Introduction: from local food to localised food

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Local food has captured the interest of a number of academic disciplines and many of them are represented in this special issue of Anthropology of Food, based on a European Scientific Foundation exploratory workshop where European researchers met to discuss the concept of local food (see part 2). Through a pluridisciplinary perspective, this issue deepens the problematic and adds to research questions on local food in both empirical and theoretical ways, while raising an uncertainty about the concept of local food by extending the dimension from local to localised food.

The previous AOF web journal on Local Food (AOF n.4. 2005) highlighted the fact that “local food” was a broad term containing several different complementary and dynamic dimensions and concluded by emphasizing differences between place and space, with a “place aspect that often underlines the historical, cultural and social features, while physical space obviously focuses on the typicality of the products from this special place”. What is considered local covers a variety of scenarios, which reflect diverse academic starting points including rural development, systems management, social networks and ethnographic routines and livelihoods. The idea of short food chains has been central to the formulation of a new geography of food, as well as to rural development studies. Within economic disciplines, localisation of food continues a ‘tradition’ of analysing the decentralisation of power and bureaucracies. From the consumer perspective the emergence of the local food concept has rekindled interest in the folklorist approach particularly in the US. To some extent, anthropology has become an umbrella for geo-demographic sciences (geography, sociology, marketing etc.), thus it becomes possible to discern theoretical perspectives within these anthropological approaches:

• Rural sociology – rural communities and traditional farm systems
• Economic geography – power within supply chains
• Sustainability – ecology and health
• Marketing – product labels and branding
• Consumer research – demand for quality, ethics and authenticity
• Folklore – traditional recipes and food habits

Many of these different avenues of approach are touched on in this special edition of AOF that has been structured to reflect the pan-disciplinary implications of a specifically anthropological interpretation of what is rapidly becoming a major socio-economic driving force within European cultures. Hence, some articles in the edition deal with regional food specialities whilst others concentrate on the concept of sustainable food systems.

In one sense it is possible to set a linear frame of reference amongst these approaches. Starting with economic considerations – such as the UK New Economics Foundation (NEF) calculation that locally-produced food generates almost twice as much income for the local economy as the same amount spent in a typical supermarket. This leads on to considerations not only of costs but of socio-anthropological meanings and practices of everyday life surrounding food production and consumption, the way people do things. To which end, Belasco reminds us that ‘Western dualism prizes mind over body, and (of) the idealised bourgeois division between the female sphere of consumption and the male sphere of production’ (Belasco, 2002, p.51). Further up the scale we might thus move to ‘reposition food as a primary focus of social enquiry instead of merely a useful tool’ (Belasco, 2002, p.51), and a realisation that we don’t just define our identity by food; food also constitutes our physical existence and any mental repercussions from that. From which point it becomes possible to study food as more than a simple consumer item but rather as a way to approach larger issues such as the interaction between globalisation and the invention of national cuisine. In this way we return not in a circle to economic issues but in a spiral from micro to macro economic issues. This is the breadth of exploration that the study of ‘local foods’ opens up to scholars.

Rules, legislations, contracts and conventions

European regulation is a common political tool that creates a logical frame for reflections about local food in Europe, and the most common reference in this special issue has been the EU regulation No 2081/92 from July 14th 1992 about Protected Designations of origin for foods, which is characterised by the name of a place to designate products coming originally from this area and therefore having a specific quality (see Box 1). Nevertheless local food is a complex concept that is far from just regulated by law and rules.
Box 1: A European approach to local food, through movements and legislations
The Slow Food movement was founded in 1986 in Italy and was expanded to twenty countries in 1989. Today there are about eighty-thousand members in more than one-thousand groups ("convivial") worldwide. The movement helps to save local values and traditions (e.g. Biodiversity foundation).

