

Changes in the practice of eating: a comparative analysis of time-use

Alan Warde, Shu-Li Cheng, Wendy Olsen and Dale Southerton

School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester

Corresponding author:

Alan Warde, CRIC, University of Manchester, Harold Hankins Building, Booth
Street West, Manchester, M13 9QH, UK

Alan.warde@manchester.ac.uk

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Abstract

This paper examines changes in aspects of the eating habits of the populations of five countries between the early 1970s and the end of the 1990s. Time-use diary data provide the main evidence, which is subjected to techniques of statistical description and regression analysis. The study of France, UK, USA, Norway and the Netherlands shows considerable national variation in patterns of food preparation, eating at home and eating out. Each of these components of the practice of eating is examined for indications of whether there are any tendencies towards de-differentiation within countries or convergence across countries. There are some common patterns across countries, notably a decline in the amount of time devoted to food preparation. Time spent on eating at home reduces in all countries except France. In the USA time devoted to domestic food preparation and consumption is minimal. Internal differentiation shows continuities – of gender divisions and age-related behaviour – but also new emergent tendencies – with presence of children and levels of cultural capital becoming significant predictors of behaviour. It is maintained that the analysis of time-use provides a useful framework for comparing practices in different countries and that the variation revealed might best be understood in terms of different modes of institutionalisation of consumption.

Keywords: comparative sociology, distinction, eating, food habits, globalization, practice, social differentiation, time-use surveys

1 Introduction

The globalization thesis continues to provide the obligatory background for the analysis of large-scale cultural trends. It is widely acknowledged that the products and business techniques of multinational and transnational corporations and the internationalization of the cultural industries and media outputs produce pressures towards the diffusion of common cultural elements across the globe (eg Sklair, 2004). Whether this process is primarily one of Americanization, or something which is more of a cosmopolitan compound, is an interesting on-going associated controversy (Tenbruck 1990; de Grazia, 2005) However, it is almost equally widely recognized that local and national distinctions are not thereby eliminated (Appadurai, 1996; Jackson, 2004). At the very least, globalizing forces collide with established, historically entrenched and locally meaningful patterns of practice and taste. Novel or foreign elements are incorporated into existing arrangements, adapted to institutionalized patterns of consumption by both local populations and, consequently, local and international businesses. That McDonald's, a watchword for uniformity of product, provide different menus in different countries is the much quoted example of the inevitable necessity of adaptation to local conditions (Watson, 1998). In some instances local distinctiveness is defended through positive resistance or even the invention of new forms (e.g. respectively Fantasia, 1995; Miller, 1998). Hence it might be concluded that

those general formulations announcing the process as a local-global dialectic, or 'glocalisation', are basically accurate (Robertson, 1992). There are competing tendencies and counter-tendencies (for a concise balanced historical summary of tendencies for convergence and divergence see Trentmann, 2004).

This paper arises from a project which aimed to mobilise relevant evidence to verify claims about convergence and divergence of consumption behaviour between countries. Further progress in the understanding of these patterns probably now requires more subtle and more detailed accounts of how these processes operate in specific cases. Most attempts to date are case studies of how global trends are accommodated in a particular country. We adopt an alternative approach, comparing change in several countries simultaneously.

In order to do this with some degree of precision we examine a single practice, eating. We select a 'practice' as the unit of analysis as means of defining a unit for precise comparison but also for general theoretical reasons (see Warde, 2005). In brief, theories of practice start from distinctive presuppositions which explain not on the basis of individual decision making, as with rational action theory, nor on the basis of functioning systems, where the operation of the society or the organization accounts for the behaviour of its members. Instead, analysis begins from the shared understandings, know-how and standards of the practice, the internal differentiation of roles and positions within it, and with the consequences for people of being positioned relative to others when participating (see Reckwitz, 2002, for further

elaboration). Applied to cultural consumption, this entails exploring *inter alia* participation and commitment of different categories of people to particular practices.

When thinking about the globalization of consumption, practice around food is one where many would anticipate considerable effect. The transnational agri-food businesses and the span of supermarket operations bring similar foods to domestic kitchens everywhere, while the spread of 'ethnic cuisine', often through the catering industries, signifies the de-localization of both products and tastes. While American corporations lead in the globalization of production, the USA is arguably much less important as regards consumption and taste. True, fast food and McDonald's have had impacts world-wide, but there seems no rush to imitate other aspects of the food regimes of the USA. Overall, this is an area where we might expect the global-local dialectic to operate and be amenable to empirical investigation.

Western societies share in voicing popular concerns about changing food habits: recurrent themes include the decline of the family meal, the erosion of national culinary traditions, the growth of convenience and fast foods, the escalation of risk associated with food production and consumption, and the social misuse of an abundant food supply which is believed to guarantee sufficiency for all. The impression that all is flux arises partly because there are a vast number of component elements of the practice of eating each of which may change over time - for example ingredients, meal contents, companions, temporal organization and sources of labour. Academic wisdom

in the past has been that food habits and preferences are particularly resistant to change. Many studies assessing such propositions find that dominant notions of how household eating should be organized continue to provide the ground-rules for the majority of eating events in the majority of households (see Murcott, 1997; Anderson & Marshall, 2002; Grignon & Grignon, 1999; Kjaernes, 2001; Mestdag, 2005). Arguments for continuity are further enhanced when historians like Burnett (2004) reject the assumption that until recently more or less everyone ate at home with nuclear family members in formal meal settings consuming foods of predictable, nationally-specific content.

