

Hash, Fish, and Fresh: Food Lifestyles and Strategic Uses of Space in a Paris Neighborhood

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Everyday life is often neglected as a sociological question. Yet, it allows to appraise class differences, and to interweave grounded, empirical description with mechanism-based theorizing. This paper focuses on two key dimensions of everyday life: eating and moving – in other words, food and mobility.

The chosen context is the Paris metropolis. Its structural singularities lie in a twofold, categorical class structure: safety of living (precariousness vs. stability) and standard of living (working classes vs. middle and upper classes). Its ecological singularities are a persistent class residential segregation, yet an even spatial distribution of retailers and public transportation.

The theoretical framework aims at encompassing food and mobility within everyday life. I adopt a non-normative, inductive, and comprehensive definition of food and mobility – whatever people put into their bodies, wherever people displace their bodies, and the meanings they endow. In a bid to avoid miserabilism and populism, I conceptualize food and mobility as strategies – food lifestyles, strategic uses of space. I draw from empirical evidence on the enduring class differences in both food lifestyles and strategic uses of space, rather than postmodernist approaches theorizing them as individualized choices. I thus investigate food and mobility individual strategies, within structural and ecological contexts.

I conduct ethnographic fieldwork on food in Sétif, a Paris neighborhood whose singularities consist in a process of residential gentrification, yet an enduring working-class, immigrant retail structure. The methods include participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interviewing, mapping, and primary source analysis.

Through detailed portrayals, I show that the precarious working classes engage in *multiplying places*, the stable working classes in *partitioning* places, and the middle and upper classes in *anchoring* places. The precarious working classes, in quest for satiation (e.g., hash), resort to multiple places, both in Sétif and in the working-class inner suburbs of Paris. The stable working classes, craving for natural goods (e.g., fish) at the best price, partition their shopping places, also in Sétif and in the working-class inner suburbs of Paris. The middle and upper classes seek locally sourced and sold products (e.g., fresh foods), but are frustrated by Sétif working-class, immigrant stores: they resolve to shop in the adjacent neighborhoods.

These results stand in contrast to empirical evidence on class-based strategic uses of space in Paris regarding another sociological question, education (wherein against the working classes, the middle and upper classes reside in neighborhoods that are better equipped with schools, and elaborate large-scale mobility strategies). They contribute to criticism of miserabilist and populist appraisals of food and mobility, which depict the working classes as doomed to taste of necessity and immobility. They account for everyday life as a class-differentiated outcome shaped by class-differentiated ecological and structural mechanisms.

The paper then aims at a threefold input: document the entanglement of place, class, and everyday life in Paris; add to theorizing food and mobility as within everyday life; uncover mechanisms that account for class differences in everyday life.

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