In the early 1990's, a new quality concept was established in the EU based on the historic traditions of French quality labels (e.g. Label Rouge). The basic regulations of the EU agricultural quality policy are as follows:

- Council regulation (EEC) No 2092/91 on organic production of agricultural products and indications referring thereto on agricultural products and foodstuffs.
- Council regulation (EEC) No 2081/92 on the protection of geographical indications (PGI) and designation of origin (PDO) on agricultural products and foodstuffs.
- Council regulation (EEC) No 2082/92 on certificates of specific character for agricultural products and foodstuffs.

These regulations contribute to the diversification of agricultural production, which is also an objective of rural development policy. They bring benefits to farmers and retain the population in rural areas. From 1993 on, EU member-states and nowadays also other countries can register their product denominations at the EU level to the Common European Register. In the EU three categories of denomination exists:

- Protected Designation of Origin – PDO
- Protected Geographical Indication – PGI
- Traditional Speciality Guaranteed – TSG

Each of these quality denominations has a specific Community symbol, a logo. The logo has a round form, is yellow and blue and the symbol represents the sun. In the case of PDO and PGI there is a symbol for countryside in the middle, representing a delimited geographical area to which the registered product name is linked. At the end of 2005, there were 705 PDO and PGI product names registered in the EU Register and 24 were registered during 2005. Within denominations, the biggest product category is cheese with 142 names registered. While in PGI denomination, the majority of the names are fruits and vegetables and fresh meats, with 87 and 78 product names registered respectively. Geographical Indication and Designation of Origin indicate the name of a region, a specific place or, in exceptional cases, a country, standing for an agricultural product or a foodstuff. Conditions for PDO products are the following:

- 1) All the steps of the production, processing, preparation, including raw materials must be performed in the defined geographical area whose name the product bears; and
- 2) The quality characteristics of the product must essentially or exclusively originate from a particular geographical area.

PGI is a more flexible category. The conditions for PDI products are as follows:

- 1) At least one phase of production, processing or preparation has to take place in the defined area.
- 2) The product has to possess a specific quality, reputation or other characteristics attributable to its geographical origin. The product denomination contains the geographical name and the product name.

Upon French initiative was launched the “Euroterroirs” program in 1993, to prepare an inventory of EU regional food products. Its conception can be summarized as follows: Traditions, region and culture linked to the products are considered as important quality features. Food consumption habits have a cultural aspect, and they contribute to the national identity. Traditional and regional products are therefore part of the national cultural heritage. From an economic point of view, these high quality products are competitive in the overstocked European market. A particular attention is devoted by the EU to the connection between origin and quality, the basis for protection may be determined. The specific link between quality and origin has a cultural base, as human added value, human “know-how”. Factors associated with the product are such as: name, trade-mark, appearance, package, and label. Psychological factors are tradition or heritage, customs, knowledge and experience.
Networks and Conventions

The ever popular concept of network to analyse relationships and activities is then attractive while trying to understand and structure the world of local food. However, Lockie reminds us not to over simplify the rigour, or confuse the application, of this approach. He identifies three different conceptualisations of social networks: social network analysis, the network society thesis and actor-network theory noting that these approaches are based on divergent ontological assumptions. At the same time, Fine (2004) notes that across the social sciences actor-network theory has inspired in particular over the past decade a greater understanding of the culture of consumption.

A second popular format for analysis has been ‘economics of conventions’, an emerging school of economic thought which holds that economies can be conceived as sets of rules, largely implicit in nature, which actors generate and by which they coordinate themselves under conditions of uncertainty.

Diagram 1. World's of Production in the local food sector, after Storper, 1996

Storper’s Worlds of Production derived from conventions theory was employed by Murdoch and Miele (2003) to demonstrate the shift in worlds that accompanies niche marketing for organic and traditional artisan foods and in this edition we see in particular the application of World’s of Production on two additional levels, that of the market (Tregear, A.) and the consumer (Amilien, V.) – see Diagram 1.

However, such a schematic can also been seen as a framework for hybridization. Ilbery and Maye (2005) for example found that the heterogeneity of surveyed specialist livestock producer initiatives, in the Scottish - English borders, throws into question the simple conceptual distinction between conventional and alternative supply chains and the relationship of 'short supply chains' to each. The researchers found that the specialist food chain is triggered though upstream supply links in the same way as conventional food chains, and producers attempting alternative forms of supply
nevertheless are linked to different conventional nodes downstream, such as abattoirs, processors, and wholesalers. The authors conclude that food supply chains are therefore better characterised as 'hybrid spaces'.

