

## **ITINERARY OF YOUTH FOOD BEHAVIOR**

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### **INTRODUCTION: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE RESEARCH**

The goal of our study was to catch some factors which for a while organized the youth food behavior based on a comparative qualitative approach of life cycle, from childhood and teenage to youth and entrance into adult cycle in several countries.

In France, the field study was mainly focused on the cycle of youth and on cooking practices and on the meaning of doing dressings for young.

For all countries, the practices of young people were caught by the study of a food itinerary which starts from home where the consumption decision making process begins to their ingestion and their elimination, passing by their storing, cooking and preserving in the domestic space. I would like to present one Chinese itinerary.

#### **I. Young people in France**

The trajectory of life shows that among the fourth first cycles of western life (Childhood, adolescence, youth and beginning of adulthood) the youth cycle between 20 and 30 is composed of three main home situations of which the order of importance could vary in function of age, gender, the school level, the social and cultural origin of actors. These situations work structuring the training in tasting and cooking skills.

This training is a part of the building of identity of youth as generation or individual. Male and female roles are taught by implicit influences applied to cooking practices as a secret, gender space and task boundaries within the house (for example: kitchen for women, do it yourself room for men, watching TV news for men in the living), what practices, spaces and occasion of using cooking objects are prescribed, permitted or prohibited.

### **1. The first home situation is made of stability**

Young people lives in the house of his/her parents a situation of relative abundance in term of space, domestic appliances and kitchen utensils.

However his/her cooking skill being limited he/she strongly selects among goods and objects which are in the kitchen of his/her parents. This situation would be transformed later under the form of home mobility even if living together with parents tends to increase nowadays in all European countries (according to Alessandro Cavalli and Olivier Galland, 1993).

### **2. The second home situation is made of mobility and composed of two phases.**

#### ***a. The first is a precarious phase.***

The young people lives in a **temporary apartment**, often **small** between 30 and 100 "square feet" and **solitary**.

The young people, male or female, at the same time has an **ascetic behavior** link to:

- the **weakness of his/her material conditions** - the food budget could be between 200 and 300 FF. (about \$12 and 18) a month,

- the feeling of **not being confident in mastering skill cooking** which is a strong identity stake in French culture

- the **destabilisation of the landmarks** of the new home environment which they face.

It is also a **period of food discovery** because of relative autonomy with regard to parents and possible increase of his/her social network. It is a period of fast food.

**b. The second phase**, which is the core of the study, is made of:

- **inversion** of family food habits
- **experimentation of new food blending** (very often a mix of sweetened and salted products)

- a **paradoxical demand** of information and cooking advises, oral or written, to their parents, but following them in practice is not the goal. This demand has a function of reinforcing the familial link as a condition of cooking inversion without too much risk.

It is a **social and space mobility period**. The main characteristic of this phase is an "unfaith fullness"/no loyalty to brands an products.

**Creating, researching new tastes and mixtures based on new and cheap products makes the pleasure of young people.**

**3. The third is the beginning of a more stable home situation.**

It is an **indicator of the entrance into the adult life** as well as a more stable job, living in couple or having a baby (according to Olivier Galland). It could be around 25 or more than 30 (in Italy it could be 35 or 40).

It is a period of **couple building** (cf. The conjugal texture or framework of Jean Claude Kaufmann, 1992 and the Pygmalion effect of François de Singly, 1996) by negotiating recipes and tastes. It is more or less a hard bargaining depending on the couples!

**4. The French inversion phase**

The inversion phase is between precarity and autonomisation based on the creation of a new domestic order. Its main features are:

- shopping in superstores
- diverting recipes

- a multipurpose using of space of apartments (such as using the living room as a kitchen) and daily life things (the desk can be used as a cooking work top, a cooking knife both for cooking and eating).

Cooking practices are based on **mixturing, improvising and fast cooking searching**: the search of limits (cf. the energy curb)

**These practices are** based on two utensils, **a frying pan** (for hamburgers) and **a saucepan** (for boiled noodles) which help young people in cooking fast by opposition to oven cooking for instance.