Adjudicating between general accounts is difficult because systematic comparison of change in routine food behaviour across countries is rare. Most studies of food habits refer to a single country, or a social group within a country. Consequently, contexts for analysis of change are primarily endogenous; the logic of development is found in a particular national economic and cultural history, with external forces contingently invoked only where necessary to account for current practice. The danger is that parochial explanation is generalized to other countries. The advantage of comparative analysis is that we can estimate whether trends and patterns are common to post-industrial societies or whether they are subject to local differentiation, thereby providing more discriminating and more systematic accounts of the complexities of change. However, there are few studies which compare more than two countries (exceptions include Rozin et al, 1999; Kjaernes, 2001; Kjaernes et al, 2007) and the data invariably refer to a single time point. We

contend that comparative method can helpfully get at the complexities of change but to do so requires a tightly defined and meaningful object of analysis for which we have an effective operational measure at different points in time. We find our object in the practice of eating, our measurement of change in the allocation of time to that practice.

For the purpose of estimating participation and commitment to a practice, time-use is an interesting measure. It is quantifiable and, while recognizing the variability of the experience of the passing of time, its units are directly comparable. Time-use studies have been conducted on more than one occasion in many countries and have proved useful to explore macro socio-economic change. They have, however, despite collecting data on many activities, aggregated them to broad categories. For example, attempts to explain the rise of consumer culture focus on changes of time allocated to paid work relative to leisure (Schor 1992); accounts of gender inequality focus on paid work relative to unpaid work (Gershuny 1992). Micro detail is of less importance than general tendencies for the arguments being made.

Nevertheless more specialized and focused analysis is possible (Sullivan 1997; Bittman and Wajcman 2000). As we will show, the practice of eating, with its different component elements, provides an ideal object for examining complexities in patterns of change through a more specific focus.¹

The pattern of time-use is a proxy for, or indicator of, a key dimension of social organization. Time-use reflects social interdependence because for many practical purposes interaction has to be coordinated spatio-temporally.

One of those purposes always has been eating; commensal events punctuate and structure the daily schedule and provide a focus for domestic organization (Bell & Valentine, 1997: 80-82; De Vault, 1991). Of course, time diary data does have limitations; it does not account for experiences of time nor the meanings attributed to the activities that it measures (Adam 1988; Paolucci 1993). However, for the purposes of this article we require time diary data to be no more than a comparatively crude instrument giving a broad brush map of the organization of daily life. Shifts in the distribution of time allocated to the components of the practice of eating since the 1970s are indicative of the changing ways in which food is provisioned and consumed, from which cultural meanings may be inferred. Shifting time allocation reveals changing social norms and suggests how socio-economic constraints might lead social groups to organize their practices differently. It is surprising, therefore, that time-use data has not hitherto been used much to understand the practice of eating (see Scholliers, 1993, as an exception).

Our basic orientation is to estimate the degree of homogenization in food habits. To test the homogenization thesis we conduct systematic comparative analysis of patterns of change in five countries - the USA and four in western Europe - examining primarily allocation of time to food provision and consumption in the last quarter of the 20th century to address three research questions. First, is there evidence of transnational trends with similar impacts? Second, are national differences between countries reducing as a consequence of homogenizing tendencies of a globalizing economy and consumer culture? Third, how important now are the social position and the

composition of households in structuring the provision of food, and is there a decline in differentiation and distinction within countries?

In pursuit of this objective, we marshal systematic evidence about three different component elements of the practice: meal preparation, eating at home and eating out. When seen in terms of the resources required to organize eating, these elements can be seen as interdependent and partially substitutable the one for the other. The practical arrangements surrounding eating, which vary from household to household and country to country, will be compared in order to analyze change. In the next section we describe our data sources and methods. In section 3 we examine changes in the average amounts of time devoted to the component elements of eating across countries. In section 4 we explore patterns of internal differentiation within countries. We follow this with a discussion of the implications of this evidence for our more general research questions. In line with the view that there is a global-local dialectic, we show that there are some strong common trends across countries but that impacts are not uniform, that change is temporally uneven and social differentiated, although socio-demographic patterns often remain stable.

2 Methods and data

Time-use surveys record the primary activities of respondents during time slots of specific duration (usually 10, 15 or 30 minutes duration) over 24 hours for two or more days. We compared results from time-use surveys for five

countries at two points in time, during the first half of the 1970s and around 2000. The data sets were compiled and harmonised by the Multinational Time Use Survey (MTUS) Archive at the University of Essex (see MTUS for technical details and Gershuny, 2000, for a comprehensive application). Comparability between countries is not perfectly systematic, since the surveys at the earlier dates were independently designed and conducted, resulting in variation in size of sample, activities recorded, the duration of time slots and batteries of independent variables selected to explore socio-demographic differences in behaviour.² Harmonisation requires compromises and detail is lost, though that may be judged acceptable for purposes of comparison.

