

TERESMA Conference
4-5 April 2017
Université Bordeaux Montaigne



Threatened, forgotten and lost foods.
Causes and mechanisms of their decline
14th – 21st centuries

Conference organisers : Corinne Marache and Philippe Meyzie

Far from being strictly linear, the life story of food products is composed of successes, of periods of spatial and also social distribution, of fashions fleeting and long-lasting, but it sometimes also includes mistrust or even fears which entail movements of retreat or even of decline. In marketing theories each product has a life cycle that is characterised by phases of growth, maturity and decline. Sometimes, even, certain foodstuffs, drinks or dishes disappear before reappearing later in a slightly different form. Today the tendency is for success and for re-launching or even exhuming products that have long been snubbed or despised, whereas others are threatened for ethical or health reasons.

The research developed by the ViValTer programme (*La ville, espace de valorisation des produits de terroir*) and now by the TERESMA programme (*Produits de terroir, espaces et marchés, hier et aujourd'hui*) which are behind this conference, have shown that local products – from the *terroir* – are undergoing a revival which is examining the nature of the links between consumers and areas of production and the way products are linked to history. Preserved meats, cheeses, fruits, animals, wines and other products associated with a geographical area of origin will therefore be of special interest within this scientific gathering which nevertheless aims at including all kinds of food and drink as well as different means of production. Whether real or artificial, the fame now enjoyed by all these once long-forgotten products cannot ignore why and in what conditions they fell into decline, came under threat or actually disappeared.

While history and social sciences in general have taken a lot of interest in success stories, in the products which have managed to become widely distributed, which have flourished in the long term, established their name and brought about the growth of economic sectors and companies or territories, it is also true that failure can be of historic interest as it allows light to be shed on economic, social and cultural changes within a period or a space. While these issues have sometimes been tackled in the study of certain agri-food sectors or in companies, so far they have not concerned in-depth research specifically examining their characteristics and what is at stake. In contrast with study devoted to analysing the successful adoption of new foodstuffs (coffee, sugar, maize), to the well established fame of great wines or industrial products that are household names worldwide or to that of the conquest of international markets by renowned localised products, the theme of decline also possesses heuristic values when one takes an interest in a product, its history, its geography, its place on the market or it

the role it plays in consumption. It will in fact help us to better understand how a foodstuff is situated within consumer patterns which may evolve, how a product manages to be distributed on a market before competitors arrive, how a local product widely known throughout a region little by little becomes a culture left aside. Studying the many processes involved in decline, from the latent threat to a foodstuff to its final disappearance, will also lead us to question food choices and their constraints, the directions taken by the agri-food industry and the policies that are implemented in this field.

Within the framework of the TERESMA programme, which is interested in the links between *terroirs*, territories, spaces and markets both yesterday and today, this conference is therefore focusing on understanding the causes and the mechanisms of the decline of certain products from the 14th to the 21st century. True to the spirit of this collective international programme, we are looking to bring together thinking from human sciences but also from law and economics in a historical perspective which will allow us to measure the changes and the importance of different historical contexts, and this will be based around three main axes:

- The decline of a food product, of a range of products, a dish or a drink reveals itself in a variety of ways which need to be gauged and examined, in particular regarding their socio-economic and spatial dimensions: decline in consumption, retreat on regional markets or niche markets, dwindling production on shrinking territories, loss of reputation, name and identification, loss of knowledge about production methods, total disappearance, etc. Variations in scales of time and space will help to identify the mechanisms at work which threaten the production and consumption of a foodstuff or a drink, which may entail a significant drop, lead to total, or in some cases, only temporary, disappearance on the local, national or international scale. We therefore need to also ask whether a significant decline in the production or consumption of a foodstuff necessarily entails a decline in its notoriety or whether, on the contrary, certain products do not gain in stature or attractiveness from the moment when their production drops.
- Another aim of this conference is also to reflect on the causes of decline. In order to do this we need to take economic changes into account : a raw material becoming scarce, the loss of comparative advantages, competition from other typical or industrial foodstuffs, changes in agricultural practices, the shift from subsistence farming to farming which is commercial, aimed at production and globalised, with all its corollaries such as the need to make a profit, the resistance and inappropriateness of certain products or methods of production which obey productivity criteria. In the context of globalisation which began in the 19th c. and which has largely favoured the standardisation of behaviours and tastes in food, we will need to examine the development of distribution and especially the arrival of mass distribution which, like the fashion industry, is in a position to influence the choices made by the agri-food industry, to impose itself as a trend setter, have also played a part in the disappearance (or “re-appearance”) of products. The socio-cultural logics which are behind the decline of some products should also be of interest to our speakers (changes in tastes and demand, changes in culinary fashions and use, changes in lifestyles and methods of consumption and cooking, the impact of medical discourse and ideas about health and well-being, consideration for animal welfare). Some of these different types of decline take place over the long term while others may arise from specific events: the effects of health crises and the ensuing need for precautions, which may then entail decisions not to consume certain products (offal ...); weather events, environmental questions ecology crises; legislation, political decisions, treaties, taxes and tariffs

... on a local, national, European and global scale. The role of the actors in this decline process must also be considered: could inertia, inability to adapt to demand and strategic errors possibly lie behind declines or maybe just hasten the speed of decline?

- Finally, it also seems necessary to analyse the re-launching of forgotten products, some of which are enjoying a true revival, such as parsnips and Jerusalem artichokes, as well as some breeds of cattle, sheep and pigs, such as Kintoa pork from the Basque country. These products in decline also seem to be a resource for innovation, in stimulating the economic, touristic and heritage revival of an area. The decline and therefore the rarity and even the threat of extinction of these products bring them down to human-scale production and their consumption appears as a way to safeguard the wealth of our heritage where food and associated expertise are concerned. It becomes an eco-responsible act although it remains to be seen whether this is enough to reinstate these products in a sustainable manner. The absence of information about the revival of certain products thus offers another facet in the understanding of the causes and mechanisms of decline.

**Propositions for papers should be sent to corinne.marache@gmail.com, phmeyzie@club-internet.fr and villeretmaud@gmail.com.
Deadline 1 November 2016.**

They must include :

- The title of your paper
- A 10 to 15 line summary
- A short biography

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