

STUDYING FOOD AND EATERS

A cocktail of perspectives and methods

Olivier Lepiller, Tristan Fournier, Nicolas Bricas,
Muriel Figuié, eds



Studying Food and Eaters: A Cocktail of Perspectives and Methods

Olivier Lepiller, Tristan Fournier, Nicolas Bricas,
Muriel Figuié (editors)

Éditions Quæ

This book was produced following a series of seminars held in Montpellier, France, between November 2017 and February 2020, for which the editors would like to thank all the participants. This cycle entitled "Méthodes d'investigation de l'alimentation et des mangeurs" was supported by the Agropolis Foundation under reference ID 1700-025 through the "Investissements d'avenir" program (Labex Agro: ANR-10-LABX-0001-01), within the framework of I-SITE-MUSE (ANR-16-IDEX-0006), and by the Joint Research Unit MoISA (Montpellier Interdisciplinary Center on Sustainable Agri-food Systems. Social and Nutritional Sciences—CIRAD, IAMM, INRAE, IRD, L'Institut Agro).

The publication of this book received financial support from MoISA, the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), the Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux sociaux (Iris), the UNESCO Chair in World Food Systems—L'Institut Agro, Cirad—, the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD) and the Action, Transitions et Territoires (ACT) department of the Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement (INRAE).

To cite this book:

Olivier Lepiller, Tristan Fournier, Nicolas Bricas, Muriel Figuié (eds.), 2024. *Studying Food and Eaters: A Cocktail of Perspectives and Methods*. Versailles, éditions Quæ, 218 p. DOI: 10.35690/978-2-7592-3664-0

This book is the English translation of:

Olivier Lepiller, Tristan Fournier, Nicolas Bricas, Muriel Figuié (dir.), 2021. *Méthodes d'investigation de l'alimentation et des mangeurs – MIAM*. Versailles, éditions Quæ, 244 p. DOI : 10.35690/978-2-7592-3347-2

Translator: David Manley (chapters 1-4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14: translation from French, chapters 7-10, 12, 15: English copy editing).

Éditions Quæ
RD 10, 78026 Versailles Cedex
www.quae.com – www.quae-open.com

© Éditions Quæ, 2024

ISBN (PRINT): 978-2-7592-3663-3
ISBN (eBook): 978-2-7592-3665-7

ISBN (PDF): 978-2-7592-3664-0
ISSN : 1773-7923

The digital versions of these books are distributed under the CC-by-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Table of contents

A fictional introduction: when disciplines cross paths with eaters	5
<i>Nicolas Bricas, Olivier Lepiller, Tristan Fournier and Muriel Figuié</i>	

PART 1

MEASURING EATERS' PRACTICES AND REPRESENTATIONS

Chapter 1. Individual food consumption measurement: methods tailored to objectives	19
<i>Edwige Landais and Diane Djossinou</i>	
Chapter 2. Measuring individual and household food security: potential and challenges in nutritional and social science collaboration	33
<i>Emmanuelle Bouquet, Alissia Lourme-Ruiz and Anne Bichard</i>	
Chapter 3. Impact assessment on nutritional health prevention and promotion initiatives	47
<i>Marion Tharrey, Mathilde Savy, Marlène Perignon, Caroline Méjean and Nicole Darmon</i>	
Chapter 4. Experimental economics: highlighting the preferences and factors influencing people's decision making	63
<i>Douadia Bougherara, Laurent Muller and Sabrina Teyssier</i>	
Chapter 5. Subjective food wellbeing assessment: how eaters rate their food	77
<i>Christophe Serra-Mallol and Mila Lebrun</i>	

PART 2

TRACKING EATERS AND FOODS

Chapter 6. Ethnoaccounting: monitoring, counting and understanding what eaters value	89
<i>Margalida Mulet Pascual</i>	
Chapter 7. Photovoice: a participatory method to explore food environments from inhabitants' viewpoint	101
<i>Carolyn I. Auma, Michelle Holdsworth and Rebecca Pradeilles</i>	
Chapter 8. Quantified narratives: a research method that combines interviews and statistical analysis of biographical dynamics	115
<i>Grégori Akermann and Paul Coeurquetin</i>	
Chapter 9. Auto/biography: a comprehensive approach for accessing eaters' subjectivity	127
<i>Amandine Rochedy and Tristan Fournier</i>	

Chapter 10. ‘Follow-the-thing’: tracing food products to chronicle their sociospatial biography 137
Michaël Bruckert

Chapter 11. Sociological surveys of young eaters: methodological and epistemological issues..... 149
Anne Dupuy and Géraldine Comoretto

PART 3

UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE FOOD AND EATING FACT

Chapter 12. The URBAL participatory method: collectively documenting sustainable food innovation impact pathways 165
Olivier Lepiller, Élodie Valette, Alison Blay-Palmer, Denis Sautier, Michaël Bruckert, Marlène Pérignon, Nguyen Thi Tan Loc, Nguyen Thi Sau, Ophélie Roudelle and Amélie Wood

Chapter 13. Action research: an analysis and social transformation process to enhance access to sustainable food..... 177
Pauline Scherer

Chapter 14. Theatre workshops: accounting for food-sensitive experience..... 189
Estelle Fourat and Frédérique Jankowski

Chapter 15. Focus groups: studying food and eating through thematic discussion... 201
Amandine Rochedy and Sandrine Barrey

List of authors..... 215

A fictional introduction: when disciplines cross paths with eaters

*NICOLAS BRICAS^a, OLIVIER LEPILLER^a,
TRISTAN FOURNIER^b AND MURIEL FIGUIÉ^c*

^a Cirad, UMR MoISA, F-34398 Montpellier, France ; MoISA, Université Montpellier, CIHEAM-IAMM, Cirad, INRAE, Institut Agro, IRD, Montpellier, France.

