



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijgfs

Popular cuisines at foodie tables. Social class, distinction, and food transformation and incorporation in contemporary gastronomies

Lorenzo Mariano-Juárez^a, F. Xavier Medina^b, David Conde-Caballero^{a,*}

^a Universidad de Extremadura, Spain

^b Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain

1. Introduction

Food is not only a source of nutrition, but also refers to the cultural and social aspects that significantly influence food patterns, taste preferences, and culinary practices. For Douglas and Isherwood (1990), “food is a form of social communication that transcends its mere nutritional value”. Therefore, understanding social preferences, ideologies, practices, and meanings is essential to understand the contemporary, historical, and cultural uses of food and food products (Medina, 2019; López et al., 2016). Beyond aspects of tradition and ideology, it has also been argued that the construction of identities around taste and other categories – e.g., social class and power – can permeate and shape the culinary sphere (de Garine, 1995). The performative capacity of food and food practices to define spaces of class distinction has been extensively addressed in the last decades in sociology, anthropology, and other social sciences. The fewer than twenty pages that Bourdieu (1984) devoted to exploring eating habits in 1960s and 1970s France have inspired numerous works on the relationship between food and social status over the last forty years. His definition of the opposition between the working classes’ “taste of necessity” and the upper classes’ “taste of freedom” has been used, readapted, and updated to study the framing of social class distinctions in eating practices (Oncini, 2019); to describe in a variety of contexts how social class is embodied in food choices and preferences (Baumann et al., 2019); and to enable processes of evaluating one’s own social position vis-à-vis others (Pachucki et al., 2007; Edelmann, 2018), among other studies. Food and food practices are, without a doubt, a mechanism of social distinction (Jordan, 2007).

Food-based processes of identity construction, and the gastronomies thus generated (Goody [1982]1995), produce processes of differentiation by consolidating social systems in a community (de Garine, 1995). Different people eat different types of food that are specific to them, defining their identity. Consequently, through food practices, social groups maintain continuous relationships or dialogical processes open

to diachrony and social change. As the literature reveals, lower classes tend towards emulation as a social practice for the accumulation of capital or prestige – replicating food consumption patterns, table manners, or assessments of what defines quality in gastronomy. In a reverse process, the search for distinction among the upper classes pushes them towards alternative eating habits that allow them to continue defining the cultural and social limits of their social position.

Gastronomy in the hospitality industry is no stranger to these rules. In recent decades, eating out in restaurant spaces, tasting dishes carefully paired with bottles of wine, or considering the architectural dimension of the dining experience have helped to emphasise these class distinctions. Restaurants strive to find a niche that distinguishes or places them above others. Over the last few decades, many restaurants have moved towards offering “unparalleled” experiences based on rare products and complicated preparations that reinforce the sense of luxury. The notion of exclusivity would thus underpin this search for gastronomic distinction within the restaurant industry.

However, in recent years we have also witnessed the exactly opposite process – some of the menus offered by the most exclusive restaurants have begun to include products considered “popular” or associated with perceptions of social or cultural subordination. The still relevant idea of distinction operates here through refined culinary procedures that rework the symbolism of these food products. In this way, products traditionally associated with the popular classes and perceived as “minor” or second-class are being introduced into sophisticated gastronomic menus – transformed, through the way they are prepared or their combination with other foods, into high-end gastronomic offerings. In this regard, concepts such as “traditional” or “popular” and the links with identity and history acquire an indisputable role in the projection and communication of the dish, something hitherto unknown in this type of catering. More and more often, nowadays we witness a “generalisation of geometrisation” – the process through which a product, dish, or gastronomy traditionally associated with a subordinated, popular

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dcondecab@unex.es (D. Conde-Caballero).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100791>

Received 20 July 2023; Accepted 3 August 2023

Available online 5 August 2023

1878-450X/© 2023 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

social status is adapted to a sophisticated, high-end cuisine (Harris and Phillips, 2021). This process of revalorisation of the traditional – products and practices associated with the popular or lower classes – has been reworked into the logic of the capitalist market, which offers experiences – i.e., sleeping in a rural house as people used to do in the past, without comforts, milking cows, and tasting “authentic peasant meals” – as renewed forms of distinction. These contexts of renegotiation and reappropriation of culinary spaces and symbols, in the context of gastronomy and gastronomic spaces, define and shape the focus of this special issue: how food, and the way it is produced, prepared, consumed, and marketed, have become active components in the construction of contemporary social processes of identity and class distinction.

