

The World on a Plate: culinary connections, globalisation and changing places

Lecture Summary

Geographers define **foodscapes** as the places and spaces in which we eat or otherwise meaningfully engage with food. Common examples would be restaurants, food markets, other food retailers, food media, domestic spaces (like the kitchen), and so on. This lecture considers some of the connections, flows and globalisations that are shaping contemporary foodscapes. Its illustrative examples predominantly concern restaurants.

Our foodscapes are shaped by, and form part of, the wider dynamics of place and space. In particular, **foodscapes exemplify key aspects of places** as addressed within A-level curricula, namely:

- foodscapes (like place more generally) are both directly experienced and also mediated and encountered through representations;
- foodscapes (like place more generally) are shaped not only by endogenous factors but also by exogenous relations and connections;
- and a focus on foodscapes (like on place more generally) offers a local lens on how wider processes, such as globalisation, are experienced.

The lecture starts with a sketch of the public foodscapes of one place, Nerja in Andalucia, where we traditionally run a first-year undergraduate fieldtrip for Royal Holloway students. Whilst 'typically Spanish' eateries are present, it is notable that they are outnumbered by a range of other cuisines (Italian, Indian, Mexican, Thai, etc.). Andalucia also has a significant presence of 'global brand' food outlets (McDonald's, Burger King, etc.). This raises the question of what factors are shaping these food geographies. Two ways of thinking about this are outlined in the main part of the lecture.

First, the **glocalisation** thesis, to use the term coined by George Ritzer. This posits the global growth of homogenising food cultures, standardised by transnational corporations and their global marketing strategies, and delivered through centrally designed 'non-places'. McDonald's, with its 39,000 restaurants in more than 120 countries, is cast as exemplary of this trend. It should be noted that these kinds of 'glocal' food cultures may also be localized in some ways (a process sometimes labelled as **glocalisation**), as when McDonald's adjusts its food offer for different territories, or markets its restaurants as places for everyday social interactions and events.

Second, an emphasis on **translocalisation**. This focuses on the shaping of places and foodscapes not just by transnational food corporations but by more complex interrelated movements of people, things and ideas, especially associated with histories of international migration. One example highlighted is the use of 'ethnic foods' as part of the 'place making' and 'branding' of urban neighbourhoods (as in London's Chinatown and Banglatown, or Birmingham's Balti Triangle). Another example explored are the UK's 'Indian' restaurants, estimated to number over 12,000, and formed through histories of British imperialism, post-colonial migrations from South Asia and East Africa, and the culinary inventiveness and economic entrepreneurialism of British South Asians.

The lecture concludes by reiterating how 'foodscapes' are a topic that can illustrate aspects of place more generally:

- As an important part of our experiences of place;
- As a frequent element of place-making and place-branding practices;
- As a key medium for the representation of places that we may never have experienced directly;
- As shaped by wider spatial connections, whether those be understood as a corporately driven 'glocalisation' or processes of 'translocalisation' associated with the multiple connections and flows between places.

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