The MTUS activity categories we examined were cooking and washing up, eating at home, and eating and drinking away from home. The third of these is less than perfect for our purposes, but there was no alternative than to aggregate eating and drinking because of significant differences in the way that these practices have been institutionalized in different countries.³ In addition, standardizing the surveys produced data which are strictly comparable only for that section of the population aged between 20 and 59. In this paper we report on the working age population, aged 20-59. For most, however, we also have data for the whole population over the age of 16. The general patterns displayed are not very different when we take into account the remaining age groups and where there are minor differences we note them. In addition, although eating at home is almost universal in the time periods measured by the surveys, the other two bundles of activity are practiced by only a proportion of the population. It is therefore reassuring to

find (using logistic regression analysis not reported in the paper) that, with respect to time allocation, the factors associated with spending more time on an activity are usually the same ones which determine whether a person ever participates in that activity.

We carried out regression analysis to examine the relationship between socio-demographic variables and the components of eating. In doing so we looked at the effect on the activity of each socio-demographic factor while taking into account all the others. We use regression techniques primarily in a descriptive manner to discriminate between different patterns of variation within countries, rather than for the purpose of causal analysis. Two types of regression analysis, multiple and logistic, are used in the paper. The choice between them depended upon the distributions of our response variables, the components of eating. Many individual respondents recorded zero time spent in eating out, which exaggerates one general feature of the data under analysis, a tendency for large deviation from means. Multiple regression analysis was used for eating at home and for cooking and washing up as most sample respondents spent time on these activities, especially the former. By contrast, a much lower participation rate was observed for eating and drinking away from home, hence a more skewed distribution. To overcome the non-symmetric distribution of time spent eating and drinking away from home, logistic regression was employed to estimate the impact of socio-demographic variables on the likelihood of spending any time, rather than the amount of time, eating out. This may be no loss to the analysis since, as we know, amount of time spent eating out is largely a function of the rituals or norms of

the different ways in which commercial food outlets are organized (Warde & Martens, 2000); people spend less time eating burgers than a three course meal, less time in a café than a restaurant. It is therefore inevitably difficult to determine whether time spent is more a function of how often one eats out, or where one eats. However, an earlier closer examination of the British case showed a marked polarisation between 1975 and 2000 between brief episodes, presumably involving consumption of 'fast food', and ones of longer duration (see Cheng et al, 2007).

In order to take account of over-sampling of specific sub-groups and non-response, we used weights computed by the Multinational Time Use Survey (MTUS) and the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to correct for the distributions of sex and age and to bring the sample in line with the national population. In addition, these weights adjust for seasonal and daily variations in the pattern of time use. Descriptive statistics of mean minutes spent in the components of the practice of eating were calculated in order to provide a broad overview of trends in food provision and consumption. OLS multiple regression analysis was then employed to analyse the socio-demographic basis of the amount of time devoted to eating at home and food preparation. The same set of explanatory variables was also used in logistic regression analysis to estimate the probability that a respondent ever ate out. For the purpose of comparison demographic variables were limited to those contained in the less comprehensive datasets of the 1970s: employment status, gender, age, educational qualifications, household composition and marital status. Other variables such as income and occupational group were not recoverable.

Regression equations are particularly useful for estimating the relative importance of socio-demographic characteristics for the allocation of time; they can, for instance, identify whether changes in minutes devoted to an activity are associated with, say, gendered behaviour or changes in employment status while controlling for other variables. We use this to describe changes within countries and make comparison of these changes across countries.

3 Eating at home, eating out and food preparation: national profiles

Table 1 reports the mean amount of time spent by respondents aged between 20 and 59 in five countries in the 1970s and at the turn of the century. It also identifies the rate of participation recorded in each instance.⁴ We see both common tendencies and some differences.

Almost everyone spent some time eating at home, though the proportions recorded for Norway in 2000 and USA in 1975 are exceptions. Everywhere except France, the amount of time spent has, on average, reduced. People in France were eating at home for longer than those in the other countries in the 1970s and, since the amount of time remained constant (at just over one and a half hours), were spending much more time than the others by 1998.

Reduction of time was less in the Netherlands than for the rest of Europe, to a little over an hour in 1995, while the Norwegians and the British were spending less than an hour and the Americans less than three quarters of an hour. It is clear that domestic meals were already taking much less time in the

USA in 1975 than in Europe, and that the amount of time reduced further in the subsequent decades. Time allocated to domestic food consumption is minimal in USA.⁵

Time devoted to cooking reduced in all five countries. The decline is most marked in Norway and France (32 and 22 minutes respectively). It dropped between 6 and 10 minutes in the other three countries. These changes indicate a powerful convergence effect in Europe: the average household at the turn of the century in France, UK, Netherlands and Norway devoted between 47 and 51 minutes per day to food preparation. While the mean hides variation by household type, it nevertheless suggests that the elements of the domestic food provisioning process have grown similar. There is an institutionalisation process occurring throughout Europe which we might presume to have common sources – supermarketization, provision of part prepared convenience foods, new kitchen technologies, etc.. For example, a Mintel Report (2005) shows that although Britons use ready meals more frequently than the French the penetration of such items in the population is similar (72 per cent and 67 per cent respectively in the last 12 months) and attitudes to cooking and convenience are also very similar.⁶ The amount of time spent in Europe at the end of the 1990s was about the same as in USA in 1975. Twenty years later Americans were spending a further 10 minutes fewer in food preparation. In addition, fewer people were involved in cooking in America, a trend also apparent in France; though the other three European countries all saw a significant increase in participation, indicating most

obviously some shift in the gendered pattern of the division of domestic labour as more men became involved.