^b CNRS – Iris, EHESS, Paris, France.

^c Cirad, UMR MoISA, Maputo, Mozambique ; MoISA, Université Montpellier, CIHEAM-IAMM, Cirad, INRAE, Institut Agro, IRD, Montpellier, France.

Food studies have carved an academic niche in English-speaking countries, especially the United States, yet in France they remain segmented within historically entrenched disciplinary fields (Poulain, 2017). This situation has endured despite institutional calls for interdisciplinarity, which is not always put into practice. Hence, on one side of the Atlantic, there is an established research strand devoted to the food theme that has the appeal of being open and territorial in scope, although confusion sometimes arises due to differences in research methods and conceptual frameworks. On the other side of the ocean, the food topic has gained academic legitimacy in a range of disciplinary areas, while policymakers and funding bodies are increasingly urging these diverse researchers to work together, despite the ongoing difficulties in between-discipline communication.

This book is based on a two-pronged hypothesis. The first is that the food issue now has sufficient legitimacy within the humanities and social sciences disciplines (anthropology, economics, geography, history and sociology) for a fertile dialogue to finally be possible with nutritional science specialists, thereby paving the way for the development of full-fledged interdisciplinary research programmes in France. The second is that researchers conducting studies on environmental, social, economic, political and health issues are prompted to address the challenge of forging a transition to more sustainable food systems, thereby providing a lever for reshaping food studies in France, particularly with a view to fostering an open science sphere to metabolise interdisciplinary interaction.

With this book and the seminar 'Méthodes d'investigation de l'alimentation et des mangeurs (MIAM)' (Methods for studying food and eaters) from which it derives, which was held in Montpellier (France) between 2017 and 2020 and organized by the Montpellier Interdisciplinary Center on Sustainable Agri-food Systems (MoISA) research unit and the UNESCO Chair in World Food Systems, we have sought to identify the possibilities, limits and conditions of this dialogue. Each of the chapters is written by one or more specialists in a given discipline, focused on a specific food research method while also considering the disciplines with which it would be possible and beneficial to collaborate. This broadening of the disciplinary horizons is considered from a data collection standpoint, but also with regard to data interpretation and analysis procedures for which methodological reflections are often relatively muted (Warde, 2014). This is not a pitch to promote mixed methods, but rather an attempt to transcend disciplinary positions based on the following argument: it is the

question that a researcher asks that legitimizes the method to be used, where the question sometimes requires the researcher to be willing to take a step back, to engage in dialogue with representatives of other disciplines and sometimes even to combine different methods. The aim of this English version of the book is to bridge the gap between French- and English-speaking research communities, and more generally between the disciplines and different epistemological traditions that underpin food studies.

By way of introduction to this dialogue project, hereafter is a brief story about a few researchers from different disciplines who meet to discuss a societal issue.

When Charlotte Bond, a sociologist at France's National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, received an email from the *Agence Française de l'Excellence Scientifique* her heart was racing. She struggled to put together a response to the Agency's call for projects and then sent a short 4-page submission for the pre-selection phase. Her proposal dealt with the factors impacting meat consumption patterns. Charlotte was keen on the project and had succeeded in bringing together several researchers from different disciplines to focus on the same issue. They had all agreed to it without really discussing the participation details and conditions. Anyway, it was a promising subject but the timing was tight. "We'll see if we get the project", several of the researchers involved had told her.

Moreover, the Agency's comments were right on. They considered the project to be interesting and innovative and it was pre-selected, but the Agency evaluation committee requested that the researchers specify the disciplinary linkages, while taking advantage of the complementarities and possible contradictions of the different methodological approaches. Charlotte was happy even though it meant more investment. It was then essential to sit down around a table and really start talking.

A month later, Charlotte had managed to book two successive days to bring everyone together. She had found a room that could fit a large square table, around which everyone would be on the same level. She had prepared an introductory presentation on the planned structure of the project and had recruited Max Logos, a post-doctoral fellow trained in the history of science and epistemology, who was to participate in the project's Epistemology of Interdisciplinarity strand. "Well, you'll have to explain to them what that means, because I'm not sure everyone will understand", Charlotte told Max.

All the team leaders were there on D-day: Charlotte and Max; Nathalie Vitamine, nutritionist; Alan Smith, economist; Marcel Man, anthropologist, and Fabienne Chart, geographer. After a shared coffee and a round of introductions, Charlotte offered an overview of each of the project's research strands.

