

**"INTEGRATION THROUGH THE KITCHEN? THE EUROPEAN FOOD PROJECT"  
AN OVERVIEW**

PROJECT CONCEPT

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## Integration through the Kitchen? - The "European Food Project" An Overview

The *European Food Project* was first proposed to the former EUROCIRCON Network in Budapest, Spring 1990 by Andreas Joh. Wiesand (Centre for Cultural Research, Bonn) together with Stephen Mennell, international expert on the sociology of food. At its 2<sup>nd</sup> assembly in Torino and Cocconato d'Asti, Italy, the Scientific Council for ERICarts designated the *European Food Project* as one of its priorities. Since this time, the framework for the project has been developed and two important "sub-projects" have been begun including: *Bread - The World's Heritage* and *ELEA: Producing and Consuming Olive Oil. A Contribution to European Culinary Cultural Heritage*. Additional sub-projects remain in development to be undertaken with regional and international partners.

### **Background**

*"La cuisine est le seuil le plus accessible d'une culture, le palier le plus bas d'une frontière... En ce sens, la cuisine représente l'étape initiale du contact interculturel."*

*S. Bessis, Paris, 1995.*

*"Food [culture] in its various guises, contexts and functions, can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, and intimacy or distance."*

*S. Mennel, London, 1994.*

"Culinary culture" is not a trivial topic. In past centuries the emergence of national traditions of cooking and eating have closely paralleled the emergence of nation-states themselves in Europe. The wider influence of certain styles of cookery reflected the emerging power ratios between nations, cultural communities and within social structures; the latter most obviously seen in the diffusion of French haute cuisine from the seventeenth century onwards to upper-class circles throughout Europe. In the twentieth century, food has come to play a prominent part in the development of cultural identities including - on the one hand - the formation of national "we-images", used as symbols of national pride and identity and - on the other - negative stereotyped "they-images" of other nations and cultures (as can be seen in such labels as "Frogs", "Krauts", "Spaghettifresser", "Limeys", and so on).

More recently we can observe that food culture has become an important link among societies which have normally been divided by their manners, languages and/or religions. Numerous examples can be found in the export of some distinct food (and agricultural) traditions, reaching well beyond national borders - like in the Mediterranean or the Nordic countries and regions - which has aroused interest in "their" eating and drinking specialities. Restaurants offering "foreign cuisine" are already outnumbering those with indigenous menus. Traditional recipes are gradually being brought into the marketplace by "grandma" style restaurants and by quality minded, often individual cooks, who can easily charge two or three times more than usual, even at lunchtime. It could be reasonable to make use of such experiences when it comes to counteracting prejudices against foreigners or ethnic minorities. It is in this latter scenario that we can begin to explore concrete ways in which food or culinary culture can effectively integrate such principles as identity and diversity.

Artists have long been at the forefront of such developments, taking an "avantgarde" approach in the promotion of cultures abroad and of the innovation and richness resulting from cultural diversity. In terms of culinary culture, some have been known to transform not only the best of their own and other country's recipes, but have also introduced new ways of eating and thinking about food as an integral cultural expression. Some of the most famous, in this respect, include Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's classic, *"La Physiologie du Gout"* (1825) or Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (*L'Art de la Cuisine*, 1966). A more contemporary example of artists contribution to culinary culture can be seen in the "Slow Food" movement. The movement is animated by famous writers, film directors and painters as well as gastronomic experts, wine-growers,

journalists and politicians whose emphasis is on regaining a new, taste- and quality-based gastronomic culture<sup>1</sup>, not only in Europe but around the world.