Cooking is one instance where we might imagine the USA to be the forerunner of the future of Europe because it was first to adopt modern domestic technologies (Freeman, 2004). However, inspection of the ratios of time spent in cooking and time spent in eating at home (between which activities we know there to be fairly robust correlations at any one point in time) do not show the same trends between countries. The amount of time spent eating at home falls faster than the amount of time spent cooking in the UK and in the USA (between 1975 and 1985). Eating at home falls slightly less quickly than time in food preparation in Netherlands and Norway; that is to say the balance shifts slightly towards more time in the pleasures of consumption and less in work. But the small differences in rates of change mask the distinctive distribution of the Netherlands where many more minutes are spent eating than cooking. Indeed the Dutch ate for longer and cooked less in both years, a pattern which characterized France in 1974 and also the UK in 1975.

Everywhere the amount of time spent eating and drinking away from home had increased. The French and the Americans now spend most time on eating out, on average half an hour a day. Britons were not far behind. Norwegians and the Dutch spent far less time, a result of much less developed habits of public eating (see, respectively, Holm, 2001; and van Eijck and Bargemann, 2004). Americans were, by 1998, spending almost as

much time eating out as they were eating at home. In none of the European countries was this repeated. Britons, the nearest rivals, spent more than twice as much time eating at home, the French and Norwegians three times as much, the Dutch some ten times more.

The pattern overall suggests that eating and food preparation takes up considerably less time in the USA than in Europe. Whether this is a harbinger for the future of Europe is uncertain; with the exception of France, all the other countries are clearly moving towards a smaller allocation of time to food-related activities. France exhibits, in line with national stereotypes, the greatest dedication to food provision and consumption, with eating and drinking, uniquely, taking up more time at the end of the century than it had in 1974. This must be some mark of the persistence of a distinctive culinary culture, despite much national hand-wringing about loss of valued traditions (see Fantasia, 1995; Poulain, 2002b). After France, Britain by 2000 was devoting the most time to eating and drinking, perhaps some further indication of an emergent interest in the aesthetic aspects of food. There are, then, some common trends. The increase in time devoted to eating out is universal. Also apparent everywhere is a significant decline in time spent cooking. With the exception of France, time spent eating at home has reduced. The practice of eating is one which seems to have some common rhythms across the western world. Nevertheless, the remaining differences are substantial, evidence both of different histories of the arrangements for food provision and consumption, what we will call the localized institutionalisation of

consumption. A similar conclusion might be drawn from considering in more detail differences in behaviour within national populations.

4 Time spent by whom?

This section reports on regression equations, country by country and at various dates in the last three decades of the 20th century, which account for the amount of time allocated to the same three activities which comprise the main elements necessary to an understanding of the practice of eating – eating at home, food preparation and eating out. It provides a foil to the broad comparisons of the previous section which cannot but conceal differentiation within countries.

Eating at home

Table 2 examines which of a number of independent socio-demographic variables are associated with length of time spent eating at home. The data is presented in abbreviated form, showing the strength and direction of the effects of the independent variables on time-use in the five countries.⁷ This enables us to explore the social forces determining the amount of time spent eating at home, country by country, isolating tendencies for change over time, and comparing structural features and trajectories across countries.

Domestic food consumption in France exhibits the most intricately structured pattern of all countries. Being in full or part-time employment, not being a

member of a couple, and having had advanced education all reduced time spent eating at home in both 1974 and 1998. Being female and having secondary education also reduced time spent in 1974, but not in 1998. Being older and having at least one child at home increased time devoted to domestic food events, the statistical significance of both being greater at the later date. The power of the explanation is not great, though there is a marginal increase with the passage of time. Overall, this suggests stability in the forces behind the performance of family meals; the differences between the two dates are small. Practical considerations might explain many of the effects – people in employment have less time at home, and therefore less opportunity for eating there, while those with children face typical practical constraints about finding alternative sources of meals. There is, however, no reason to interpret the effect of education as essentially practical and it uniquely, perhaps, gives some indication of taste and preference, which reduces domestic involvement.

The other countries exhibit rather similar patterns, often rather more strongly, in the sense that more variation is explained in Britain and especially the Netherlands. The pattern in the UK is not complex and is fairly stable. The main change was that those with higher education reduced relatively their time spent, as did those living outside a nuclear family. Employment status and marital status are the most significant factors in 2000, much like the USA. The USA also shows little change, and is distinctive only in the weak social determination of patterns of behaviour and in the fact that the regression equation explains less of the variance at the later date.⁸ Eating at home is not

a highly differentiated activity in UK or USA. The Netherlands exhibit patterns which are very similar to those of Norway, both of which differ from Britain and America primarily in the importance of children in predicting more time spent in domestic eating. They share this feature with France, suggesting something of a more familial basis to domestic provisioning on mainland Europe than in UK or the USA. In neither northern European country is there much change over time. Both display fairly homogeneous cultures, insofar as neither education nor age makes a difference to arrangements, although it is noticeable that the distinctive behaviour in the 1970s of older adults of working age disappears by 2000. If, however, we look in addition at the behaviour of persons of all ages 16 and above, we find that ageing only matters in the other three countries, suggesting that the key to variation within Norwegian and Dutch households is the presence or absence of children, rather than age *per se*. By contrast, in UK and USA it is only age that matters, while in France both age and children make a difference.