The first was entitled 'Describing: the current situation and baseline data on meat consumption'. This discussion focused on defining the scope of the consumption data to be collected. Nathalie Vitamine had given this some thought, and immediately proposed that all data on the consumption of foods of animal origin and protein-rich plant foods, especially legumes "which could serve as a meat substitute", should be collected. Marcel Man grinned wryly and asked: "And cassoulet, lentils with sausage and chilli con carne—which do you put them in, meat or legumes?" It was already clear that each discipline, focusing on one aspect of food, e.g. nutrition for Nathalie Vitamine and culinary culture for Marcel Man, was implicitly mapping out the boundaries of what was relevant and a monitoring priority. In this respect, the situation got more complicated when it came

to discussing the consumption measurements everyone required, i.e. quantities of products by weight for Nathalie, who would convert them into grams of protein and other nutrients, and expenditures in economic value terms for Alan Smith. Fabienne Chart asked whether consumption frequencies could be measured, but was told that it was not precise enough. She then stated that, regardless of the measurement method, she would like data on the products' geographical origins to be collected, but added that this was not an easy task. Otherwise, Marcel Man wanted to be certain that he would be able to identify the dishes being eaten, and specified that he did not want to be restricted to protein-rich foods, arguing that "a meat dish could be replaced by a spinach pie for dinner". But above all he wanted to be able to interview "eaters and not consumers" before they were handed a questionnaire that would give them too many hints as to which aspect of food was being prioritized in the survey. "You see, if your questionnaire suggests to people that you're a nutritionist, they're going to gear their answers towards the relationship between their diet and health, and that's going to bias all my answers". One could sense some irritation at this denunciation of biases associated with the disciplinary focus, and at this determination to be all-encompassing.

To cool things down, Charlotte Bond took the opportunity offered by Marcel the anthropologist to say a word about the eater/consumer distinction: "It's true that some of us here use the term 'eater' rather than 'consumer'. It's not a trite intellectual whim! The aim is above all to stress the fact that food cannot be solely reduced to the consumption stage, which is in any case ambiguous—are we talking about acquisition as a whole? Purchasing? Ingesting and digesting? All of that? Of course, consumption is still essential to consider, but there are also a whole host of foods and practices that are beyond the purview of the market. We can eat what we produce, gather, hunt, trade with our neighbours or families, etc. Otherwise the 'eater' notion helps to position the individuals we are studying in relation to all the other food system actors—from the field to the plate, to put it bluntly—but also those who discuss food in the public sphere, i.e. the media, politicians, experts, doctors, etc. These systems of actors and activities include the vital stage of cooking, which transforms foodstuffs into food, and meal sharing, which is the lifeblood of social life. The term 'eater' also places greater emphasis on meaning, thereby making it possible to consider the values, emotions, representations and rationales that underpin the very act of eating. Besides, when people have a meal or snack they generally use the verb 'to eat'. You wouldn't say to a colleague, "Would you like to consume together at noon?" Finally, there's the organic dimension to eating. We eat plant- or animal-based foods that nourish our bodies, so we're part of the food chain. If you agree, I suggest we use this term throughout this 2-day meeting. It's the term we used when we drew up our project. Don't think of it as a disciplinary lens, but rather as a first step towards interdisciplinarity, an open door to all the dimensions of the act of eating. Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach, a determination to grasp the act of eating in all its biological, psychological, sociological, anthropological, economic, geographical, historical, political and ecological complexity all encompass this 'eater' figure. On this point, I encourage you to read an article by Claude Fischler¹ (1988), chapter 8 in a book of Jean-Pierre Poulain (2017) and an article by Jean-Pierre Corbeau (2021) that reviews the emergence of this 'eater' character."

1. In French, see also the leading article by Claude Fischler (1979) and the entire issue of the *Communications* journal, for which it serves as an introduction.

Then it was time for lunch. On the way to the small restaurant that Charlotte had chosen not far from the meeting room, bilateral conversations began in an attempt to find trade-offs between disciplines. Max heard Nathalie Vitamine and Alan Smith, who were trailing behind, discussing the human sciences, “always a bit paranoid about being misunderstood by the harder approaches”, “always saying that we only see our research topics through our own narrow lenses”. But they did admit that Marcel Man and Fabienne Chart seemed really nice... And actually it was true that they were just about to eat, not consume, together. As soon as they arrived at the restaurant, Max Logos jotted down some details in his notebook. For him, the investigation had begun and he had already filled in pages and pages of notes!

The second half of the day was devoted to the topic of ‘Understanding and explaining: the factors driving meat consumption’. Over lunch, Fabienne the geographer and Marcel the anthropologist had discussed how they intended to work on the determining factors. They began the discussion by explaining that they wanted to talk freely and extensively with a sample of eaters so as to identify their reasons for changes in their meat consumption patterns, while at the same time tracing the channels through which the food had transited before ending up on the plate. Nathalie the nutritionist and Alan the economist looked at each other, and then Alan spoke up: “How many people do you want to interview?” “I don’t know, I’d say around 30”, replied Marcel Man. “You know, I try to vary the people I interview as much as possible and I stop when I don’t hear anything different from what I’ve already heard. That’s often around 30. But then sometimes it’s a bit more,” he explained.