2. In this special issue

This special issue presents works that allow us to explore different spaces of incorporation and transmutation of symbols and meanings linking the popular social classes to perceptions of luxurious, “special”, or revalorised gastronomies. The thematic dossier published in this Journal stems from an international conference held in the Portuguese city of Évora in September 2022, titled *Popular cuisines and today's gastronomies. Common popular products and preparations go to gastronomic tables*. The contributions presented at this conference, which celebrated the 44th Meeting of the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition (ICAF) and the 5th International Meeting of the UNESCO–UOC Chair on Food, Culture, and Development, were complemented with a call for papers open to researchers that, finally, resulted in this special issue.

Opening the special issue are three different articles addressing a variety of gastronomic aspects within the same place: Western Andalusia, in Spain, and particularly the city and the province of Córdoba. In the first paper, Dancausa-Millan et al. (2023) analyse olive oil in Andalusia (Spain) as a gourmet ingredient from a tourist perspective, examining food as a tourist attraction that boosts the incomes of its producers. This tourist market segment is still small, but it helps provide recognition to a popular product like olive oil and its gastronomic and health values.

Continuing with Andalusia and also the subject of tourism, Hernández-Rojas et al. (2023) analyse the impact of traditional gastronomy on tourism loyalty in the urban world heritage site of Córdoba. In this article, the authors reveal the impact of traditional gastronomy on issues such as satisfaction with the destination, satisfaction with the restaurant, and visitors' loyalty to the city.

Closing this first section, Velasco-Ruiz et al. (2023) discuss Córdoba's “perol” – not just as a popular dish of gastronomic interest but as an open-air celebration that encourages commensality and togetherness. Thus the “perol”, a local version of a hot pot stew, is also an element of current popular culture that has become an instrument for local identity, transversal to all social classes within Córdoba society, emphasising the importance of commensality and sociability around food (Medina, 2021).

Next, moving to Bangladesh, the article by Bhuiyan et al., 2022 aims to explore and preserve the details of Bangladeshi traditional food items with the potentiality of large-scale industrial production to meet the increasing need for diversified food for increasing population. Their research shows that diversity in geography, religion, availability of ingredients, crop production, or socio-cultural indices all influence traditional food choices among the Bangladeshi population.

Back to Europe, and focusing again in Spain, three new articles explore different products whose perception has shifted in recent decades – currently being considered gourmet products, although historically they were not necessarily so. The first article, by Conde-Caballero et al. (2023), analyses the gourmetisation of the “patatera”, a popular sausage from Extremadura. The article describes a process of upward social and cultural repositioning of a food product, leaving behind representations associated with poverty and vulgarity and transforming

it into a contemporary, singular ingredient targeting a distinguished “foodie” audience.

Not far from there, in Galicia, Freire-Paz (2023) analyses the regional consumption of shellfish, currently perceived as a marker of class and elite status. The author shows that an anthropological perspective can contribute to the scientific assessment of the shifts in dietary practices, trying to understand how the attempts of popular classes to emulate the habits of the rich can reveal shortcomings among the poor, while also noting how the cultural classification of food items fluctuates over time.

Closing this block, Pedret-Massanet et al. (2023) review the gourmetisation dynamics created around carob in the Balearic Islands (Spain), focusing on the strategies and agents involved in the rediscovery and revalorisation of this ingredient as a gourmet product. Their research also examines how the gourmetisation of carob reveals a confluence with current gastronomic trends focused on locally produced, sustainable, and healthier products and the valorisation of tradition as a synonym of “authenticity”.