In sum, we can say that there is little change in these the broadest structural parameters of household arrangements for eating the later years of the 20th century. (We have of course already noted that the absolute amount of time devoted to such activities has decreased everywhere except France.) Marital status and being in employment matter everywhere at all dates, but otherwise there are no shared patterns. There is no sense in which the data suggest convergence over time upon any particular new pattern, though there may be some tendency recently for more time to be spent in eating in households with children in mainland Europe, perhaps itself a reaction to fears about the

decline of family meals. The influence of children on behaviour is probably the key feature distinguishing our countries, with a separation between the European mainland and the USA and UK. The significance of marital status suggests, however, that the family meal at home in nuclear family households still has a strong presence in the other countries too (see Murcott (1997) for a persuasive review of evidence showing the persistence of the family meal; and Mestdag (2005)).

Food preparation

Table 3 shows socio-demographic determinants of time spent in food preparation at home - in cooking, washing up, etc.. Though not itself an act of eating, it is a work task integral to the practice of eating at home which exhibits a close and interpretable relationship with domestic eating.⁹ Let us begin once more with the French case. There is almost no change between 1974 and 1998. Above all, women cook most at both dates. So do older adults, those who live in couples and those with fewest educational qualifications. Being in employment reduces the time spent. This equation is almost perfectly parallel to that for eating at home; the same factors affect both activities. The strength of the model, however, is weaker at the later date, as indeed it is in all other countries, though reductions are in general not dramatic.

The other countries show very similar patterns to France. Cooking is everywhere highly structured. The base case for employment status is those

who are 'inactive' and who are therefore likely to be housewives, explaining perhaps their tendency to spend most time in food preparation activities. The main identifiable trends, which are in any case weak, are for those with tertiary education to begin to spend less time in food preparation, a fact which might indicate a more rapid rate of adaptation of modern part-prepared foods, for as Table 2 showed, except in France, they did not eat less at home. However, it might also reflect a greater tendency to eat out, commensurate with either higher salaries or a pursuit of distinction. Having children in the household also increases time spent in preparation, again possible evidence of parents taking particular notice of advice about the health (and moral) benefits of a freshly prepared family meal. (Again, we should not forget that the amount of time spent on average in cooking has fallen sharply in all the countries, including France).

The parallels in the patterns regarding eating at home and cooking are rather less apparent in countries other than France. In the Netherlands, the old spend proportionately more time cooking than eating, while the reverse is true for those with degrees. The USA is perhaps most distinctive with determinants of cooking time much reduced in range and strength by 1998. This might be thought to reflect an increasingly homogenized regime of domestic food provisioning, with both employment conditions and single person status becoming less powerful differentiating factors. Once time spent on cooking decreases beyond a certain level it might be imagined that the majority of people are using the same time-saving strategies and the same convenience foods regardless of their other practical and material circumstances. With the

exception of the universal habit of allocating most cooking to women, other principles for distribution of domestic labour are eroding. It should be noted that while everywhere hugely disproportionate amounts of time are invested by women, the magnitude of the difference is gradually reducing.

Eating out

The growth in time spent eating and drinking away from home is uneven and is less easy to interpret. Spending more time cooking is generally looked upon as a sacrifice of labour, as work; and more time spent working is considered onerous. Saving time is positive. That is not necessarily so with eating out. Spending more time may mean more occasions, or it may mean a different rhythm or meaning to the event; the difference between hurriedly grabbing a sandwich and having a relaxed dinner in a restaurant. Burnett (2004:320) suggests that in England at least eating away from home is probably no more prevalent now than at any time since the Victorian period; rather what has altered is the character of the event, it now being impelled by pleasure rather than necessity. We can, I think, assume that since British people mostly get enormous pleasure and satisfaction from eating out (Warde & Martens, 2000:171ff.), that the more time they spend, in general, the more they will be pleased.¹⁰ It is thus worthwhile examining time use patterns.

Consider Table 4 which reports a logistic regression analysis predicting whether a respondent will have eaten or drunk away from home in the reference period. It is much less easy to explain the variations in the decision

whether to eat out than in the other two activities. This might be because of the heterogeneity of the forms of activity recorded in the time-use surveys. Also, eating out has mixed meanings including convenience, entertainment (for it includes drinking) and distinction, and time-use measures cannot discriminate between them. Clearly the practicalities of household organisation are not very decisive in determining whether people eat out. The pattern in France is the most strongly differentiated. Not living as a couple, being in full-time employment and having more education increase the likelihood of eating out, while having children or being a woman reduces the likelihood. There is some correspondence between patterns of eating at home and patterns of eating out. Those groups who are likely to eat out spend least time eating at home. The pattern has changed little since 1974.

The pattern for France in 1998 is very similar to that in Britain at the same point in time, though there is more evidence of change in British behaviour. Education was not significant in Britain in 1975, nor was employment status. This might suggest that France in 1974 had a more integrated or coherent system of food provisioning than Britain, or indeed than any of the other countries, for the determinants of eating out were more or less a mirror image of eating at home. Britain, became more like France in the last quarter of the 20th century. Having children remained a powerful factor influencing eating out, but the greater involvement of those with a degree and those in paid work were emergent features.

In the United States the pattern of eating out became less homogeneous between 1975 and 1985. Americans eat out regardless of age or whether they have children. Women eat out less than men; singles eat out more. The decision to eat out became related to educational experience in the decade to 1985. It would seem that eating out is a very heterogeneous activity in the USA; Stewart et al (2005) report that by 2002 approximately the same amount of money was being spent in fast food as in full-service restaurants, with their contrary implications for time use.