Nathalie Vitamine beamed a big smile and said she needed a large sample size, including thousands of people if possible, so that she could conduct statistical analyses to identify the determinants of the measured consumption, which would thereby warrant publication of an article in her field. She added that a small qualitative sampling could be the icing on the cake. Yet she was aware that there was no way this project could accommodate a very large sample, and that a few hundred surveyed people could be enough. Alan Smith went on to explain that he was interested in measuring whether there were differences in consumption according to household income and that he therefore absolutely required a sample that was representative of the reference population. He too needed a large sample! Marcel Man and Fabienne Chart saw Nathalie Vitamine and Alan Smith glancing at Charlotte Bond and began to suspect that they were going to request a larger budget to carry out their large-survey survey. This would complicate their plans to each recruit a post-doc candidate. Charlotte concluded the session by pointing out that we could combine ‘quali’ and ‘quanti’ research. The in-depth interviews and observations, i.e. the ‘quali’ part, would help identify response procedures for factors affecting consumption, which could in turn be proposed as response procedures in the questionnaire for the ‘quanti’ part. But then we overheard a slightly disgruntled comment, “So we’re going to have to wait until the ‘quali’ part is finished before we do the ‘quanti’?” Charlotte continued without batting an eyelid and concluded, “Well, we’ll also need to discuss the exact timetable, as well as the budget, before tomorrow evening!” That marked the end of the first day, and Charlotte suggested that anyone who wished to do so could come along and have dinner together in a restaurant, “as long as we don’t talk about the project!” “A restaurant serving vegetarian dishes?” someone asked!

The next morning, while coffee was being served in the meeting room, the discussion turned to the subject of ‘Intervening: building and testing ways of shaping consumption patterns.’ Charlotte, the sociologist, had proposed this topic knowing that there was some degree of consensus among the researchers that excessive meat consumption—beyond the strict nutritional requirements—was a source of various problems, i.e. health, environmental and ethical, and that the prevailing militant rhetoric advocating a reduction in meat consumption seemed to be perceived very differently depending on people’s social category. She hence suggested that the reactions of meat eaters to ongoing research initiatives, or those to be implemented in the project, could be analysed to gain insight into their motives, barriers and levers to steer this consumption towards greater ‘sustainability’, as was the overall aim of the project. Then it was Nathalie Vitamine and Marcel Man who turned out to be on the same wavelength. Both advocated in favour of building an experiment with citizen participation, while Alan Smith and Fabienne Chart wanted to test hypotheses put forward in the literature in their respective disciplines. Alan argued that researchers should not monopolize recommendations for action but should instead test a stance whereby eaters’ knowledge and tactics are fostered. They had discussed the matter in the restaurant the evening before and concluded that it would be useful to focus on the way eaters viewed the issue so as to incorporate it in the questionnaire. They thereby wanted to jointly test an action research approach based on interventions, which seemed more ethically contemporary and also easier to publish, since scientific journals were now very interested in such protocols. Meanwhile, Alan Smith was keen to test the effects of price variations through an experiment in which participants would have to demonstrate their willingness to pay a higher price for more sustainable quality meats through a commitment scheme. In order to publish the results, he needed to innovate in terms of bidding techniques, and a recent Australian paper offered a novel avenue that he was determined to test. Fabienne (the geographer), after speaking to Alan (the economist) the previous evening, thought that this experiment could be an opportunity to test the effects of meat origins on consumption patterns. She also wanted to find out whether or not changes in consumption were accompanied by changes in where meat was purchased in the ‘foodscape’, as she called it. Was the trend towards ‘flexitarianism’, in particular, benefitting local butchers? Like Alan, she was quite interested in addressing a question that had remained unanswered in the literature—a research front! “But is this a real grassroots social problem or just a research topic?” asked Nathalie Vitamine, feigning ignorance?

For lunch, Charlotte Bond had prepared a surprise in the meeting room. She had arranged with a friend who worked in a foreign lab to have some meat substitutes delivered, including mini-steaks made from animal stem cells, a kind of small sausage made from bacteria cultured on mushroom tissue, mini-silkworm skewers, and a new type of textured sesame protein bites that were slightly fatty and resembled chicken nuggets. All of these items had been cooked like meat by one of Charlotte’s women friends who was a chef. These different samples were served on attractive bamboo fibre plates and could be eaten just with a fork or even as finger food. “We don’t need a knife!” declared Alan Smith. “Good point!” agreed Charlotte Bond. She then added, “Does it really resemble meat if it can’t be cut with a knife?” Marcel Man was about to start a talk on the use of knives in meals in different societies through the ages, but Alan the economist stopped him in his tracks by quipping, “Hey, that’s a sociologist’s question!

Who cares as long as it's edible?" "As long as it's protein, as the nutritionists would say," replied Marcel, winking at Nathalie Vitamine. She then went on to say to Alan, "It depends on whether it's a flexible food or a commodity... to be cut, as the economists would say!" "Could you pass me the 'carte'² (menu) to see what they call it?" asked Fabienne, the geographer. "Geographers can't do without 'cartes' (maps)," replied Marcel Man. Max, the science historian and epistemologist, was scribbling away in his notebook and Charlotte Bond was smiling with delight at seeing how bonds were forming based on 'friendly and disciplinary affinities in good humour,' a concept she was in the process of inventing and which she told herself was essential for the success of the project.

