

## 'Healthy' and 'Unhealthy' food culture in contemporary Budapest (Hungary)

Anikó Báti PhD

Food is a basic human need, at the same time it is a source of pleasure and also a possible cause of disease. Some foods are categorized by nutritional scientists as unhealthy, others as medicine. These binary categories, 'good' or 'bad' food are commonly known. Various television shows, magazines and books on diet have become available in Hungary. My paper focuses on contemporary food culture based on my investigations (ethnographic research: interviews, household surveys) carried out among the middle-class residents of an apartment building in Budapest's 20<sup>th</sup> district. I study every day and festive eating habits with traditional backgrounds and public meals, too. Nowadays an average family does not cook food every day, the members eat their meals away from home in canteens or they just have a sandwich to dinner; some elderly people order their cooked meal from food delivery services.

I outline the difference between the ideal and practice that is the knowledge about healthy life style and the actual daily routine. Socioeconomic processes behind the changes in food culture entirely transformed earlier food traditions in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most important of these: women entering the workforce causing that meals for children and the elderly could no longer be provided within the family, and the growing trend of purchasing an increasing percentage of the food required for the households in the form of raw ingredients and ready-to-eat foods in supermarkets. A change could also be observed in the value attached to money and time as people are willing to spend money on foods which they had previously produced themselves.

In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the risk of becoming overweight and suffering from dental caries is higher than previously in the lower social strata, especially among children. Their carbo-hydrate consumption is very high as this is easily affordable, unlike fruits or dairy products. These trends are observable in canteens too. I shall describe and explain some of the communal and individual reasons behind the recent trends, taste, food preferences illustrated by specific ethnographical examples from Budapest.