The relevance of food and cuisine today as indices of integration in Europe stems particularly from the well-established fact that people have traditionally been rather conservative in their acceptance of "other tastes" and have in fact been quite resistant to change; at least until recently. The creation of tools such as a "food based index of tendencies toward social, economic and cultural integration" could be used not only to demonstrate changes in taste and styles of eating (which form a particular sensitive indicator of cultural integration), but in fact, go well beyond the realm of food, and head towards establishing the conditions for stronger interaction and even mutual adaptation of European national or regional cultures. While, "eyes" from outside of Europe (e.g. from the USA or Japan) look on the development of its eating and drinking habits and the images connected with such practices, strategies to build understanding and intercultural relations, which otherwise could be interfered with by other political or economic influences, could be created. One might, therefore, go as far as to consider a "European cultural food policy" (perhaps an integral element of international cultural relations) an interesting, possibly even important addition to the set of policies of the EU and /or of the Council of Europe, UNESCO or the OECD, aiming at a closer European integration<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Their *raison d'être* has inspired movements towards standards such as a "Denomination of Protected Origin for the European Community" or the universal adoption of ecological production methods. Today, more and more *farmers and food producers* have started to improve agricultural methods and ways of food-processing which have ultimately influenced marketing concepts in food-trade. The "success-stories" of some small- and medium-sized European winemakers, whose rigid quality standards and re-discovery of old grape varieties resulted have increased their economic returns, can demonstrate how these and similar changes may influence our habits and our environment.

<sup>2</sup> According to Article 128.4 of the Maastricht Treaty the European "Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty". In a recent review (1996) of the implementation of the "cultural clause" in Community policies, it was agreed that "agricultural activities do have an inherent cultural nature, given that agriculture has been one of the driving forces of civilisation for thousands of years." Furthermore, "the European Community must ensure respect for the cultural diversity of the Member States and their regions. In Europe, local or regional *savoir-faire* has generated a very wide variety of traditional products which are part of the cultural identity of the locality or region from which they originate." These statements reaffirm the Community's commitment to encourage the promotion of the historic and scientifically proven links between culture and agricultural production and consumption.

## **Objectives/Methodology**

ERICarts' "European Food Project" is a research, information and educational project, taking account of the role food/cuisine plays in the culture of everyday life - not necessarily from the point of view of nutrition - but how it contributes to social cohesion, cultural change, ecological progress and economic development. Its aims are to:

- Raise awareness of culinary culture which is rooted in regional traditions by examining the symbolic importance of food as an element of cultural heritage and identity. Such recognition will increase the public's ability to discriminate quality and raise consumer demand for quality products and ecological progress ;
- Examine ways in which such an approach can promote principles and values inherent in cultural identity and diversity;
- Demonstrate how culinary culture (as a cultural resource) can be integrated into contemporary agri-food and cultural policies taking into consideration new trends in agriculture and food trade.

In this context, the European Food Project has been organised into "sub-projects" which allow many "basic elements" of food to be addressed as well as to include as many European countries as possible. Each sub-project will take into consideration the following themes so that their respective results can be integrated into a larger common framework where comparisons can be made. Trend, content analyses and experimental workshops will be organised by the ERICarts Secretariat to support the sub-projects.

- **Cultural heritage and identity:** including an examination of the symbolic importance of food as an element of cultural heritage and identity; activities could include surveys of cultural institutions in Europe (ie. food and beverage museums);
- **Policy making:** devising strategies of how culinary culture (as a cultural resource) can be integrated into contemporary agri-food and cultural policies. The role of the EU and its policies will be analysed - can quality and tradition be maintained in a harmonised market?;
- **Local food producers and world trade:** examination of agriculture and trade related policies and how they affect the participation of local quality producers in a new (global) competitive mass market and the interests of consumers;
- **Consumers:** analysis of changes in styles of eating and drinking habits as a sensitive indicator of integration processes. One of the main goals of the project is to create a new food-based index of tendencies towards social, economic and cultural integration in Europe.

The results of the sub-projects will be transmitted through research publications but also via special events, media coverage and an Internet platform. Its purpose is to inspire practical and political (including policy) measures within the context of further European integration, including, for example, the upgrading of products and services coming from its eastern regions, the consideration of new quality trademarks or the adoption of *agri-cultural* policies.