The following three articles focus on the re-evaluation of utensils or products that range from the popular to the gourmet sphere. The first of them, by Cipriano-Crespo et al. (2023), is not concerned with food products or dishes, but with kitchen and tableware – the ceramics of Talavera, recognised as transnational (Spain and Mexico) intangible heritage by UNESCO. Despite their humble origins, these ceramics have always been involved in a constant process of re-creation and circulation between different social classes. Today, they are still striving to find a space within the performative sphere of haute cuisine, searching for new ways to remain current after five centuries of history.

Jumping all the way to Mexico, the article by Covarrubias et al. (2023) analyses the strategies that have been applied by a higher education institution to revalue the *chinampero* vegetable products from the peri-urban area of Xochimilco within the gastronomic scene of Mexico City. Their research highlights the importance of universities to include concern for and promotion of food systems in the territories they are part of in their research and social action programmes.

Closing this block, Peña-Jiménez (2023) explores in her article how pastrami has undergone a process of gourmetisation within Jewish cuisine in the city of Buenos Aires (Argentina), showing how gourmetisation forms are intrinsically related to the different geographies of the economy, culture, and symbolic values of the city.

With a very different approach, the article by Cuykx et al. (2023) aims to cluster home cooks based on their “cooking capital”, consisting of their incorporated capital (self-reported cooking skills, attitudes, behaviours) and objectivised capital (access to cooking means) before and during Covid-19. Clusters differed significantly regarding recipe sources, valued recipe aspects, and food intake. The article shows how implications are made for a segmented communication approach adapted to each cluster of home cooks rather than focusing on upper classes with higher levels of cooking capital.

Focusing this time on restaurants, Nascimento (2023) examines in her article the processes of geometrisation of popular cuisines at sustainable restaurants in Barcelona, Spain. The author explains that geometrisation and food sustainability are complementary processes with implications for each other, and these are fundamental to the effective materialisation and permanence of food sustainability in various social contexts. The needs of sustainability must achieve social status, recognition, and visibility within different contexts to ensure that they are strengthened and maintained in society.

Jumping to Brazil, the article by Silva et al. (2023) describes and compares the Copioba and the common cassava flour know-how, based on the experience of a renowned flour producer. Their findings show differences in the application of the producer's know-how, using his traditional knowledge and accumulated experience. This process and results justify its growing, revalorised notoriety.

The valorisation of knowledge associated with popular gastronomy is also explored by Muñoz-Benito et al. (2023), reflecting on the popular and traditional recipes collected among women in the *Mancomunidad del*

Alto Guadalquivir in Córdoba (Spain), their link with avant-garde cordovan gastronomy, and the role of institutions. At the same time, the article examines the valorisation of this popular cuisine, the different discourses built around these people, and how they are linked to the territory.

The next article, by [Thampi and Priya \(2023\)](#), describes the journey of a typical preparation – *malayee*, in India – from its links to the local communities and its cultural roots to the gastronomic scene of Kerala cuisine in the modern age of globalisation, analysing also the valorisation of established classic dishes from the margins to the tables of the finest restaurants.

Back to Spain, [Rico-Jerez \(2023\)](#) analyses how the different autonomous governments in Spain promote popular and high gastronomy as part of their tourist destination branding through their websites, pointing out particularly the value of popular cuisines as a part of their cultural identity. Nevertheless, her study detected training, events, and pricing deficiencies.

Going for the first time to the North of Africa, the article by [Lucas \(2023\)](#) examines the Moroccan *bissara* (a fava bean soup) in the Chefchaouen area, highlighting the narrative reconfigurations to which this dish has been subjected over time and focusing on its resignification and valorisation in the framework of a new global heritage order associated with the inclusion of the Mediterranean diet in the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List in 2010 – of which Chefchaouen is the representative city in Morocco. In this context, *bissara* was re-signified and valued, transforming a humble dish into an important marker of gastronomic identity.

