

Editorial

Food and Culture in the Americas

More than 10 years ago, Denise Oliveira and Denise Barros from the Osvaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) in Brazil, launched the Food & Culture Network (Red Alimentación & Cultura), with the aim to join academics that analyze food and nutrition from a sociocultural perspective. The F&C Network had also the intention to put in discussion that food habits are more a sociocultural issue than a nutrition one, a topic of special relevance in public health institutions. The launch of the Journal of Food and Culture in the Americas (RACA, in Spanish and Portuguese) shows that after years working, the the Network A & C is consolidated.

The constitution of the Network A&C was made with advice of some colleagues who had been working in this topic for years, mainly Jesús Contreras, founder of the Food Observatory (Odela) of the University of Barcelona and pioneer in anthropology of food in Spain; the Odela was the model on which Fiocruz began to work and since then Prof. Contreras played a very relevant role. Successive meetings were organized in order to establish the Network scope and the relevance of sociocultural analysis of food habits in the epidemiological context of Brazil and Latin America. Also, a discussion about the need to stablish dialogue - not always easy - with other disciplines.

The sociocultural analysis of food habits in Latin America has been a topic on the academic agenda for at least a century, although it has had periods of different intensity. The central objective, in particular the relationship between nutritionists and anthropologists, was focused on improving nutritional and health status of the indigenous populations, a central issue from the very beginning of countries as independent nations.

At this moment, we are living a time when food is a topic of social interest as well as a priority in public policies, so the topic is once again in the scene of academic interest. On the one hand, the growing obesity rates and comorbidities and its relationship with food habits changes have forced to put in operation all kinds of

conceptual and methodological resources to analyze the food culture. On the other hand, food security is far from being solved and we are witnessing the perverse impacts of globalization and neoliberalism policies; market rules in food system are more important than the population needs and the human right to food. The result has been the double nutritional burden, the simultaneous presence of obesity and undernutrition in the same population, a growing problem in the Americas. In this context the food culture analysis has become imperative in order to understand the impact of globalization in the ways of eating.

Additionally, gastronomy has become part of the leisure, both the visit to restaurants, -where famous chefs offer novel sensory experiences- and the promotion of local cuisines as a tourist attraction. The commercial circuits have also picked up this boom, so nowadays is possible to find food from all over the world, utensils, spices; the advertising publicity promote pleasure and experience as the main attraction of different food and dishes. Undoubtedly, this is a sign that food is one of the great social problems, both as one of the main causes of the epidemiological situation, as a pleasant activity.

The research results on all these phenomena, both from social sciences and nutritional sciences, until now, have been published in journals of some of the disciplines involved, sometimes as thematic numbers; or in journals from other parts of the world, mostly in English. So, when academics who do research on this topic look for reference texts in specialized journals, inexorably have to go into publications in English. RACA is, in this sense, a great success as it comes to fill a gap in this topic in Latin America. Of course, for undergraduate and graduate students, open access to a journal of this level will be also a support in their training. In this way, RACA appears in order to satisfy a very clear demand for divulgation of food culture research as well as being a forum where topics are discussed and theoretical-conceptual perspectives from the south. Is absolutely laudable this immense task to organize and put in circulation a specialized journal at this moment in Latin America.

Food culture analysis as a sociocultural process is an imperative need -like food itself- essential to understand and, eventually, improve the ways of eating of a human group. It is a transversal issue that passes through different spheres, from urban development to health and body image; from tourism and leisure to the construction of heritage and identity. It is an economic and political issue present in the

government agenda at different levels as well as supranational organizations. We welcome this new space for academic dialogue and we predict that it will have a long and solid life.

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