

History of consumerism and food

Consumption is a mirror of the human condition. Our understanding of how people consume has always contained a normative element, reflecting our views about how people ought to live. Reflecting on consumption can thus tell us a great deal about a society's *Weltanschauung* – or worldview. While this insight was late to take root among historians, the history of consumption, and especially the history of food consumption, is now a vibrant area of academic research. As your thesis supervisor, I will introduce you to this new and compelling field of research, while spotlighting comparative and transnational perspectives. Please be aware that I can only supervise you in English.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

Taco loco: Why Norwegians love 'Mexican' food

Friday night is taco night in Norway – indeed, *Tacofredag* is a veritable national institution, with nearly 10% of Norwegians consuming tacos every single Friday night. While surveys in various Western countries typically find 'Italian food' to be the most popular ethnic cuisine, Norway seems to buck this trend with its devotion to Mexican food.

How can we explain the rise of Mexican food in Norway? What were the wider economic, political and cultural forces that drove it, and what are its consequences? In this connection, is the Norwegian taco genuinely Mexican, or should it be regarded as a variant of 'Tex-Mex' that was imported from the United States? Insofar as this is true, is the *fredagstaco* perhaps an artifact of US cultural imperialism? In this way, analyzing Norwegian 'foodways' may help us to better understand larger issues, including Europe's ambivalent relationship to the US in the 20th century, and anti-Americanism as a reaction to feelings of angst triggered by modernity. Indeed, the consumption of tacos in Norway may tell us a great deal about modernity. Unlike frozen pizza, which was designed for young urban singles to consume alone in front of the TV, the Norwegian taco is eaten first and foremost in the company of family and friends. In this way, is there evidence to suggest that the buffet serving style of the Mexican taco, adapted to the Norwegian context, is a coping mechanism for modernity's alienation and isolation of the individual?

Introductory reading:

Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food*, 2017.

Margaret Hayford O'Leary, *Culture and Customs of Norway*, 2010.

How the pizza came to Norway: The global travels of an ethnic cuisine

The rapid Italianization of our daily lives is probably one of the few phenomena of globalization that has been widely cherished in Western societies. Unlike American fast food, which is usually seen as contributing to the 'McDonaldization' of the world, and thus to cultural homogenization under American auspices, Italian food seems to signify cultural enrichment and a resurrection of older traditions surrounding food.

How exactly this process of cross-cultural fertilization played out in various countries is still rather unknown. Taking the case of Norway, and specifically Oslo, Master's students will have a chance to delve deeply into transnational and global history, yet at the same time remain grounded in their own national experience. MA students might choose to explore how the frozen pizza was introduced to the Norwegian market, including in particular how it was advertised and thus placed in relation to broader cultural frameworks. Was it presented as a 'national' product or as a 'foreign' import? In general, what do the production, advertisement, and consumption of products labeled 'original Italian pizza' tell us about Norwegian identity and its transformation over the course of the 20th century? Another possible topic might be to examine the emergence of Italian restaurants in Oslo. Were pizzerias and trattorias whole-heartedly embraced by the local population as places where one could live the *dolce vita*? Or did this process of acculturation also provoke discontent and even resistance to a culture decried as foreign? One should keep in mind here that for centuries the peoples of the Mediterranean have been discredited as backward, lazy and criminal; Italians have long been associated with the Mafia and corruption. Thus, in what ways did these stereotypes play out on a micro-level in Oslo when Italian natives opened up a neighborhood pizzeria? Such a study promises to improve our understanding of multiculturalism and more recent manifestations of resentment against immigrants.

Introductory reading:

Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari, *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *The Oxford Handbook of Food History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).