

**Type:**

Symposium

**Date:**

September 23-25, 2020

**Location:**

MAS Museum, Antwerp, Belgium

**Subject Fields:**

Anthropology, Archaeology, European Ethnology, Food Studies, History, Sociology, Urban Studies

## SIEF 23rd International Ethnological Food Research Conference : Food, people and the city. Comparative perspectives

Recently, food historians Peter Scholliers and Patricia Van Den Eeckhout wrote that “cities seem like enormous sponges that absorb masses of staple and luxury foodstuffs from nearby and distant shores”. Cities are by definition “hungry – a statement with a similar meaning by architect Carolyn Steel appearing in her book, *Hungry City* (2008). Though these statements carry the risk of oversimplifying the complex relationship between food and cities, they help to address a major issue: the challenges of feeding the globally growing urban populations.

In one way or the other, cities all over the world depend on agriculture for their survival. Food supply and the distribution, processing, preparation, consumption, and the disposal of waste food, form the basic fabric of cities and link them inextricably to both local and global rural areas.

Prior to industrialisation, only cities with a productive hinterland, or port cities importing food, had the opportunity to develop into large cities because they could count on extensive food geographies. Given the difficulties of feeding cities, most remained small prior to 1800. Industrialisation of agriculture,

increased market integration, and new industrial transport facilities since the 19<sup>th</sup> century such as trains and steamships, allowed cities to grow exponentially, and created the possibility to develop cities anywhere on the globe. Technological and cultural shifts since industrialisation have also profoundly changed the food experiences in cities, and widened the distance between food producers and consumers. In general, in contemporary cities, food sale and food consumption are visible, but the often complex ways in which food is produced, transported, and also wasted, are largely externalised to the invisible periphery of cities and kept out of public sight and awareness.

The fact that an ever greater number of people are likely to be concentrated in cities and metropolitan areas, raises the question about how all these urban dwellers, who most of the time do not produce food themselves, will be fed in a way that is socially, economically and ecologically viable. In 1900, an estimated 10% of the world population lived in and around urban conurbations, while the most recent forecast suggests that this ratio will have risen to as much as 75% by the year 2050. The accelerating pace of global urbanisation is precisely what prompts architects, urban planners, engineers, agronomists and ecologists to look at cities, and to do so from fresh perspectives. One of the future visions is to rebuilt the metropolis into a 'circular' ecological system in which every emission – be it energy, heat, gasses or waste – is reused to best advantage. The city would feed itself, at least partially – for instance, through innovative urban farming. Other visions emphasise, on the one hand, how cities will continue to depend on external rural areas for food, but also stress how science and technology will fundamentally change agriculture, food transport, and food consumption itself.

Alongside architects, engineers, agronomists and nutritionists, disciplines which study cultural practices, such as anthropology, European ethnology, sociology, history and archaeology, for example, are highly relevant with regard to this challenge. In fact, food consumption is one of the most common activities engaged in by humans, which is why food habits are often experienced as a given, either by nature, technology or the market, and as relatively unchangeable patterns by humans or social groups. A closer look at food production, distribution and consumption as cultural practices, in different periods and societies, reveals how daily food practices are shaped by humans who create both material and socio-cultural distinctions. Whoever wishes to understand our current food systems and feels moved to contemplate

alternatives, would do well to approach the food system as a dynamic, multi-layered cultural phenomenon.

Therefore, this conference aims through papers, panels and discussions, to increase our awareness of food systems as dynamic cultural phenomena. We, therefore, invite research papers with a sound 'urban' focus and with a sound focus on cultural practices. The papers can discuss any city or cities across the globe. We encourage comparison between different types of cities and different time periods, comparisons which increase our understanding of food habits as a cultural phenomenon. Every city is shaped by food!

**Submissions for the conference may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:**

- Distinctions between 'town' and 'country', 'farmers' and 'city dwellers', or 'producers' and 'urban consumers' in relation to food in the past and at present
- The food cycle, the city and city dwellers, in different time periods
- Food (in)security in cities, past and present: experiences, representations, reactions
- The local versus global hinterland, past and present
- The shape of and cultural practices relating to urban food markets and shops
- Urban restaurant cultures and eating out practices
- Food specialties of cities: how they are constructed and experienced
- Food waste in industrial versus pre-industrial cities as a cultural phenomenon
- Climate change and food culture
- Urban farming as a cultural phenomenon, past and present
- Success and status of cheap food
- Food, social inequality, and social distinctions, in cities

### **Guidelines for Paper Proposals:**

The conference programme consists of plenary keynote lectures, paper presentations, and panel discussions. If you are interested in presenting a paper or contributing to a panel at the conference, please submit an abstract before **31 January 2020**. The conference language is English. Presenters of accepted papers are expected to speak for 20 minutes; this will be followed by a discussion with the panel and the audience under the supervision of a session chair.

**Applications should include:**

- title of proposed paper and/or panel
- abstract (maximum 500 words)
- biographical information (short CV of maximum 5 lines)
- contact information (e-mail, telephone and postal address)

Applications should be sent by the deadline of **31 January 2020** to:  
[leen.beyers@antwerpen.be](mailto:leen.beyers@antwerpen.be)

**Notification of acceptance of conference submission:**

Authors will be notified regarding the acceptance of their submission by **1 March 2020**.

**Conference Special Volume:**

The conference is intended to result in a peer reviewed special volume in 2021 (Peter Lang publishers). Authors who will participate in the conference are invited to submit their paper for consideration for publication by the conference scientific committee by **16 September 2020**. Full details of the number of word and illustrations to be submitted, together with the publishers' Style Sheet, will be provided after 1 April 2020.

**Venue:**

**The 23rd SIEF ETHNOLOGICAL FOOD RESEARCH CONFERENCE** will take place from **23 to 25 September 2020** at the MAS Museum ([www.mas.be](http://www.mas.be)), Hanzestedenplaats 1, which is in [Antwerp](#), Belgium.

**FOOD TAGS FOR ANTWERP:**

a superdiverse port city of 500 000 inhabitants, coffee port for Europe, banana port for part of Europe, Antwerp chocolate, biscuits, beer, supermarkets since 1958, superdiverse restaurant scene, oldest Chinese restaurant of Belgium, growing number of star restaurants, french fries and much more in the fast food sector, ecological food initiatives, food waste challenges...



### **Registration fee:**

The registration fee will be 360 Euros; Students' reduced fee 280 Euros.

The fee includes lunches, dinners and three visits to the food scene in Antwerp.

Information on registration procedures and accommodation during the conference will follow in **January 2020**.

The final conference program will be communicated in **April 2020**.

### **Organizing committee:**

The symposium is a collaboration between

- CGS Centre for Urban Studies of the University of Antwerp (Prof. Dr. Ilja van Damme),
- Research unit FOST Social & Cultural Food Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (Prof. Dr. Paul Erdkamp and Dr. Frits Heinrich)
- ICAG Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History of the KU Leuven (Prof. Dr. Yves Segers)
- MAS Museum Antwerp (Dr. Leen Beyers)
- SIEF Food Research Working Group

### **Contact Information:**

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