

SOME ASPECTS REGARDING THE DIVERSITY OF FOOD CULTURE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES

Cristina-Elena HREȚCANU¹, Alice ROȘU¹, Silviu-Gabriel STROE¹, Ana LEAHU¹

¹Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Faculty of Food Engineering, Romania, e-mail: cristinah@usv.ro

Abstract: *Our main aim in this paper is to explore how food consumption leads to a deeper understanding of societies, its culture and beliefs. The significance of “diversity” of the food products refers to social, cultural and spatial variability and variety as major characteristics of food globalization. The great diversity of food and beverage products forms a part of regional or national cultural identity. When it comes to the diversity of food culture, one should take into consideration some of the following important aspects:*

- a). consumption of food, including gastronomic habits, determined by cultural and social conditions as well as by political and historical contexts;*
- b). food identity markers in terms of ethnic, religious and class identification factors;*
- c). globalization of food, seen as an economic and cultural process;*
- d). highly processed food as against genuine home made food; and the list of enumeration remains open.*

Depending on locale, multiple food producers may specialize in specific types of food characteristic of a given cultural or ethnic tradition. As a product of globalisation we commonly consume nowadays some kinds of products like coffee and tea. Food products have played a major part in the social and religious life of human groups, being much more than a source of nutrition.

Key Words: *gastronomic habits, identity markers, product of globalisation*

Introduction

The definition of food and its ways of consumption are determined by social and cultural conditions and contexts [1]. For human, the consumption of food is affected by many factors such as social positions income, social traditions and religious beliefs.

Thus, the culture, lifestyle and economic conditions can make a development of local food traditions.

In the last decade, a variety of new foods are transplanted from other places and the spread of cuisines across the globe is understood as a way to clarify economic and cultural processes of globalization. As a result of the expansion of the globalization effect, every society has its own particular diet

affected by many factors such as social traditions, geographical position and historical context, population, religious beliefs and social class. [2-3].

Food functions as an “intimate frontier between self and other, local and foreign, past and present” [4]. As an important part of any celebrate special occasions all over the world - like Christmas, New Year, weddings and birthdays - food can unite community bonds and helps to maintain a common identity among a group of persons.

Materials and Methods

Gastronomic habits become the markers of cultural continuity, difference and assimilation.

- a). Our starting point in studding the

diversity of food culture might be the different ways of food consumption affected by factors such as *income, social traditions, religious beliefs, social positions* and so on. Then, from another perspective the importance of food in understanding human culture lies precisely in its infinite variability.

We can describe, for examples, some aspects regarding French cuisine, Italian cuisine and Japanese cuisine respectively, as follows:

French cuisine is extremely diverse, with only the Chinese having similar variety in their food. This variety is supported by the French passion for good food in all its forms, France's extraordinary range of different geographies and climates which support the local production of all types of ingredients, and France's long and varied history. In many ways, an understanding of the culture of French food and recipes is an understanding of France itself. [5]

Italian cuisine is noted for its regional diversity, abundance of difference in taste, and is known to be one of the most popular in the world, with influences abroad. Ingredients and dishes vary by region. Many dishes that were once regional, however, have proliferated with variations throughout the country. Each area has its own specialties, primarily at regional level, but also at provincial level. The differences can come from a bordering country (such as France or Austria), whether a region is close to the sea or the mountains, and economics. Italian cuisine is also seasonal with priority placed on the use of fresh produce. [6]

Japanese cuisine has developed over the centuries as a result of many political and social changes. The cuisine eventually changed with the advent of the Medieval age which ushered in a shedding of elitism with the age of shogun rule. In the early modern era massive changes took place that

introduced non-Japanese cultures, most notably Western culture, to Japan. The modern term "Japanese cuisine" means traditional-style Japanese food, similar to that already existing before the end of national seclusion in 1868. In a broader sense of the word, it could also include foods whose ingredients or cooking methods were subsequently introduced from abroad, but which have been developed by Japanese who made them their own. Japanese cuisine is known for its emphasis on seasonality of food, quality of ingredients and presentation. [7-8]

b) As for the second above mentioned aspect we have chosen to deal with the importance of diversity of food culture from the religious point of view, focusing on the spiritual values that food has acquired in food religious rituals and in different religions. For many faiths including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, these rituals have become central due to the essential role played by food in cultural practices and religious beliefs which is complex and varies among individuals and communities. However, the regulations governing food and drink differ from one to the next, including some faiths that do not advocate any restrictions. For example, the ritual of communion is regularly celebrated by Christians. This involves eating bread and drinking wine (or substitutes) to represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Catholics, for example, could find a bond between each other and a mark of difference from Protestants by substituting fish for meat on Fridays. Numerous cakes, puddings, pies, and pastries are reserved throughout Europe for special occasions. In all these cases, the special food serves to mark the special occasion, emphasizing its spiritual significance.

