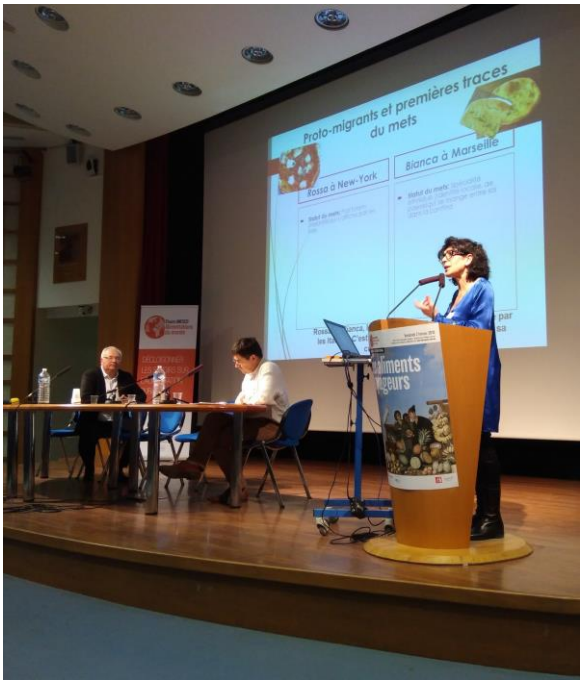
Paul Wagner, Development Director at ChronopostFood, explained how this subsidiary of *La Poste* (France) meets the last-mile food distribution challenge.



Last-mile delivery challenges in the food industry are increasingly prevalent because of changes in food habits—novel solutions are needed for the distribution of dry, fresh and frozen food products. The advent of food e-commerce has led to the emergence of numerous online sales outlets for a broad range of foods, alongside the creation of online sales platforms of current supermarket giants such as Monoprix and Carrefour in France. Existing 'pure players' such as Cdiscount are also starting to sell food goods, in addition to Amazon which now offers deliveries within a few hours at competitive prices. Finally, new services such as food recipe boxes (Quitoque, Illico Fresco) require special B2C distribution logistics. The development of these different types of online food sales services goes hand-in-hand with the development of services for the delivery of food goods from the point of origin to the point of consumption. Ensuring the health security of the food commodities during this delivery process is a crucial logistic and technological challenge.

Pizza connexion – cultures and globalization

Sylvie Sanchez, anthropologist at the Edgar Morin Centre of the *Institut interdisciplinaire d'anthropologie du contemporain* (IIAC), discussed the history of the popularization of pizza worldwide and how this dish has changed since it left Naples, its city of origin.

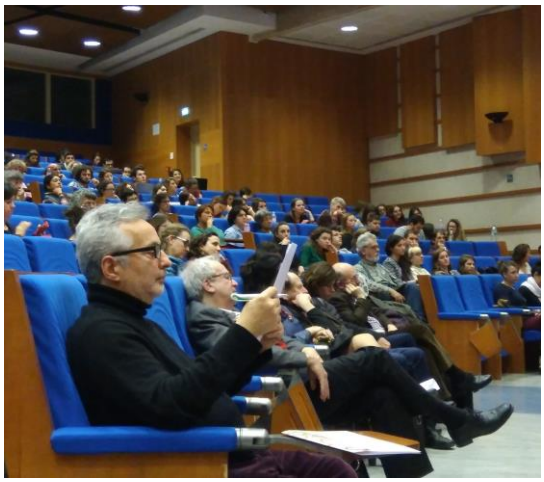


Pizza first emerged in Naples around the 16th century and then spread virtually worldwide during the 20th century, especially after WWII. Pizza became a familiar daily dish in the United States even before being introduced in northern Italy, whereas Americanized forms are now taking a foothold in Europe and other continents. The vicariance—i.e. the introduction and evolution within different cultural environments—of this dish through a diverse range of cultures and culinary identities offers an ideal means for investigating the conditions via which intercultural contacts, mutual borrowing, appropriation and reappropriation take place. Indeed, the history of pizza is a paradox—becoming a globalized dish while not breaking down borders.

CONCLUSION

Jean- Pierre Hassoun, sociologist at the *Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux sociaux* (IRIS) and a CNRS Research Director, presented a brief wrap-up on the proceedings of this one-day conference.

"Foods do not travel alone." So 'food journeys' should be historically documented and placed in their setting. In this spirit, and inspired by the historical talks of Michel Chandeigne and Christian Grataloup, Jean-Pierre Hassoun noted that the colonial and slave trade periods were crucial with regard to flows of food commodities, even though these conditions were not exclusive. The second idea put forward concerned the possible links between taste and power, as inspired by Foucault's power/knowledge concept. This idea was conveyed in several of the talks, including that of Sylvie Sanchez, who described the fierce struggles to get the authenticity of Neapolitan pizza recognized, in Jonas Pariente's films, where the calm authority of the women interviewed emerged, while Kamal Mouzawak's talk revealed how food borders can reflect political hostilities, whereas overcoming them illustrates peacemaking processes. Finally, Mariane Lefebvre highlighted the perverse (and violent) impacts that the sudden exposure to food abundance may have on some migrants in Quebec. The act of eating is also an act of power—a political initiative. This idea was conveyed specifically in Lebanese settings (Kamal Mouzawak) and in Marine Mandrila's description of Refugee Food Festivals. These examples also illustrate the food empowerment concept. Finally, the last key idea was that, "with regard to food, nothing travels without changing." But these changes coexist with discussions that promote the value of the transmission and continuity of food traditions, as well as conservative resistance to an ever-evolving food setting. However, it seems that what counts is the meanings and emotions that everyone finds (or believes they find) in some so-called 'family', 'national' or 'ethnic' tastes. At this level, the cursor should be placed closer to invention than to transmission or reproduction.



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