In both Netherlands and Norway, eating out was not much developed in the 1970s (see also, respectively, van Eijck and Bargemann, 2004; Amelien, 2003). The average amount of time spent was negligible in both countries (Table 1). De la Bruheze and van Otterloo (2003) explain the slow development of eating out for pleasure in the Netherlands as resulting from three factors, the predominant Dutch meal pattern which involves just one hot meal per day which is taken at home in the evening, an instrumental attitude to food, and a popular habit developed in the 1950s of taking quick, simple snacks when eating away from home. Norway has a similar meal pattern, with food in the middle of the day likely to be a sandwich (the 'matpak') prepared at home and taken to school or work (Kjaernes, 2001). These countries have less institutional space for elaborate eating out. There was no pattern to participation in the Netherlands in 1975, and emergent differentiation thereafter remained weak. Gender did not matter in any year, but presence of children began to have some impact. The pattern in Norway shows scarcely any internal differentiation, another instance of the cultural homogeneity of the

population and its common forms of experience and engagement in consumption.

Overall, with the exception of Norway, there is a pattern for Europe which indicates increasing importance of education – suggesting that eating out at leisure is increasingly a practice acting as a marker of taste or distinction (see Bourdieu, 1984). Also, in Europe, having children reduces eating out. There are certainly some strong similarities between France and Britain and the Netherlands, with the impression being given that French behaviour might be being imitated. France itself remains very stable in all aspects of eating practice. As in the Netherlands and Britain, there is a slight tendency for those in full-time work to eat out more.

5 Discussion

Social differentiation

In the past, the main issue for most people was whether they had enough to eat. However, for a majority in the West, satisfaction with eating habits is now probably more closely tied to its quality and the manner of its delivery and provision. There are many options, not necessarily mutually exclusive, in how to get fed. Alternatives include different combinations of time spent in cooking, eating at home and eating out.

The extent to which different options are taken can be inferred from analysis of differentiation in behaviour within populations. Social position (belonging to social categories of age, sex, gender, etc) is not equally determinant of participation and frequency across the various activities. Sometimes having children matters, sometimes not; sometimes gender matters; and occasionally so do economic circumstances. This shows continued striation and structuration of everyday life as a function of social position. However, socio-demographic characteristics of household members are becoming less significant in influencing the allocation of time to the practices associated with eating. In most cases, according to our regression equations, the extent to which socio-demographic characteristics could account for variation in behaviour diminished during the last decades of the 20th century. Differences of condition, of being unemployed or retired, or of belonging to a different social class, had lesser impact.

The temporal organization of food provisioning and consumption is generally more subject to practical constraints of life-course and employment than to symbolic aspects of life-style. Most obvious perhaps is the ubiquity and persistence of gender divisions in the area of food preparation and consumption, a fact not amenable to interpretation as a matter of elective lifestyle. Women, in every country, at each of our survey points, cook much more and eat out less.

Nevertheless, evidence corroborates Gershuny's (1992; 2000) general thesis of lagged adaptation to account for trends in patterns of allocation of time-use

by men and women. For while gender divisions have not disappeared, most especially with respect to cooking, domestic food practice is becoming more similar for women and men, and for households of different types than it was in the 1970s. There is a tendency towards homogenization emphasized by the fact that there are few exceptions to the tendency for convergence by gender. Men are cooking more, women a great deal less; and women are now spending almost as much time as men in eating.

Evidence of distinction persists. Admittedly, our indicators of potential bases for differential taste in the time-use data set are not optimal. Educational level, which might stand as a proxy for cultural capital, income or social class – and perhaps for different ones of these in different countries – is our best indicator. It plays little role in differentiating domestic practices, but becomes significant with respect to eating out. The educated middle class seems to be becoming relatively more engaged in eating out for pleasure.¹¹

Patterns of eating out are volatile, with new routines probably still being forged in most of the countries. Commodification plays an important role in domestic organisation, but it plays a distinct role in relation to service industry provision. Eating out for pleasure is a relatively new practice, one which in most countries is still in flux. Although there is a tendency for eating out to increase everywhere, we see more variation between countries in the strength and structure of internal differentiation. Norway is the most homogeneous of societies with respect to eating at home and eating out. The USA is also fairly homogeneous with respect to domestic practice and there is no strong

evidence of its rapid imitation within Europe. It must be wondered whether Europe, where there is much more differentiation and still significantly more time devoted to cooking, will resist reduction of cooking to American levels. Also, it remains to be seen whether France will continue to devote so much time to domestic eating. Nevertheless, our evidence gives some understanding of the bases of why eating in France is so different from eating in the USA.

France provides an instructive case of the general point that countries differ in their institutional arrangements. Many factors contribute to its distinctiveness. Though far from universally observed (Poulain, 2002a), the norm of the three course meal keeps average time spent eating at a higher level than elsewhere. A strong gastronomic tradition puts special value on food (Ferguson, 1998; Mennell, 1985). A supply system which still relies on much self-provisioning of raw materials signifies lower levels of commodification (Grignon and Grignon, 1999). In addition, government implements policies to preserve a culinary heritage and educate children into it (Fantasia, 1995). The local arm of the global-local dialectic asserts itself in the French case, as in the other cases, through distinctive modes of institutionalisation of consumption.