## **Sub-Projects**

In 1998, ERICarts undertook two sub-projects focussing on "bread as a world heritage" and a larger project to elaborate the principles of European culinary cultural heritage, addressing "olive oil" as a case study. Other themes in discussion or proposed by members include: fish trade, wine culture, tomato-cooking, cheese varieties, and history of potatoes. Below is a summary of some results:

***Sub-project #1: Bread - A World Heritage***

There is no doubt that bread is the single most represented food item on tables worldwide; yet, we know very little about bread, about its symbolic and ethnological meaning, cultural influence throughout history or more specifically about the range of varieties, baking methods or its value in everyday life. We do know, however, that traditional recipes are in danger of being lost and replaced by a standardised international cuisine which promotes the rise of industrial food or, more specifically, dominant bakery chains.

The aim of this sub-project was to collect, record and archive bread heritage. In 1996, ERICarts members Dimitrije Vujadinovic and Zorica Milodanovic published "Bread in 200 Ways" which begins to build an ethnological history of bread and presents 200 traditional and modern recipes from around the world. In Spring 1998, D. Vujadinovic (the Blue Dragon, Yugoslavia) and M. Fischer (Centre for Cultural Research, Bonn) circulated a survey to bread museums and similar institutions throughout Europe to continue the project. The results of this survey may lead to a first European Handbook of Bread Museums. Further goals of the sub-project are the promotion of closer co-operation between bread museums (perhaps towards building a network) and a contribution towards educating the public, teachers, scientists, researchers about bread as an important element of our world's heritage.

***Sub-project #2: ELEA: Producing and Consuming Olive Oil. A contribution to European Culinary Cultural Heritage.***

In March 1998, ERICarts, in co-operation with the Institute of Cultural Studies of Europe and the Mediterranean (ICUSEM), Athens, Greece and the Finnish Centre for the Study of Cultural and Media Policies in Europe (Finn-EKVIT), Helsinki, Finland was awarded a grant under the Raphael Programme of the European Commission in support of this sub-project.

The main objective of ELEA was to specify and further reflect on the philosophy and main objectives of the European Food Project by focussing on the production, consumption and preservation of olive oil as part of regional agriculture and food industry. Mediterranean and European cultural heritage was examined in this context.

To facilitate the project, a conference was organised from the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1998 to 1<sup>st</sup> November 1998 in Rethymnon, Crete. An exhibition, tastings and a visit to a traditional olive oil press were also organised. Three Roundtable discussions were held on the following topics:

1. Consumption Patterns
2. Major quality growing regions in Europe and their relations
3. European agricultural policies: where is the cultural dimension? (including discussion on an EU-wide protected *appellation contrôlée* for olive oil)

Cultural researchers, sociologists, anthropologists, specialists in culinary culture and cultural heritage, olive historians, public authorities (national, local, regional), representatives from the food industry, consumers and producers, health organisations, quality controllers, media representatives, artists and other experts participated throughout the various stages of the sub-project. A report, including the following declaration, was produced to enhance further debate.

## **The Rethymnon Declaration on Cuisine as a Cultural Resource**

*Adopted in Rethymnon, Crete (Greece), Saturday 30 October 1998 at the EU sponsored Expert Conference "ELEA: Producing and Consuming Olive Oil: A contribution to European Culinary Heritage"*

*Dis-moi que tu manges, je te dirai qui tu es.  
- Jean-Anthelme Brillat Savarin, France, 1825*

### Preamble

Food is a cultural resource which brings people together at the same time reflecting their heritage, manners and way of life. The participants of the ELEA conference met together on the island of Crete where the cultivation of olives is central to its cultural life. Issues such as quality, authenticity, "savior-faire" or locality were identified as important elements to understanding culinary culture. Building upon the multidisciplinary discussions and field research on the production and consumption of olive oil, the following key principles were identified and form the basis for a future action plan.