Further on we give some examples of traditional Christmas foods in different

countries of the world, differing from one country to the other, depending on many cultural factors and significance [9-10]: in France - black and white pudding, this is sausage containing blood; in Germany - gingerbread biscuits and liqueur chocolates; in Russia - a feast of 12 different dishes, representing Christ's disciples.

c) The third aspect looked upon in this paper is food globalization as most of the foods that people commonly eat today are the products of this global phenomenon. It is primarily due to the

interconnectivity between nations and regions, namely social, political, historical and cultural relationships and bonds established between peoples and ethnic communities. But globalization began centuries before the term came into use. Historically, trade in food and agriculture has been a key driver of globalization [11]. The collected data presented in table 1 give us some examples of beverage products that have a significant impact on our life at present at global level.

Table 1:

Some examples of the globalization results regarding food spreading

Type of product	Historical description	Spreading description
Coffee [12]	<p>8th c. - Ethiopia—legend of the dancing goats; 900s - Coffee first appears in writing, by Arab physician, Rhazes; 1710 - French invent infusion method of brewing coffee; 1820 - Caffeine (C₈H₁₀N₄O₂) was isolated from green coffee beans; 1900 - Hills Bros. invent vacuum-packed coffee can.</p>	<p>By 1500 - Muslim pilgrims spread coffee to Egypt, Turkey and Persia; 1536 - Coffee (called “Mocha”) was exported through city of Mocha in Yemen; 1600s - India begins cultivation from seeds smuggled in by a Muslim; 1650–1690 - Coffeeshouses open in England, Germany, Vienna, Venice and Paris; 1699 - Dutch transplant trees to Java in Indonesia; 1727 - Coffee smuggled into Brazil; by 1900 - Americans drink 50% of the coffee in the world.</p>
Tea [13]	<p>2737 B.C. - The second emperor of China, Shen Nung, discovers tea; 648-749 - Japanese monk Gyoki plants the first tea bushes in Buddhist temple gardens; 1211 - Japanese Buddhist abbot Eisai writes the first Japanese tea book of Tea Sanitation; 1657 - The first tea is sold as a health beverage in London, England; 1702-1714 - During Queen Anne's reign, tea drinking thrives in British coffeeshouses; 1866 - Over 90 percent of Britain's tea is still imported from China; 1909 - Thomas Lipton begins blending and packaging his tea at New York.</p>	<p>479 - Turkish traders bargain for tea on the border of Mongolia; 593 - Buddhism and tea journey from China to Japan; 1610 - Tea reaches Europe, carried by the Dutch from Bantam, Java. The Portuguese created trade routes to China. From Lisbon the East India Company transported the tea to Holland, France and Germany; Late 1600s - Russia and China sign a treaty that brings the tea trade across Mongolia and Siberia; 1650 - The Dutch introduce several teas and tea traditions to New Amsterdam (which later becomes New York); 1840 – 1850 - The first tea plants, imports from China and India, are cultivated on a trial basis in Sri Lanka; 1910 - Sumatra, Indonesia becomes a cultivator and exporter of tea followed by Kenya and parts of Africa.</p>

d) Highly processed food as against genuine home made food might be related to food globalization, as they go to some extent hand in hand. Fast food chains are more accessible during the standard lunch break than personal home which are usually too far away to return to for a shared meal. Food, as we know it today, in microwaveable, flash frozen, snacks, junk food or fast food has gone wrong and lost somehow its basic identity. Sometimes people consider their meals around the clock: for example, McDonald's seems to be the same everywhere, but according to Watson and colleagues [14], the locals of Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo and other Asian cities, changed the famous burger company, its food and its menu. McDonald's in Japan offers rice and shrimp. Fast food is now an integral part of the Japanese life, but in addition to the usual fare, other "local" specialties are available. [15] Modern commercial fast food is often highly processed and prepared in an

industrial fashion, i.e., on a large scale with standard ingredients, standardized cooking and production methods. Also, eating is one form of creative activity in which subjects are allowed to make choices. [16] It is usually rapidly served a fashion manner which minimizes cost: in cartons, bags or in plastic wrapping.

Results and Discussion

Taking into consideration a detailed list of dishes and the total cost of the amount for one week food consumption for families from 12 different countries [17], we focused on consumers' preferences, paying attention to shelf-life data of food and beverages for human consumption, expenditure on food and beverages, including the prices paid.

As we can remark in the figure 1 the enormous differences regarding the cost of the alimentation is intimately influenced by the income.