The afternoon was devoted to a presentation by Max, who outlined the methodological options available for the project. His talk was meant to fuel future discussions on the practical organization of the project and the guidelines for drawing up the final budget over the following weeks. He began by pointing out that the methods would vary depending on the research targets. "It's the focus issue that dictates the method. Controversies regarding methods are actually often a dialogue of the deaf between researchers who are not asking the same questions".

He explained that if you want to gauge the importance of a phenomenon, as discussed in the first half-day session, you cannot use the same methods as you would if you want to grasp the logic underlying this phenomenon or assess the relative weight of its various determining factors. "A quantitative survey can, for instance, reveal that well-off people with a high educational level eat less meat than middle class people with a low educational level. But that doesn't tell us why from the eaters' standpoint. That's what an in-depth qualitative approach can do". Even the methods will differ depending on whether we want to intervene, propose, implement or assess the effects of an initiative. Marcel Man stepped in to say, "Yeah, OK, the choice of method depends on the question to be addressed. But the choice of method also depends on the timeframe and above all the budget available. A series of in-depth interviews and their analysis can be carried out in a few months, or even a few weeks, and they don't cost very much, whereas a major quantitative survey can take over a year to set up, carry out and analyse the findings". Alan, the economist, could not help joking, "You mean, Mr Anthropologist, that methodology is economy-dependent?" And he winked and added, "...like many things, and actually like almost everything!" Charlotte then concluded, "You have to find the right trade-off between the research stance—often defined by your discipline—the question addressed and the available resources. Moreover, a few trade-offs will be needed in this project to get everyone on the same page!".

Max then delved into some epistemological issues that he said would be challenging but not useless, but which, given all the yawns that were being held back, did not seem to arouse much enthusiasm in the audience—note that the thermos of coffee had already been empty for over an hour. Yet Max was there to get the participants thinking about their research practices and to serve as an interdisciplinary watchdog. "The action of objectifying," he began, "underpins scientific activity. Firstly, it involves clearly defining the scope—or object—of the studied phenomenon and then producing a narrative on this object based on observations that have been empirically documented through data collection, before being analysed according to clear logical criteria.

2. Note that to clarify the wordplay used here in the French narrative regarding the word *carte*, the English meanings are shown in brackets.

This narrative is therefore verifiable: in the case of reproducible experimental approaches, it is disprovable or, in the case of other approaches, plausible, i.e. logically sound and based on observations. Amongst scientific approaches focused on food and eaters, several objectification methods are possible depending on their connection with the emic dimension of the studied phenomena.”

Max went on to explain that the emic concept could not be understood without reference to the opposing etic concept. Max urged the audience to read an article by Marvin Harris (1976) and another by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (1998), while mentioning that, “The etic and emic concepts were coined by Kenneth Pike on the strength of linguistic research and were then embraced in the anthropology field, notably by Marvin Harris. This distinction facilitates insight into the research stances of the different disciplines.”

He continued, “Etics is specific to science. It can be viewed as an interpretative approach to the phenomena being studied—an approach that produces a scientific descriptive, comprehension and explanatory discourse. Scientists adopt clearly identified methods and rational rules to produce this discourse. This is commonly known as the ‘scholarly sense’.” Max gave examples of etic discourses from different disciplines, explaining that such concepts, with expressions like ‘commensal situation’, ‘nutritional density’, ‘food diversity’, ‘willingness to pay’, ‘culinary triangle’, ‘food environment’, etc., often made researchers incomprehensible to ordinary folk.

“In contrast,” Max went on, “the emic approach refers to so-called ‘common sense’. This is the discourse expressed by survey respondents, representations that can be expressed and reconstructed by the interviewer, or sociocultural codes and norms that respondents are able to explain with the researcher’s help, because respondents are not always very aware of them nor are they easy for them to express. A social norm, for instance, is characterized by the social sanction associated with its violation. It can be revealed by asking the respondent to assess supposedly transgressive behaviour. For example, a respondent could be asked what he/she would think if one of his/her guests refused to eat the meat dish he/she had prepared. We would then be able to identify the norms related to vegetarianism and the sharing of meals in vegetarian communities.”

But right after he had explained the distinction between etic and emic, and as humanities researchers tend to do—Nathalie Vitamine silently laughed while saying, “It’s a mania with them”—, Max then made it clear that this distinction should not be regarded as a strict opposition. Instead, etic and emic are two poles of the same continuum. Nathalie picked up on this comment, “By the way, don’t we all ultimately deal with the emic? The fact that we’re studying human food means we’re studying human beings capable of speaking and producing meaning. Let’s not forget that.”

Marcel Man nodded from the back of the room next to the radiator, and said, “I completely agree, but I think we’re all dealing with etics, even us soft scientists!” Max was just about to get to that and then projected a diagram from a book on survey methods for studying food and eaters³. He continued, “All knowledge production processes that claim to be scientific, i.e. that aim to account for the phenomena studied via comparison, generalization and above all criticism, produce an etical discourse.