Finally, and closing the special issue, the article by [Santamarina \(2023\)](#) explores the relationship between local traditions and avant-garde cuisine through Mugaritz restaurant and chef Andoni Aduriz, analysing how popular culture has influenced his avant-garde cuisine, incorporating local and popular elements and ingredients into his culinary constructions.

3. Conclusions

The works published in this special issue allow us to examine different spaces of incorporation and transmutation of symbols and meanings linking the popular social classes to revalorised gastronomies and products, social transformations of ingredients or dishes, or new gastronomic interpretations based upon traditional or popular items.

All these elements find correspondence in cultural transformations that affect the social perception of food, dishes, and kitchens, all of which can vary (and, indeed, do) over time and space. Foods that once belonged to the most popular and/or less favoured classes are nowadays being consumed again at the most outstanding tables – covered in tradition, history, and popular wisdom. Conversely, other foods that were highly valued in the past are now within reach of the majority of the population, and their prices have plummeted, even becoming everyday foods (the example of meat can be paradigmatic). These processes have been analysed under categories such as “gourmetisation” or “food gentrification” but we need to complexify further the relationships between social class, agency, contemporary capitalism, or social structure, focusing on the complexity of processes on which the practices and discourses surrounding food consumption are built. For example, the transformation of the symbolic perceptions of food might have an impact on other areas, such as identity, food heritage, or the transformation of memory. This is the field in which many contemporary culinary practices operate. Contemporary gastro-politics ([Appadurai, 1981](#)) are articulated on the basis of these “food games” that reorganise concepts such as popular, gourmet, exclusive, traditional, patrimonialised, and inverted, to continue channelling processes of identity and distinction.

The performative capacity of food and food practices to delimit spaces of class distinction continues to remain effective today. Food appears to be an effective instrument of social differentiation, built and

changing, within our societies. From this perspective, food is and will continue to be a significant object of study for social scientists and many others.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in this publication.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