Transnational trends: similarity and diversity

It is hard to estimate the influence of the USA upon Europe, or their mutual relationship, in part because of limitations in our data. However, there is some

ground for speculating that the processes of transformation that are currently manifest in France, Norway, Netherlands and UK occurred at an earlier period in the USA. One key indicator is that much less time is spent cooking in the USA, and a smaller proportion of the population are involved. It thus looks as if the impact of convenience food and eating out cheaply occurred sooner. Another indication is that expenditure on eating out has reached a plateau, proportions of income devoted to eating out fell 1980-97 according to Schmitt's (n.d/2004) evidence.¹² This suggests that it has become a much more routine activity, and more subject than elsewhere to industrialized mass production (Levenstein, 1993; Stewart et al, 2005). It is unclear whether one should expect Europe to follow in this regard.

Strong trends in change across time are visible. Some suggest convergence, for example the time spent cooking in Europe. But there is not a general convergence, in the sense of all countries becoming more alike. For example, the status of the different component parts of eating does not appear to be the same. In Britain eating out appears to have high esteem, but not so food in general. Whereas in France, in line with its stereotype, both eating at home and eating out command respect, with a large proportion of time and household budgets devoted to food and eating, and with the rich being relatively very lavish. Norway, by contrast, despite being the richest of countries, still mostly eats at home, and there is very little apparent social kudos to eating out. Indeed it seems to exhibit its more general political egalitarianism rather clearly in its food consumption habits.¹³ Most changes seem to occur in parallel across the nations – decrease in time spent eating at

home and increase in expenditure on eating out, for instance. But countries have different starting points. The predominant impression is thus one of parallel and lagged development, tempered, as most obviously in the case of France, by path-dependency.

Most telling, however, is the almost total lack of evidence of systematic *divergence* in practices. Therefore, although we cannot strongly confirm a trend to convergence, we can dismiss ideas of divergence. The forces operating to restrain variation are currently strong and include: the unification of Europe in the EU; the American demonstration effect; mass media communication about food; mass migration with more easily sustained connections for migrants back to their country of origin; mass transportation and travel; the diffusion of mass-produced domestic technologies; even the availability of greater variety of foods which reduce constraints upon time requirements for food preparation and eating. Our study cannot discriminate among these forces for global and regional convergence. However it seems likely that the universal reduction in cooking time might be explained by the common spread of domestic technologies and the manufacture of convenience foods – as well as being influenced by changing rates of female labour market participation and flexible working hours which affect the domestic division of labour.

If, in general, rates of social change tend to be exaggerated, there is nevertheless much movement in the field of eating. None of the culinary cultures examined have proved stable over the last thirty years. It would

probably be hard to say that some have altered more than others – though France, the Netherlands and perhaps the USA would be the major candidates for having preserved their ways of eating. Patterns around domestic activities are rather similar, with more differences apparent around eating out, suggesting that new waves of commodification produce more uneven and differentiated patterns of behaviour.

6 Conclusion

We have managed to isolate patterns of change within and between countries at a relatively high level of generality. We cannot use our data to explain *why* national differences exist and persist because they capture only the broad parameters of changing practice. However, we can suggest a number of powerful forces which produce and maintain national variation. As Kjaernes et al (2007) demonstrate, the countries of Europe manifest different institutional configurations in the field of food with markedly different articulations between provisioning, regulation and consumption. The commercial chain of food provision is organized differently, with important variation arising from openness to global market forces and degree of concentration and power of retailers relative to farmers and manufacturers. Despite the growth of law at the international and European levels, distinct national modes of regulation and implementation pertain (see Halkier and Holm, 2006). Furthermore, specific and aggregate differences of household constitution, organisation and activity underpin variations in practice. Differences within these three elements is magnified enormously when configured together, such that

measured variation in individual behaviour is attributable in much greater part to country of residence than to socio-demographic characteristics. The task, in other words, is to analyze in detail how consumption is institutionalized differently by country.

Our evidence suggests that social habits, routines and conventions provide a source of general resistance to rapid change. Contrary to some recent accounts, social and group positioning is not yet defunct as a structuring principle of personal and collective experience in the food domain.

Consumption is institutionalized differently between groups as well as between countries. The socio-demographic pattern is mostly stable with regard to domestic activity, though the strength of differences reduces for food preparation. Despite a predominant decline in overall time used on food practices (and, in accordance with Engel's Law, there is also a decline in expenditure on food too), socially differentiating factors remain in operation in most countries. Internal differences are not the same from country to country; but social differentiation is being restructured. This has been demonstrated, despite our data sources lacking sufficient indicators of household structure or social class.

We would not anticipate, on the basis of this study, that there are many simple sources of cultural homogenisation. There are, of course, some strong common trends which include greater commodification (especially through eating out), a commensurate reduction of time and money spent on eating at home, and diminishing time allocated to preparation of food. But there are

also significant differences between countries which are readily apparent: distinction around eating out occurs in France and Britain, but not Netherlands and Norway; extensive domestic eating survives more in France and the Netherlands than in USA and UK. In general, national differences matter.