3. See Figure 0.1 in this Introduction.

This is equally true of the so-called ‘hard’ sciences and the humanities. An approach that focuses solely on emic phenomena, e.g. representations shared within a group, assuming that it’s really possible, can only claim to be scientific if it forges or adopts an etic narrative to account for them. So all of us in this room produce etics. It’s even to some extent our mission and warrants our salaries. Not producing etics at all would mean, for example, reporting on emic discourse gleaned in the field without a clear definition of the subject, without further analysis, without any generalization, without any translation to make the situation understandable and interpretable for readers, colleagues, or even the respondents. This in other words would be tantamount to not producing any objectification. If you stick too closely to emics, you’re not generalizing anything, you’re just being a mouthpiece. To sum up, different methods and disciplines have different positions in relation to etics and emics. Some seek to distance themselves from emics and produce a discourse that is as etic as possible. Here we are more concerned about the epistemology of the so-called hard sciences, objective measurement, the use of statistical tools and experimental protocols. Others focus on emics and seek to produce a comprehensive objectification and reconstruct the rationale that drives the respondents. We’re more on the side of the epistemology of the human sciences, i.e. of the plausible rather than the deniable.”

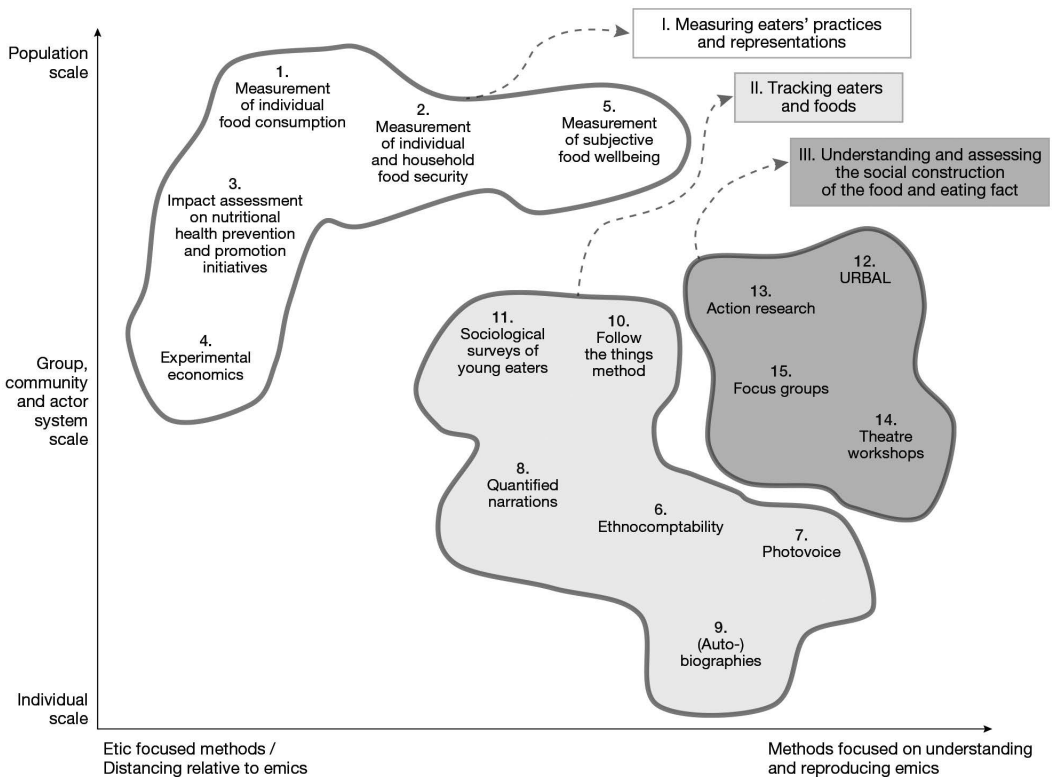


Figure 0.1. Cognitive map of the methods described in the book *Studying Food and Eaters: A Cocktail of Perspectives and Methods*.

After this tangent on etics and emics, which seemed to wake up the audience, Max continued, “Alongside this first strand, which provides a means of structuring the diverse methods of investigating food and eaters, a second strand can be identified, i.e. the monitoring scales, which are more intuitive and obvious, as you can see from this diagram. At the finest level, i.e. the individual. Next, there are groups of different kinds that are defined in different ways by different disciplines, including the family, household, consumption unit, clan, tribe, community, etc. Then there are populations, which can for instance be defined in terms of regional or national boundaries. You might of course argue that we often start with the individual when it comes to generalizing on the group or even population level. But the key point here, when striving to structure the methods, is the scale at which the researchers are ultimately interested and at which the knowledge they produce is focused. Qualitative methods based on interviews and ethnographic observations are often preferred at the most detailed levels. These methods aim to provide a detailed picture but they are time-consuming to carry out given the time/respondent ratio. Moreover, the budget allocated to them within research projects is often limited.” “Don’t even mention it!” said Marcel Man smiling.