### ***Rethymnon principles***

1. Economic integration and globalisation continue to link cultures more closely together. At the same time they may work against cultural diversity and pluralism, in both the commonly understood arts and heritage aspects of a society as well as in popular cultural traditions including food and cuisine and rural ways of life.
2. Intangible heritage goes beyond languages and values and includes culinary traditions, history and conviviality. Creativity should be recognised as being as valuable and tangible in the culinary arts as it has been for the high arts.
3. Cultural diversity is as important as biodiversity for a sustainable future. Cultural homogenisation is as strong a force in the spread of fast foods and so-called "natural", but industrially-processed foods as it has been for other standardised cultural products, e.g. in the field of film and television.
4. The defence of local and regional cultures requires the full and imaginative use by public authorities in partnership with civil society of the cultural resources and traditions available, including those relating to food and cuisine. In addition to food safety and nutritional value, emphasis should be placed on ensuring the authenticity of processes of production, the origin and quality of the product ("terroir") as well as the local customs and traditions surrounding their use.
5. Economies of scale and market failure are as common in the activities of artisanal cuisine as they are in the cultural industries, with both requiring public sector encouragement. Markets alone can not maintain cultural diversity.
6. The essential aims of cultural policy are to establish objectives, create structures and secure adequate resources in order to create an environment conducive to human fulfilment. This goes beyond the arts.
7. Cultural policies should be reinforced in a way which identified food culture, cuisine and the culinary arts as valid objects for support and promotion.
8. Cultural considerations should be taken into consideration and integrated into other policy areas, including agriculture, social, rural and urban development.
9. Artisanal agri-food, cuisine and culinary heritage dimensions should be incorporated into tourism policies and programmes of agricultural and cultural ministries.
10. Foreign ministries, international cultural promotion agencies and trade ministries should incorporate the promotion of culinary culture in various aspects of their activities.

## **Additional Research**

While the sub-projects are extremely important to demonstrate the applicability of the "European Food Project", an overall longer term historical perspective is also essential in providing the context for such results. Therefore, ERICarts plans to engage in research which focuses on trends in Europe since the late 1940s and will include activities such as:

**PART I:** A brief historical survey of the emergence or disappearance of "European", "American", national and / or regional traditions of cuisine or "culinary cultures" prior to 1957. The results will be examined together with some evidence on relations of these trends with economic, social, geologic, meteorological, medical, religious and other cultural factors.

**PART II:** Content analyses using some of the following sources to determine similar or different trends following 1957 in (or even outside of) Europe. Such sources were also found to be useful in such prominent studies as in Mennell, "All Manners of Food".

- cookery columns, e.g. in women's magazines
- cookery books (where the number is not excessive and adequate methods of sampling can be determined)
- specific articles or monographs dealing with the relations between food and culture, food and health, the cultural aspects of eating and drinking etc.
- catering trade journals (sampling of one year in five or ten journals is generally sufficient)
- food chemistry manuals
- new and old farming surveys and manuals

Criteria for the content analyses will be developed by a team of experts. Resources to be used in the development of these indicators include selection criteria outlined in gastronomic guide books such as Michelin, Gault-Millau, Good Food Guide, Egon Ronay's Guides, VARTA etc.

Complementary information to be used includes:

- Analysis of published data, including opinion polls on consumer tastes, where these exist. (depending on the budget available, two or three "test" questions will be included in general opinion polls - similar to that in the ELEA project)
- Collection of statistics on agricultural development and trade in the EU since 1957.

## **Partners**

Since its inception, the European Food Project has been extremely well received not only by the members of the ERICarts but also by key figures from both the public, private and non-profit sectors as well as from a range of disciplines. In 1990, a group of experts or resource persons was put together, which in some cases remains valid. Since 1997, the ERICarts has been working with partners from the European Commission and the European Parliament as well as others from Finland, Greece, Serbia, Ireland, France, Italy, Spain and Germany. Such contributions have been important in establishing the current two sub-projects and the overall methodology.

ERICarts welcomes additional partners who are interested in either pursuing one of sub-project themes (see above) or to work on the historical aspects of the project. In each case, financing partners or sponsoring institutions must also be found.