

Food culture: social inclusion, sustainable development and cultural identity

UNESCO, May 24, 2018 – room XI

1. Institutional Context

On May 24, 2018 the Permanent Delegation of Italy is organizing an event on the various aspects of food relevant to UNESCO's mandate, with the support of the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Permanent Delegation of France to UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair "Food: Access and Law" at the University of Milan. Invitations will be sent to all Permanent Delegations and relevant stakeholders.

2. Substantive Focus

The specific features of production and consumption of food are a key component of the cultural identity of local communities. Furthermore, food culture acts as a powerful tool for intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and social inclusion. Within this framework, preserving local food habits and traditions, as well as biodiversity, is a core element of the challenge of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals set by the 2030 Agenda.

It is suggested that the idea of intercultural dialogue mediated by food be a transversal *leitmotiv* running through the event as a whole.

The event will call for a discussion on food issues as related to UNESCO priorities, along the following guidelines.

- **Food culture: a key driver of cultural identity**

Producing, preparing, serving, sharing and consuming food is never simply about meeting physiological needs – it expresses every people's understanding of themselves and of their place in their world and to that extent reflects and shapes their collective identity. In view of this cultural dimension, various practices associated with food have been recognized by UNESCO as components of the intangible heritage of humankind and others are under discussion.

Among the cultural dimensions of food, sharing has particular significance. The rituals of eating together are closely connected with the characteristic social rites of any particular community – birth, marriage, death, harvest, peace-making, propitiation... – and are generally codified in ways that make any formal meal the enactment of a cultural script. Food is also at the heart of rituals of hospitality, recognizing that while culinary customs may differ widely, giving deep cultural meaning to eating is a human universal. Offering food to the traveller who needs it expresses an idea of common humanity, while also creating the practical basis for human exchange, understanding and peaceful relations between strangers. On the other hand, the connection between food and peace is complex: some foods or food rituals may perhaps be more conflict-sensitive than others. On this point, the event will foster discussions of theories, methods and themes in the anthropology of food, ranging from its role in social relationships, to its symbolic and semiotic significance.

- **Food culture: social inclusion and sustainable development**

The production and consumption of food are essential aspects of how societies function. Through history, changes in cultural representations of food have driven and reflected profound social transformations. These issues are of considerable academic and intellectual interest, but they also have major practical significance.

Food issues are of major transversal importance within the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Food culture is a core element of the challenge of achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns (SDG 12). It also encompasses a broader range of Sustainable Development Goals, relating to eradication of extreme poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10) with particular emphasis on gender equalities (SDG 5), healthy lives and well-being (SDG 3), responding to climate change (SDG 13) and protecting the oceans (SDG 14). Furthermore, traditional habits in the consumption of food represent a strong driver of cultural identity within the migrants' communities, as well as a feature of social integration.

- **Food culture: education and vocational training**

The multi-dimensional features of food culture ask for an in-depth analysis of how the political, economic, social, cultural and nutritional aspects are connected. Educating the new generations through this innovative approach opens up ideas for new social platforms, contemporary artistic projects and novel paths in food education, equipping them with ecological sensibility and care for the local communities. Education on food culture could also contribute to identify new skills and new opportunities for vocational training.

Without attempting to deal in detail with all of these issues, the purpose of the proposed event will be to shed some light on each, to explore their relevance to UNESCO's programmes within the established framework of the 39 C/5 and, by linking them together, to identify follow-up actions that could produce new programmatic synergies.

3. Programme Outline

- The keynote addresses (9.45 a.m.- 10.45 a.m.) will be delivered by eminent specialists on a wide range of issues relevant to food, as sketched in section 2 above, in order to provide a shared basis for the subsequent exchanges. The founder of the Slow Food movement, Carlo Petrini, will participate in live streaming.
- The morning roundtables (10.45 a.m. – 12.45 p.m.) will focus on the production and consumption of food as aspects of cultural heritage and dialogue and social transformation. Experts will be invited to cover different aspects of the cultural meanings attached to food, with an emphasis on their diversity and changes over time (roundtable moderated by UNESCO's ADG for Culture), and as a tool for dialogue and social transformation (roundtable moderated by UNESCO's Sector for Social Sciences). Among the invited experts, there will be a representative of the UNESCO Chair "Food: Access and Law" at the University of Milan.
- The last roundtable before the lunch break (12.45 p.m. - 1.15 p.m.) will take the form of an interactive exchange with renowned chefs.
- A buffet lunch will be offered by the Italian Delegation at UNESCO's Restaurant in cooperation with the UNESCO creative cities of Alba and Parma (gastronomy category).
- The first afternoon roundtable (3 p.m. – 4 p.m.) will focus on education opportunities and vocational training (roundtable moderated by UNESCO's ADG for Education). The second (4 p.m. – 6 p.m.) will see experts share best practices in promoting food-related landscapes and traditions as elements of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Success stories from the UNESCO Creative Cities network in the gastronomy category will also be presented.
- To follow, a gastronomic reception will be offered at UNESCO's Restaurant by the Italian Delegation, in cooperation with the UNESCO creative cities of Alba and Parma.