The trends and counter-tendencies isolated in this one field are not alone grounds for rejecting the thesis of global homogenisation, but they do reveal complex localized processes of development. Eating, in fact, exhibits a more internationally similar pattern of time-use than almost any other practice. Besides food preparation and eating out, only shopping and participating in sport, among approximately twenty other non-work activities recorded by MTUS, showed the same trends in the mean quantum of time allocated across the five countries (see Warde et al, 2005). A comparable examination of reading in these five countries showed much more unevenness in national trends and socio-demographic bases of behaviour (see Southerton et al, forthcoming). Eating, thus, is a case more amenable than most to an interpretation in terms of globalization. Yet the evidence is at least as favorable to the argument that consumption is institutionalized on a national basis, with considerable internal differentiation in the ways that practices are organized.

Looking at the component elements of practices separately has shown that different social factors appear to determine the conduct of each. There is some indication of de-differentiation, but equally evidence of the re-structuring of practices. Practices are variously organized, with people in different social

positions participating in different kinds of ways, deploying their time, and indeed their money, in accordance with localized social conventions, styles and taste. A comprehensive study of the practice of eating would probably rely primarily on findings deriving from qualitative and ethnographic inquiries, which would in turn reveal much greater differentiation than does a generic investigation into the allocation of time across populations. Our study provides not only a context but also a rationale for further study of localized practices. Cultural convergence across the West is not, at least as yet, a dominant tendency.

Endnotes

¹ Eating (and the activities of eating at home, eating at the home of others, the range of commercial establishments in which one can eat, and food preparation) are among the very few activities recorded consistently across surveys, both with respect to different historical times and different countries.

² Gershuny (2000) makes a robust defence of time diary data, demonstrating that it is as reliable as other survey data, and that under or over-reporting and non-response rates are not significantly biased against particular social groups. Furthermore, when time use surveys administered in the same year and country employed different sizes of time slot were compared, the number of minutes allocated to activities were remarkably consistent. An additional general concern is that, although secondary activities are recorded in some surveys, many of the early surveys collected data only about primary activities. The classic example is child-care, where men are assumed to record child-care as a primary activity, whereas women are more likely to

record it as a secondary activity (for example, caring for children while shopping or cooking dinner). However, the practice of eating is less susceptible to this problem of reliability because it is largely recorded as a primary activity (the main exception is snacking while reading or watching television).

³ Unavoidably, we combined MTUS categories AV27 and AV28. Also note, MTUS measures exclude eating at work, the normal practice of which takes substantively different forms across the five countries.

⁴ It should be noted that interpretation of the latter measure is made difficult by the somewhat different ways of recording time-use in national surveys.

⁵ Of course, we recognise that this comparison ignores the fact that in many households only one person will prepare the food but two or more may eat it.

⁶ In response to the statement 'I don't really have time to spend preparing and cooking food' 19 per cent of the French and 18 per cent of the English agreed, and 46 per cent of respondents in each country agreed that 'I am prepared to pay more for products that make life easier'. The big differences between the populations were in answers to questions about fast food, frozen foods and take away meals, to each of which at least 50 per cent more French than British respondents were hostile (Mintel, 2005: 10).

⁷ Space constraints, but also ease of interpretation, dissuade us from giving the evidence in detail. The full regression equations can be obtained from the authors upon request.

⁸ The US data for 1998 is unusable because it originally included all eating under the same code, making it impossible to distinguish eating in from eating out.

⁹ The general connection between eating and cooking also helps us compensate for the absence of data on eating at home in the USA in 1998.

¹⁰ But we should not therefore assume that it is in the economists' terms a luxury good (see Blow et al, 2004).

¹¹ Because the symbolic significance of eating out is not ideally captured by measures of time use, it is interesting to see the apparent effects of distinction operating through expenditure. The most affluent sections of the population spend very disproportionately more than the poor on eating out, especially in Britain and France.

¹² However, according to his evidence also, it would seem that US Expenditure Surveys produce a much lower estimate of the value of the catering industry than do the national industrial accounts.

¹³ This effect is probably facilitated by the dominant meal pattern. In countries of northern Europe many eat in the workplace, but time spent eating lunch in particular is not included in estimations of eating out. (Meal breaks during working time are recorded as work rather than in the category of eating out.) National eating patterns are strongly differentiated by the conventions in operation surrounding meals in the middle of the day during the working week (see Kjaernes, 2001).

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Biographical details

Alan Warde, Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on Innovation and Competition (CRIC). Research interests include the sociology of consumption, the sociology of food and eating and methodologies of the social sciences. Address: School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK. E-mail: alan.warde@manchester.ac.uk

Shu-Li Cheng, Research Associate, Manchester Institute of Innovation Research (MIoIR), University of Manchester. Research interests include quantitative methods, particularly application to large-scale comparative datasets and consumption theory in relation to time use and monetary

expenditure. Address: MIOIR, Harold Hankins Building, University of Manchester, M13 9PQ. E-mail: shu-li.cheng@manchester.ac.uk

Wendy Olsen works as a Lecturer in Socio-Economic Research at the Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR), University of Manchester. Her research interests focus on labour relations, transdisciplinarity, and methodological pluralism. Address: CCSR, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK. E-mail: wendy.olsen@manchester.ac.uk

Dale Southerton is a Lecturer in Sociology and The Morgan Centre for the Study of Relationships and Personal Life at the University of Manchester. His main research interests centre around the sociologies of consumption and time, with particular focus on the relationship between the temporal organisation of practices, social networks, and theories of social, economic and cultural change. Address: School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK. E-mail: dale.southerton@manchester.ac.uk