Gastronomy does not reach mass production but the demand for gastronomic services is highly growing and chefs and gastronomy became a mass topic. In the more developed countries newspapers develop gastronomic columns; magazines covers on Ferran Adrià all around the world are numerous. TV programmes show luxury restaurants, interview famous chefs, give recipes; sometimes channels are dedicated to cooking and gastronomy. Recipe books and gastronomic guides are available in an increasing number on the publishing market. These different discourses on gastronomy are turned towards millions of potential consumers and not towards restricted elite. Conversely, the prices of the famous restaurants become incredible: in Paris as in London, Tokyo and New York, having dinner in a three Michelin stars restaurant implies to give a lot of money, more than €500 (GBP 422; USD 682) for a couple, but you generally have to book one month or more in advance. At the same time, financial and luxury groups invest in restaurants. Parisian palaces recruit high-level chefs to win Michelin stars. Nevertheless very different changes are occurring.

If some very expansive establishments which deal with the extra-ordinary made a lot of money, exported their restaurants all over the world (Joël Robuchon owns 13 restaurants with a total of 18 Michelin stars and Paul Bocuse 17) and built profitable groups (as the Ducasse group), others encountered difficulties to maintain a financial equilibrium. An increasing number of gastronomic restaurants do not practice the elitist way of cooking and on the contrary tend to go back to ‘the roots of gastronomy’. Thus the extra-ordinary ways of cooking, of receiving clients... became through time debatable. Slow Food, Fooding and other movements looking for a return to commensalism, healthy preparations, old products, authenticity and cheap bills joined this movement.

This evolution apparently linked to the consecration of creativity and to the “democratisation” of luxury, allows the cohabitation and the competition of different forms of gastronomy. When some famous chefs as Senderens give back their Michelin stars the hegemony of the old model of elitist gastronomy is questioned. As Paris is traditionally considered as the capital of elitist gastronomy and as it was the place where this model emerged, it is interesting to observe the evolution of Parisian gastronomy. If the core of the model is affected, then things are serious. So, the aim of this paper is to answer the question: when democratisation is coming is it a crisis in the organisation of gastronomy?

For that, we use the following method: thank to history, we begin by building an economic lecture of the organisation of gastronomy; after, we study the present empirical data to observe the changes; and we connect the two of them to interpret the present evolution of gastronomy. More precisely, in the point 2 we consider the building of the French gastronomic model, in the point 3 its worldwide exportation. The point 4 is dedicated to a statistic analysis of the empirical changes occurring in the Parisian gastronomy on a significant period of sixty years and the five one uses MCA (Multiple Correspondence Analysis) to observe the evolution of the segmentation of the Parisian gastronomic market. The point 6 exposes our interpretation of the process of evolution.

Our main results:

The original dataset, taken from the French Michelin guidebook, includes all the establishments (restaurants and public restaurant in hotels) located in Paris and selected by the Guide Rouge Michelin between 1934 and 2010. Our descriptive statistical analysis shows that the 1990s constitute a very decisive turning point between a trend of more and more elitist gastronomy and a new trend of enlarging the field of legitimated gastronomy by including less sophisticated cuisine and setting. In order to precise and
consolidate this analysis, we compared the profiles of the Parisian restaurants in 1960 and 2010. The MCA confirms the evolution of the segmentation of Parisian gastronomy from an old to a new one. The segmentation in the Parisian gastronomy changed by the appearance of a new “low-cost” category, which takes an active part in the “democratisation” and the “mass-consumption” of the French Grande Cuisine, that confirms the importance of the turning point of the 1990’s.

The explanation of the evolution refers to the limits of the elitist paradigm of luxury, which governed the French model of gastronomy, when the democratisation of gastronomy is spreading.