Definition frames around local food

In their last book about *Terroir products, between culture and regulations*, Laurence Bérard and Philippe Marchenay drew definition frames around terroir and local food products by referring to PGI, PDO, TSG, as well as food baskets, distributor's own label or slow food. In this special issue, they emphasize the concept of localised food production and products, which is not only based on the local as a place, but on the cultural dimension as well as the know-how aspect. In an article mostly based on the Dutch context, Hielke S. van der Meulen also proposes a definition frame by characterizing a methodological tool that takes into consideration various factors and their relationship to connectedness of food products to their places of origin. The author notices how central is the way people assess the 'originality' of food products while thinking definition and frame, and how interesting it could be for producers of a “region-typical food product to pay more attention to the environment in order to ensure public support for continued access to a vulnerable biosphere”. In spite of a common black box around which everybody agrees, local food appears pluridimensional and peculiarly culturally subjective, socially environmental and politically dependent on the market.

Cultural vs. environmental anthropology

Underpinning research on the ecological vs. cultural approaches to local food are the sub-disciplines of environmental and cultural anthropology. The new trend in academic food studies, which invokes eco-gastronomic movements and elevates slow food over fast food, is a descendant from the ethnographic approaches of cultural anthropology. Environmental anthropology on the other hand emerged from the field defined in the 1950s by Julian Steward as cultural ecology and has led to a process of ‘organising the realities of interdependent plants animals and humans... and to try passionately to save what is of value and importance to the survival of a diverse world’. Both branches are heir to the tradition of subjective, qualitative learning and reflexive self-criticism within anthropology. However, each is also influenced by the doctrines and practices of positivism, and more quantitative data, through association primarily with policy related disciplines. Environmental anthropology is subject to shared goals in human ecology, and cultural anthropology likewise has formed strong bridges with disciplines such as nutrition and health sciences. Nabhan (2006) shows that health comes from a genetically appropriate diet inextricably entwined with a healthy land and culture, ‘each traditional cuisine has evolved to fit the inhabitants of a particular landscape or seascape over the last several millennia’ but this does not explain the generations of genetic mix in the American melting pot, so this analysis might be of limited value in modern societies. The possibilistic view of culture-environment relationships has on occasion been categorised as a compromise between cultural (only culture determines culture) and environmental determinism. This classification underestimates and obscures the influence of interactionism; the dialectic between culture or human choice and environmental opportunities inherent within the possibilistic stance.

Possibilism is the basis for evolutionary theory. It has been suggested that shared suppositions within rural sociology, geography, and history, conferring on local food both artisan properties and contributions to rural development, under-appreciate the
dynamic nature of the evolution of food-territory links from a broader perspective. Much can be learned by cultural, national and ideological trends in shaping local foods in their various guises. For example, in one survey, ‘typical’ foods grounded in UK conventions were contrasted with ‘classic’ Mediterranean products. In another study on supply routes for the vegetable trade from Africa to Europe, it was found that variation in patterns and infrastructures appears to reflect pre-existing socio-cultural preferences of the importing country. The study found that the British buy ‘baby’ vegetables from industrial-scale farms, pre-packed and pre-trimmed, and the trade is coordinated by managers and technologists, whilst the French buy their vegetables ‘naked’ from peasant farms, and merchants and entrepreneurs coordinate the trade.

