

## MICHIGAN FOOD AND PLACE: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the diversity and versatility of food or food-related activities connections with territorial development, building our reflexion from empirical situations drawn from the context of a North American state: Michigan. The first part of the paper outlines the diversity of “food and place” configurations which may be observed in different areas within Michigan State. This boils down to a tentative typology of food and place linkages. The final section deals with the potential of widening comparative studies focused on the territorial roles of agriculture and food and their externalities towards culture and social identity.

*Material and methods.* In the frame of an international exchange (USA / France) on Ecology culture and politics of food, U.S. faculty and students visited and analyzed French local and regional initiatives in developing and supporting regional and origin-labelled products. During a visit of French researchers to Michigan, field visits were organized to a number of localities where the relation between food and place is currently object of private initiatives or local public policies. Interviews were then conducted with farmers, processors, restaurateurs, tourism operators, local governments, community leaders and business support agencies. Although the initiatives analyzed cannot pretend to be representative of all territorial development stakes in Michigan, they do represent a significant array of diverse viewpoints and offer an opportunity to better understand this diversity.

*Results.* The following empirical situations were highlighted –each representing one possible axis for the development of Food and Place linkages and connections:

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- In the Detroit metropolis, birthplace of the Ford car company, “Greenfield village” open air museum was created to host a collection of original or replicated workshops, buildings and garages celebrating American inventors. Plans are made for a “Greenfield village” brand for American food and processed products. This is representative of a more general trend for *using brand names for food that include a geographical localizer and sell authenticity values as a marketing strategy, but have no link to place.*
- Hart County is a famous fruit-growing and industrial processing area near Lake Michigan. Cherry and asparagus productions are complementary in terms of climate and labour requirements and have established a local productive system which was almost exclusively directed to industrial processing in regional units. But very recently, NAFTA free-trade agreement caused Michigan canned asparagus to lose its market share to imports from Peru and Chile. A key question for the industry now is, whether and how “place” be activated, in order to differentiate the product and develop new competitive attributes, such as: freshness, bio-safety, locally produced or organoleptic quality. The trend, here is to *build local assets and a specialty status for this threatened commodity, in the context of globalized markets.*
- Grand Traverse area enjoys a warm lakeside climate and hilly landscape. It has become one of America’s top spots for high-income retirements. Simultaneously (as a consequence or as a cause?), vineyards and specialty food outlets have developed quickly. Significant extension and regulatory support is received from the state and local governments. A new regional economy may be emerging around a bundle of goods and services linked to “terroir” and agro tourism. Some collective initiatives are appearing, such as wine routes, agro-food villages and farmers’ markets. The question here is, *whether this growing array of individual initiatives for quality production, processing and hospitality services will be achieve its potential for clustering and produce a sustainable impact on the regional territorial development.*
- Finally, Presque Isle area, in Michigan's Lower Peninsula, is a flat, poorer, colder and less populated area. Extracting activities have traditionally been dominant: from wood logging to mining, while also training many sailors for navigation on the Great Lakes waterways. As both mining and navigation employments have declined drastically,

this working-class identity is undergoing a crisis. One key currently used to put together a new identity and a new project for the future, is the *rediscovering of the rural identity of the region*. Forests, fishing, snow and harsh winters may be the basis to stimulate the “sense of place”, bringing together the community and attracting new economic and service activities into the area.

### *Discussion*

These contrasted local situations point out a very acute presence of local stakes to a diversity of mechanisms to link food and place, in a context of globalisation and competition. These connections vary according to the local history and social and economic capital, but depend also on the stakeholders’ projects and their support by private initiatives and public policies.

Conclusions will be drawn on three levels: i/ the meaning of these food and place links for each territory; ii/ the global meaning of these experiences at Michigan State level; and iii/ the coexistence of these territorialized dynamics with the commoditized agricultural economy.