References

- [Appadurai, A.](#), 1981. Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia. *Am. Ethnol.* 8 (3), 494–511.
- [Baumann, Shyon, Szabo, M., Johnston, J.](#), 2019. Understanding the food preferences of people of low socioeconomic status. *J. Consum. Cult.* 19 (3), 316–339.
- [Bhuiyan, M.H.R., Hossain, M.A., Yeasmen, Y.](#), 2022. Local-traditional foods of Bangladesh: A treasure to be preserved. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 30 (100602). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100602>.
- [Bourdieu, P.](#), 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge, London.
- [Cipriano-Crespo, C., Freire-Paz, E., Medina, F.X.](#), 2023. The cultural revalorisation of the ceramics of Talavera: from folk culture to haute cuisine. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100683 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100683>.
- [Conde-Caballero, D., Rivero-Jiménez, B., Mariano-Juárez, L.](#), 2023. Tradition, upward social mobility, and sophistication: an ethnographic appraisal of the patatera. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 31, 100651 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100651>.
- [Covarrubias, M.A., Vázquez-Medina, J.A., Jiménez-Serna, A., Medina, F.X.](#), 2023. Strategies for maximizing the gastronomic value of the chinampero products from Xomichilco area in Mexico City. Experiences from a Higher Education Institution. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100685 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100685>.
- [Cuykx, I., Teunissen, L., Decorte, P., Pabian, S., Van Royen, K., Vandebosch, H., Van den Bulck, H., De Backer, C.](#), 2023. Let’s talk about chefs, baby: comparing three types of home cooks on recipe use before and during COVID-19. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100699 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100699>.
- [Dancausa-Millan, G., Millán-Vázquez de la Torre, M.A., Huete-Alcocer, N.](#), 2022. Olive oil as a gourmet ingredient in contemporary cuisine. A gastronomic tourism proposal. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 29, 100548 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100548>.
- [De Garine, I.](#), 1995. Los aspectos socioculturales de la nutrición. *Alimentación y cultura: necesidades, gustos y costumbres*. Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, p. 129–69.
- [Douglas, M., Isherwood, B.](#), 1990. El mundo de los bienes: hacia una antropología del consumo. Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, México.
- [Edelmann, A.](#), 2018. Formalizing symbolic boundaries. *Poetics* 120–130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.04.006>.
- [Freire-Paz, E.](#), 2023. Galician shellfish: sustenance in poverty and a delicacy in affluence. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 31, 100654 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100654>.
- [Goody, J.](#), 1995. *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: a Study in Comparative Sociology*. Cambridge University Press [1982].
- [Harris, D.A., Phillips, R.](#), 2021. What’s better than a biscuit?: gourmetization and the transformation of a Southern food staple. *Food Foodw.* 29 (3), 243–263.
- [Hernández-Rojas, R., Huete-Alcocer, N., Hidalgo-Fernández, A.](#), 2022. Analysis of the impact of traditional gastronomy on loyalty to a world heritage destination. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 30, 100585 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100585>.
- [Jordan, A.](#), 2007. The heirloom tomato as cultural object: investigating taste and space. *Sociol. Rural.* 47 (1), 20–41.
- [López, J., Mariano-Juárez, L., Medina, F.X.](#), 2016. Usos y significados contemporáneos de la comida desde la antropología de la alimentación en América Latina y España. *Disparidades. Revista De Antropología* 71 (2), 327–370. <https://doi.org/10.3989/rdtp.2016.02.001>.
- [Lucas, J.](#), 2023. Popular cuisines at tourist tables: Moroccan *bissara* and its rising path between heritage and commodification. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100744 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100744>.
- [Medina, F.X.](#), 2019. Food culture: anthropology of food and nutrition. In: [Ferranti, P., Berry, E., Anderson, J.R.](#) (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Food Security and Sustainability*, vol. 2. Elsevier, Oxford (UK).
- [Medina, F.X.](#), 2021. Looking for commensality: on culture, health, heritage, and the mediterranean diet. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Publ. Health* 18 (5), 2605. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052605>.
- [Muñoz-Benito, R., Navajas-Romero, V., Hernández-Rojas, R.D.](#), 2023. Traditional gastronomy in Alto Guadalquivir: origin of contemporary recipes in cordovan cuisine. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100720 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100720>.
- [Nascimento, M.A.](#), 2023. Sustainable restaurants in Barcelona: from popular cuisine to sustainable gourmet menus. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100700 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100700>.
- [Oncini, F.](#), 2019. Feeding distinction: economic and cultural capital in the making of food boundaries. *Poetics* 73, 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2019.02.002>, 2019.
- [Pachucki, M.A., Sabrina, P., Lamont, M.](#), 2007. Boundary processes: recent theoretical developments and new contributions. *Poetics* 35 (6), 331–351.

- Pedret-Massanet, C., López-Lago Ortiz, L., Allen-Perkins, D., 2023. From stigma to haute cuisine: strategies, agents, and discourses in the revalorisation of Carob as a gourmet product. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 31, 100677 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100677>.
- Peña-Jiménez, L., 2023. Pastrami's gourmetisation in Jewish cuisine in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100696 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100696>.
- Rico-Jerez, M., 2023. Tourism marketing of the Autonomous Communities of Spain to promote gastronomy as part of their destination branding. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100727 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100727>.
- Santamarina, A., 2023. The importance of identity in today's chefs: Mugaritz and popular culture. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100756 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100756>.
- Silva, S.B., Pena, L.C.C., Cardoso, R.V., 2023. Copioba and common cassava flour know-how: establishing similarities and distinctions in São Felipe, Brazil. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100713 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100713>.
- Thampi, A.D., Priya, M.G., 2023. From traditional to continental to inter-continental and back in search of the roots: a culinary journey of the typical Malayalee. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 32, 100723 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2023.100723>.
- Velasco-Ruiz, M.I., Moreno-Ortega, A., Villegas-Becerril, A., Moreno-Rojas, R., 2023. Characterization of Cordoba's perol: food patrimony and demographic influence on current customs. *Int. J. Gastron. Food Sci.* 29, 100588 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgfs.2022.100588>.