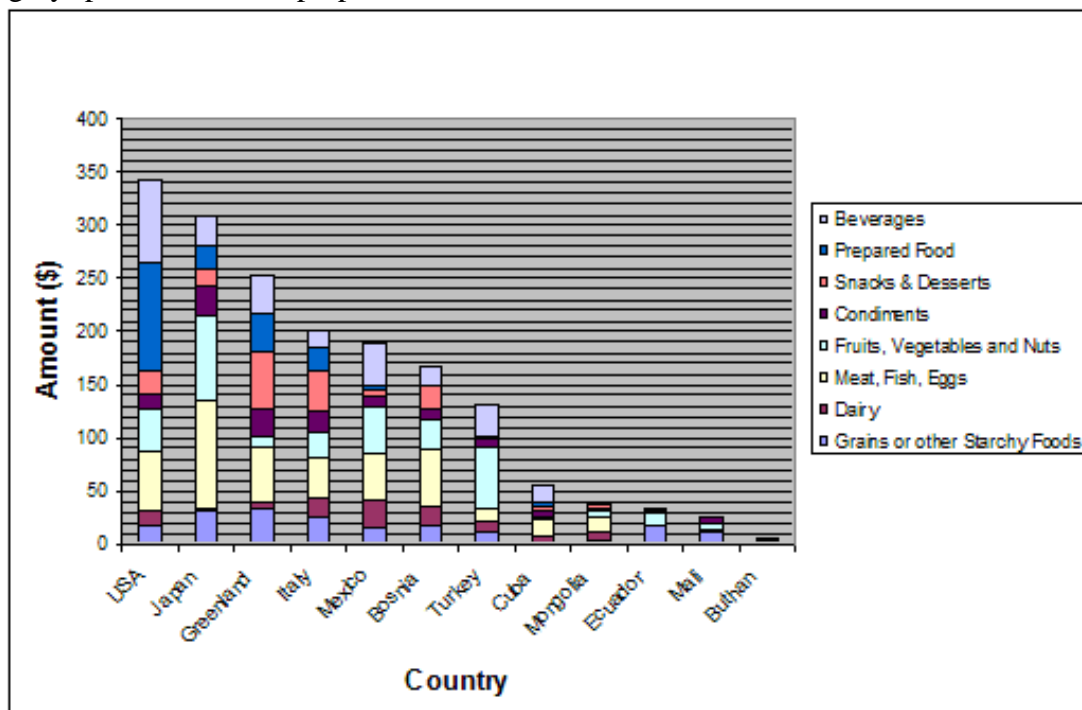


Figure 1: Total amount for one week food consumption in a family

One can easily notice that there are some disparities between the consumption of certain food items

usually related to whether or not a product can be supplied locally. Food and beverages are amongst the

most important consumption items, satisfying the basic physiological needs of hunger and thirst and forming one of the most recurrent expenditure items for the majority of European Union households.

Diets are sometimes considered as signs of ethnic groups and people select their diet from food items available in their geographical region. The influence of the conditions determined by the geographical position and historical influence of the country, religion or cultural as well as the means of production which leads to the development of different dietary habits. Great attention should also be paid to the influence of the conditions determined by the geographical position and historical influence of the country, religion or cultural as well as the means of production which lead to the

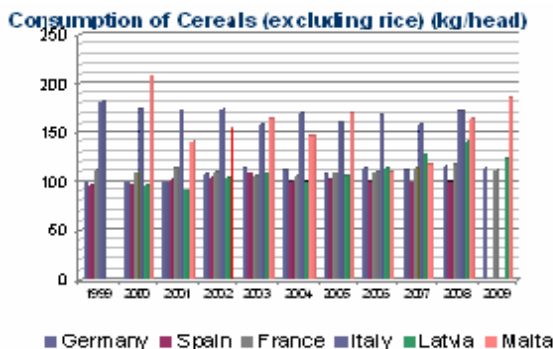


Figure 2: Consumption of Cereals (excluding rice) from 1999 to 2009 in some European Union country

Conclusion

Diversity of food culture leads obviously to a deeper understanding of societies, its culture and beliefs where the gastronomic habits become markers of cultural continuity, difference and assimilation. One can notice that, as a result of the expansion of the globalization effect, every society has its own particular diet affected by many factors such as social traditions, geographical position and historical context, population, religious beliefs

development of different dietary habits in the European countries in question.

When purchasing food, European consumers take into consideration, first of all, the quality and secondly the price.

Using the policies on food safety and hygiene, animal and plant health, nutritional information, labeling, welfare regulations and, also, restrictions on pesticide residues, the European Union works to safeguard food quality. Using the information from Eurostat Pocketbooks: Food - from farm to fork statistics [18], Consumption of Cereals (excluding rice) and Meat are presented in the Figure 2 and Figure 3: average per capita apparent consumption (for the EU country which sends details regarding these topics):

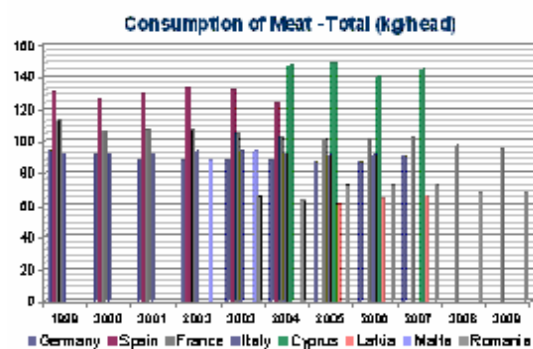


Figure 3: Consumption of Meat from 1999 to 2009 in some European Union country

and social class. Food globalization as a significant cultural phenomenon is due to the interconnectivity between nations and regions, namely social, political, historical and cultural relationships and bonds established among peoples. And not in the last, when it comes to food culture, people should primarily have in view the policies on food safety and hygiene, animal and plant health, nutritional information and labeling and welfare regulations and also restrictions on pesticide residues promoted by the European Union that works to safeguard food quality.

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