Max added, “With these fine-scale qualitative methods, the samples are not designed to be representative of a reference population, but rather of the diversity of situations and possible types. The goal is to interview a range of very different people so as to identify all of the possible discourses and practices—even though some of them may be marginal in the target population or not statistically significant—with the aim of gaining insight into them and their underlying rationale. History illustrates the importance of fringe patterns, e.g. the consumption of ‘organic’ quality meat, which was completely negligible just 30 years ago, but is now much more prominent. We can identify factors that influence what eaters say and do, but we can’t carry out a statistical analysis to measure their relative importance. Statistics can also be used to analyse the discourses, e.g. the frequency with which words or expressions appear. On a larger scale, i.e. the population, the relative importance of what has been identified can be assessed on a finer scale. For example, in-depth interviews with individuals may reveal that the reasons for reducing meat consumption may be health-related, economic, environmental, ethical, taste-related, cultural, social or even animal welfare-related, factors that enable people to stand out or, conversely, to be integrated into a social group. Interviews also help to show how these different reasons for eating less meat combine, and possibly how their combination determines changes in practices. A personal event such as the birth of a child can simultaneously make people more aware of health and environmental issues, forcing them to look to the future of the next generation. A quantitative survey can measure the relative importance of each of these reasons in a population, provided the sample is large enough and sufficiently well constructed, while identifying how these reasons are associated with individual characteristics: age, gender, standard of living, education, residence location, etc.”

Charlotte Bond then added: “These monitoring scales often differentiate disciplines. For starters, psychologists focus on individuals, although some social and cultural psychologists do also carry out quantitative surveys. Otherwise epidemiologists focus on populations. What they observe, each on their own scale, is not always consistent. For instance, major differences in meat consumption may be noted between individuals due to taste preferences, but these are less visible on a population scale,

where economic and sociocultural factors are more important. Even so, we can still try to combine methods that implement different monitoring scales. This is where it is really interesting to combine methods and foster interdisciplinarity.”

Nathalie Vitamine proposed another factor for differentiating research approaches. Firstly, she identified approaches geared towards making progress on a given scientific front—studying something that nobody else has previously explored, e.g. a little-known field or a new method. The key is to innovate relative to what everyone else has already studied. The challenge is to make scientific progress. That is what makes it easier to publish, because that is often what journals are looking for. “Yes, but you see, plenty of papers explore new methods whose results are appallingly trivial in terms of their usefulness,” said Charlotte Bond putting things into perspective. Nathalie picked up where she left off, highlighting that it was also possible to find approaches that took social issues as their starting point and sought to address them. What really counts is being useful in solving societal issues. She added, “This distinction can be summed up by looking at both basic and targeted research.” “I agree, but there’s a risk that if we start from the questions raised by society then we could get trapped in a vision imposed by some of its actors. Often the problem is actually the question and the way it is framed,” declared Fabienne Chart. Then Charlotte repeated what Max had said earlier, i.e. that we often see scientific debates in which different methods clash when we are simply not asking the same questions, before continuing, “Often, the choice of method is made according to the question we ask ourselves, or which is asked socially. We then have to ask ourselves whether the method we choose will really enable us to answer the question we are asking. The issue is primarily the question, not the method. But we also have to admit that a methodological innovation leads us to ask new questions. We can measure new dimensions and thus reveal them and thereby question their role. This is the case, for instance, with regards to the enormous processing possibilities offered by new Big Data methods.”

Charlotte, who could see the clock was ticking, took advantage of the opportunity to thank Max and conclude this productive day with four comments.

The first was that to reach agreement in an interdisciplinary group we have to accept that the importance each discipline attaches to the studied food aspects has to be put into perspective. Each discipline tends to stress the importance of its preferred dimension—social, biological, cultural, hedonic, ecological, psychological or economic—while regarding the other dimensions as secondary. For example, nutritionists consider health to be a primary food dimension, and that pleasure, economic constraints, social norms and cultural practices can be studied in terms of how they shape nutritional health. Sociologists and anthropologists study social interactions and cultural dynamics, which they see as being highly relevant to the behaviours they observe, while economists focus on material and monetary constraints in their search for determining factors. Interdisciplinarity therefore presupposes recognition of this diversity of viewpoints and acceptance of the fact that not all disciplines share a unified vision of the behavioural endpoints, that they zoom in on some rather than others, and that they tend to rank them in order of importance.

The second comment was drawn from a thought experiment involving a 1:1 map superimposed on the entire concerned area, as imagined by Lewis Carroll, Jorge Luis Borges and Umberto Eco (Palsky, 1999). This kind of map is the most reliable representation

of the area, but the only problem is that it is unusable! So we have to accept that there may be some information loss to capture the reality, and the selection of information collected through the implemented method depends on its conceptual framework.

The third comment applied to all qualitative and quantitative survey methods. It concerned the need to take the effects of interactions between interviewers and respondents into account as well as the influence of the question order and wording on the responses. Charlotte recommended that everyone, irrespective of their discipline, should read a selection of works by authors she considered essential on methodological issues: Olivier de Sardan (2012) and his book *La rigueur du qualitatif*, which is geared towards readers conducting qualitative (and even quantitative) research on human beings; Norbert Schwarz and Seymour Sudman (1996), who have conducted numerous surveys demonstrating how the question shapes the response; and Van Campenhout, Marquet and Quivy (2017) and Becker (1998) on rigorous approaches to social science surveys. Charlotte also recommended a book by Alan Warde (2015)—which is more focused on food—on the value of research practices and mentioned a few essential methodological manuals: Macbeth and MacClancy (2004); Poulain (2002); Miller and Deutsch (2010); Albala (2012); Murcott, Belasco and Jackson (2013); Chrzan and Brett (2016); Klein and Watson (2016); and Leer and Krogager (2021).