Cooking could be a collective activity. It is still a merging period (this period is the main base of observation, when there is one, of post modernists social scientist. That is why they focus on emotion and fusion the main features of young people).

The youth food behavior is organized around 4 basic objects:

- one fridge to produce cold and preserve "non dry foods" (but cans could be stored in it)
- a stove with one or two electric or gas points to produce heat and transform food
- one water point, sink or washbasin, to cook and wash dishes as well as clothes.
- One cupboard or open shelves for dry foods.

Wealthier young people have a micro-wave. Oven (which need more money and a long time cooking) are very rare as well as freezers.

Food choice is based on a division between:

- food "without taste": breast, fish "filet", steaks (mainly for men) and eggs, in one hand, and noodles, rice, potatoes, green vegetables (mainly for women) and pizzas in the other hand.

- food for adding taste, seasoning in a large meaning: cream (to multipurpose use), tomato sauce, white sauce, cheese (gruyere and Roquefort), spice, herb and ground meat (viande hachée).

Youth cooking practices are not based on classical food classification of French adults: ground meat can become a "seasoning" when used in Bolognese noodles. At the opposite a pizza becomes a support to be enriched.

Consuming is based on a single meal.

There is no wine at the opposite of other alcohols which are numerous.

Achieving a cooking skill is one of the stake of this period more for women than for men even if this cooking stage is quite a gender blurred period. All young people has to contravene a forbidden practice: using fire by stove then oven for cooking what has been highlighted in the beginning of the study. When he/she is younger salad dressing and some sweat meal are only implicitly allowed to be done by child then adolescents.

At this stage she/he has to learn how staging her/himself in front of her/his peers. She/he will avoid cooking for her/his parents before she/he being confident in her/his skill. This period is revealing a crucial process acquiring the right food taste skill which has a cost.

This cost is at once:

- social, contravening an implicit but strong social forbidden norm based on gas and electric cooking and learning staging the image of self.

- economical, investing in space, time, devices, utensils and food of quality according to the French standards depending of course on social classes, genders, ages or cultures. This taste cost is linked with going to restaurant and tasting wine that is why it is still one of the most important invisible marking social practice in France nowadays.

Focusing on seasoning help young people in limiting the social risk and cost of cooking:

- food "without taste" are very cheap and easy to cook, seasoning is easy to do. It gives a socially accepted taste by peers. Succeeding in seasoning means having a "tour de main" (dexterity) what is brought out (valorisé) by peers.

Social and gender differentiation will come later with the dexterity in doing meal with sauce and testing fine wine.

When young people comes into the adult cycle cooking practices become more intimate, more individual and more feminine. It is the beginning of a social and gender differentiation process.

Domestic things are going to be more specialized with several table sets, one for every day and another or more for feast day likewise for the separation between cooking utensils and cutlery.

Kitchen becomes larger and the multipurpose use of space is given up little by little. Equipment of kitchen is improving, furniture's are more homogeneous. There is a process of esthetisation of the room with objects on display. Four fire point stove is coming as well as oven, cooker hood, freezer and micro-waves. Young adult begins shopping at street markets as sign of a better skill in choosing food and greater confident in itself.

Cooking practices become more conventional even if innovation is not eliminated. Recipes are more systematically followed, traditional meals with sauce are appearing (veal blanquette or mustard rabbit as well as red meat with sauce). Vine begins to be drunk and bought to be stored into a cellar.

So the gender division of cooking activity is setting up as well as for the other domestic activities. Ability in doing cooking increases for women, spaces and things are more specialized. Norms and routines are going on until the occurring of a new social disturbance in the life cycle such as divorce, unemployment or retirement.

Finally seasoning plays a central role in the cycle of cooking and taste training of the young people. It allowed young to experiment an inversion of cooking codes so at the same time contravening the forbidden cooking code what is used as a social transition in a "liminair" (introductory, cf. Turner) period before coming into in the game of the social constraints more stable of the couple or familial life.