Ethnographic approaches through local food, regional food and traditional food hold the potential to bind and stabilise communities through continuing their histories. Terroir is defined as ‘sharing soil and weather conditions ...earth as a whole (and) its cumulative use over the years (...) the culture and morals of the proprietor, and the soul of the country’. Within this pattern of life and work, cooking provides a deep connection with the earth and becomes a social act that forges cultures ‘as rite and magic binds those who believe, and brands those who don’t’. These are traditional foods that there is an indigenous demand to preserve. The exciting thing about such indigenous knowledge is not just knowing the recipes or the local village, but knowing the context of these by knowing also the variations in recipes and the reasons for these variations, and knowing the entire region within which the locality is set. Indigenous knowledge is thus a body of knowledge, a system. In other words, terroir is a reflexive understanding of the context of a specific locality or recipe. At the same time terroir products are a source of income for maintaining the resources needed to preserve the cultural infrastructure and way of life through an external demand for those same speciality foods sold at a premium in distant markets.

Demand for terroir products has been instrumental in the CAP reform programme in the guise of protected food labels – PDI: protected designated indication; PDO: protected geographical origin. Eurobarometer findings of a food quality survey in 1998 (n=16,000) were, that:

- 30% of Europeans said that origin (country or region) of agri-food products was an important criteria on which to buy;
- 76% of Europeans claim to consume food produced ‘traditionally’;
- 50% of Europeans have heard of and 40% have bought PDO products at some time though not necessarily on a regular basis.

Moreover, the availability of these labels has led to the re-invention of traditions in some cases. In the case of gamalost or ‘old cheese’ (Hegnes A.), the revival of traditional food is marketed primarily to stimulate a general (urban) consumer interest in traditional foods. Presumably some consumers of the cheese are not aware that the process has to all intents and purposes largely declined in a cultural sense. This is consistent with recent findings on the subtlety of markets for rural, local foods. In Sweden, rural food business managers use local food culture to gain competitive advantage but since rural customers are of minor economic value except on festive occasions and prefer a classical urban meal to the food they eat at home, the most advantageous local food combines an urban ideal of the countryside, by using authentic rural products, with the rural ideal of classical urban cuisine. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the foie gras case study in the empirical part of this edition...
(Téchoueyres I.), local foods can be a vehicle for new technologies to be introduced. In some countries, locally grown produce has in fact become a signifier for safer, as noted in relation to the avoidance of e coli contamination[^20]. This is not surprising given the attention paid to traceability systems in the last decade. Giraud (2006) found that whereas traceability systems are good in France, Italy, Malta, Spain, Hungary, Slovenia and Germany; systems in Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Norway and the Netherlands were not so good, with a willingness to pay for traceability shown only in Italy and Germany.

Local food and in a global frame

Tensions between local and global were highlighted in the previous AOF issue on local food concluding that “in many cases the globalisation process does not eradicate, but rather stimulate the rebirth or reconstruction of local and regional values”. The construction of local food, stimulated by the global market, is described in this number through a French case study where a regional wine is turned into a local wine (Crenn C. and Téchouèyes I.) The phenomenon of patrimonialization is closely related to relocalization, which has been a common strategy in agricultural policy (Brunori G.) Part of the strategy consists in alternative distribution channels, like participation in farmers’ markets or on-farm retail activities that diverge from the global hypermarket system.

Although in 2001, research suggested that whilst there were evident economic and social benefits of local food to farmers, micro-businesses and community, environmental benefits including ‘food miles’ were not proven[^21]. Six years on from this, the body of evidence relating to the environmental benefits of local food has amassed and there is a need to identify environmental issues as well as socio-economic. Local food is now seen as greener than organic. Calculations indicate that reducing food sourcing to within 20km would lead to an environmental saving of £2.1bn annually in the UK. This is compared to a yearly saving of £1.1bn in environmental costs if all farms were organic[^22].

Within the organic movement concern has grown over the past years that organic food may lose intrinsic qualities when introduced in the conventional system – known as conventionalisation (Vittersø et al, 2005). And it is suggested that organic farming is often beneficial for alternative food chains because it is ‘a way to disengage from commoditisation and ...to undertake a variety of on-and off-farm activities’[^23]. In Ireland, ‘organic’ is being explicitly reconstructed to include socio-environmental values deemed to be missing from certified produce[^24]. Moore notes that, the collective cultural behaviour and language around ‘postorganic’ can buffer against the pressures of economic disconnection from the mainstream food system. One of the key aims of ecological approaches to food production is an emphasis on natural animal behaviours. There are questions therefore that remain unanswered in relation to whether the welfare aspirations expressed in northwest Europe can accommodate the full range of culturally derived local foods – the example of foie gras production being a pertinent specific example and the standards of local meat product production in newly unionised countries a more general issue. Potentially the traditional foie gras practice can be justified in the face of evidence relating to the well-being of the duck and cultural (and international) importance of the foie gras terroir product, but here there are no firm answers only suggestions for future explorations and assessment.
Thus, to summarise, the world of possible benefits of alternative food networks as depicted by Holloway\textsuperscript{25} are:

