Food, Gastronomy and Cultural Commons

Christian BARRERE, Quentin BONNARD, Véronique CHOSSAT

OMI, University of Reims
christian.barrere@gmail.com, quentin_bonnard@hotmail.com, veronique.chossat@univ-reims.fr

Transforming natural resources in foodstuffs is a cultural and collective process, which constitutes culinary cultural commons in all the societies. These “culinary commons” constitute common-pool resources but some of them are related to identity of the group, in relation to other groups, and express its specificity through a collective idiosyncrasy; generally, culinary commons are not a collection of resources but are structured by norms; they pass through time, by a process of cultural transmission; they result from a social and cultural building. Then they become heritages.

Gastronomy, which differs from nutrition, appeared when people or groups could separate the nutritive function of food and its pleasure dimension. On one hand, local cuisines evolved towards gastronomic services. On the second hand, some countries gave birth to aristocratic cuisines. Then gastronomic commons and gastronomic heritages appeared.

Even if some of the resources of gastronomic commons can be used in any place their spatial dimension implies that most of them have an idiosyncratic relation with territory. Then, ceteris paribus, their “productivity”, which derives from their specific value but also from their fit with the consumer’s tastes, is higher in these territories. We can thus define gastronomic district as based on specific resources and particular synergies. A more precise enquiry shows that territorial areas depend on two models. In the first one, the localization is polarized in the neighborhoods that have a strong cultural heritage. The supply of common-pool resources is not local but national and international. In the second one, the cuisine is based on a real and important gastronomic heritage that gives it the character of a regional cuisine.

Defining the concept of gastronomic commons and gastronomic heritages finally raises the question of establishing property rights on commons including a set of private goods. The last section is dedicated to this point.