Charlotte's fourth and final comment was a recommendation to check out a book that would be useful for anyone conducting research on food. This book, entitled *Studying Food and Eaters: A Cocktail of Perspectives and Methods*, is the one from which Max's earlier diagram was extracted. In her view, this book offers an opportunity to review and compare various methods: participatory methods involving respondents, comprehensive methods deployed on individual and group levels, and more explanatory methods carried out on a few individuals or very large population samples. "To present the different methods compiled in the book, the editors opted to arrange them graphically according to the two strands Max was talking about earlier: the etic-emic strand on the x-axis and the monitoring scale on the y-axis. There are other possibilities, of course, but this allows readers to pinpoint each of the methods graphically and also for the editors to organize the 15 chapters of this book into three main groups, each of which includes methods that share a similar family resemblance. The first group is entitled 'I. Measuring eaters' practices and representations'. These are mainly quantitative methods designed to be statistically representative, or to measure the weight of different eating behaviour factors. The second set is entitled 'II. Tracking eaters and foods'. These are methods for grasping the dynamics of food practices, representations and flows, mostly at the sub-population level. The third group is entitled 'III. Understanding and assessing the social construction of the food and eating fact'. These are mainly participatory methods involving respondents in the knowledge production process."

Charlotte continued her discussion of the diagram and then opened the discussion to address the many questions. Someone floated the idea of applying all 15 methods presented in the book to the study of meat consumption. Everyone agreed that it would certainly shed light on the subject from very complementary angles, but that the budget offered by the *Agence Française de l'Excellence Scientifique* would not be sufficient. Charlotte then seized the opportunity to say, "For that, we'll ask Europe for funding for our next project! Meanwhile, how about going for a bite to eat together?"

►► References

- Albala K., 2012. *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, New York, Routledge, 406 p.
- Becker, H. S., 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 239 p. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/T/bo3683418.html>
- Corbeau J.-P., 2021. Reflections for a Sociological Representation of the Eater. *Social Sciences*, 10 (9), Article 9, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10090339>
- Chrzan J., Brett J. (ed.), 2016. *Research Methods for Anthropological Studies of Food and Nutrition: Volumes 1-3*, Oxford, New York, Berghahn Books, 820 p.
- Fischler C. (ed.), 1979. Communications. *La nourriture. Pour une anthropologie bioculturelle de l'alimentation*, (31), 224 p. https://www.persee.fr/issue/comm_0588-8018_1979_num_31_1
- Fischler C., 1988. Food, Self and Identity. *Social Science Information*, 27(2), 275-292, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901888027002005>
- Harris, M., 1976. History and significance of the emic/etic distinction. *Annual review of anthropology*, (5), 329-350, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/2949316>
- Klein J. and Watson J. L., 2016. *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 496 p.
- Leer, J., and Krogager, S. G. S. (ed.), 2021. *Research methods in digital food studies*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 231 p.
- Macbeth H. M. and MacClancy J., 2004. *Researching Food Habits: Methods and Problems*, New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 242 p.
- Miller J. et Deutsch J., 2010. *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods*, Oxford, Bloomsbury Publishing, 229 p.
- Murcott A., Belasco W. and Jackson P., 2013. *The Handbook of Food Research*, London, New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 681 p.
- Olivier de Sardan J.P., 2012. *La rigueur du qualitatif. Les contraintes empiriques de l'interprétation socio-anthropologique*, Brussels, Academia, 372 p.
- Olivier de Sardan, J.-P., 1998. Émique. *L'Homme*, 38(147), 151-66, <https://doi.org/10.3406/hom.1998.370510>.
- Palsky G., 1999. Borgès, Carol et la carte au 1/1. *Cybergeo : European Journal of Geography*, (106), [Online] <https://doi.org/10.4000/cybergeo.5233>
- Poulain J.-P., 2002. *Manger aujourd'hui : Attitudes, normes et pratiques*. Toulouse, Editions Privat, 235 p.
- Poulain J.-P., 2017. *The Sociology of Food. Eating and the Place of Food in Society*. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 288 p.
- Schwarz N., Sudman S., 1996. *Answering questions: Methodology for determining cognitive and communicative processes in survey research*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 469 p.
- Van Campenhoudt L., Marquet J J., Quivy R., 2017. *Manuel de recherche en sciences sociales*. 5ème édition revue et augmentée. Paris, Dunod, 384 p.
- Warde A., 2014. Food studies and the integration of multiple methods. *Politica y Sociedad*, 51(1), 51-72.
- Warde A., 2015. *The Practice of Eating*, Malden, USA, Polity Press, 220 p.

Part 1

Measuring eaters' practices and representations