- Local economies and societies
- High-quality specialist food products
- Particular ‘traditional’ farming practices and livestock breeds
- Ecology of a farmed landscape

Some authors focus in particular on the last of these. In particular there is a growing belief that as society has urbanised so the population has lost touch with the ‘natural loops’ of farming livestock and crops in ‘mutually beneficial circles’, leading to a clash of viewpoints between local or ‘small utopian’ and ‘big organic’\textsuperscript{26}. This alienation is seen as part of a cultural trend towards individualisation and fast food eating, ‘the loneliness of the fast food eater and de-socialising effect of microwave cooking alienate us from the communal act that made culture. The role of the next revolution will be to subvert the last’\textsuperscript{27}. Such thinking underpins the rapid advance of plans for a localised agricultural world\textsuperscript{28}.

Trade vs. sustainability

Such questions of dietary and spiritual subsistence make a compelling case for eating from the ‘foodshed’ to avoid ‘\textit{the vacuous nutritional promises of the industrialised food that has sold our health down the river}’ (Nabhan, 2002). Nabhan highlights the ‘craving to be somewhere else and someone else other than the animals whose very cells are constituted from the place on earth we love the most’ but has been criticised for ignoring such possibilities as ‘craving an Oreo’ or tasting a local food that is not to his liking. Thus we are faced with a return to the Rousseauian ideal in an attempt to reproduce the perceived and real stability of hunter-gatherer society for the first time since cities and agriculture formed a ‘settled’ societal substructure.

Economic globalisation is ‘a process of strategic decisions in which new technologies and geographies imply ...a spectrum of possibilities’ so that, ideas around ‘elite’ vs. ‘democratic’ globalisation could replace the concepts of pro and anti-globalisation\textsuperscript{33}. In the case of ‘fair trade’, although it is a form of globalisation, it is nevertheless created out of the same conventions found in local food i.e. related to trust, equality and a...
connection between consumers and producers. In the practice of fair trade these conventions are combined with a sense of global responsibility using both traditional and industrial commercial conventions across production and consumption arenas. However a critical review of three common claims made for fair trade found that conversely there was a reinforcement of producer–consumer differences and low levels of farmer participation beyond commodity production. Moreover, since the import and export of cash crops may act against local market production in European countries, any commodity-focused trade can be seen as a threat to sustainable (i.e. localised) development.

Summary and future research potential

From this special issue we gain a brief insight into a broader European differentiation in local food between a north, west focus on environment and health properties of local food, and a south, east focus on cultural histories, each however concerned to demonstrate the role of local food in revitalising rural areas. Each traced back to their distinct national cultures. France with its history of rural communities and regional cuisine produced the Terroir concept. Italy also showing strong peasant tradition in the South and regional culinary complexity produced Slow Food. The northwest European tradition of local food can be traced to the strong emphasis on the health of agriculture in these countries: Germany produced the Biodynamics in the 1920s; UK produced the Soil Association in the 1940s; Sweden produced ecological agriculture on experimental farms in Uppsala in the 1980s; and Denmark has a strong history of organic and a corporate-cooperative industry structure. Ireland sits some way between the two groups; with strong rural communities Ireland has spawned a strong post-organic movement. Differing ruralities aside, further research will hopefully also expand on the emerging ideas around consumption of local food in dense urban areas, urban short food supply chains, urban box and gardening schemes, and crucially the dynamics of the peri-urban fringe and rural interface.

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