



# It is time for food revolution: New entrepreneurship and food culture in the context of tourism-oriented food offer in Havana

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## Foreword

This thesis has been the result of a long journey and, as often in (my) life, of a thoughtless idea that has been followed with determination. For me Cuba has been a school of idealism, joy, simplicity and nude reality. During my stay in Havana I had the chance to listen to many voices, all of them sharing an honest sense of dignity and pride.

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## Abstract

Cuba is experiencing an important growth of tourist arrivals, and this trend appears to be confirmed for the next years. Today the tourism sector is largely represented also by the privates, who are complementing the services before only offered by the state. Especially the tourism-oriented food offer is showing the potential of this new entrepreneurship, with *paladar* and *casa particular* being the main actors. However, Cuban political and economic system present some challenges for these new entrepreneurs, especially in regard of food access and availability. My study focuses on the challenges perceived by these entrepreneurs and the way they interact with Havana foodways. The research took place in Havana, the capital, which offers the best stage to explore the phenomenon. I adopted a qualitative approach, interviewing 16 owners/manager of *paladar* and *casa particular*, plus other 6 inhabitants of Havana, which contributed to a larger understanding of the influence of privates into local culture and food practices. Results shown that food availability is one of the main challenges and at the same time a stimulus to creativity and development of alternative solutions. Instability and formation of a new work culture, are two other important challenges according to the interviews. Moreover, *paladar* and *casa particular* are also influencing the way locals relate with food, in terms of food acquisition power, practices, eating habits and food heritage. Therefore, the new entrepreneurs are strictly linked with Havana foodways and tourism is enhancing this relationship.

## 1. Introduction

In the spring of 2016, the visit of Obama in Havana meant a turning point in what has been one of the main conflicts of the past century: the dispute between Cuba and United States. Apart from Obama's visit, that year there have been other popular events that contributed to turn the spotlight on the island, such as the concert of Rolling Stones and Chanel fashion show. Suddenly, Cuba has been at the centre of world attention, and this has brought to a growing tourism interest for the island as destination. Two years later, things look in some respects consistently different, especially regarding the political relations between Cuba and U.S. The new president Trump, having searched for the support of exiled Cubans during the presidential elections, shown to be very critical about the detente measures promoted from his predecessor. Therefore, he announced that measures against Castro government would have been strengthened, as the the possibility for U.S. citizens to visit Cuba would have been limited. Within this evolving political setting, how is tourism doing?

Looking at the data, the question suggests that the tourists' will is moving autonomously from what Trump's political line is. Cuba closed the year 2017 with more than 4.700.000 tourists

(Medina Fernández, 2018) and U.S. tourist have increased of 18% compared to the previous year (Marsh, 2018). Looking at the tourist arrivals of the last couple of years (World Bank, 2018), we can see that in Cuba is happening a tourism boom which, for now, has no signs of slowing down. New connections are strategically linking the biggest island of Antilles with the surrounding countries, including the U.S., such as new flights and cruises. These are offering new channels for the tourists' arrivals, and a larger variety of ways to visit and experience Cuba.

The tourism sector, for long time being only managed by the state, is now knowing a rapid spread of small private businesses which complement the industry with the offer of accommodations, eateries, and other professions related with the broader tourism sector (taxi, tour guides, and others). Therefore, the tourist revenues are now shared by the state and non-state sector, where the last one is receiving more of the 30% of the total tourist spending (Feinberg & Newfarmer, 2016). This trend is worthy to be acknowledge as special, if we consider the peculiar political and economic background of Cuba. Seeing that, it is possible to understand that something is changing, internally in the country and also externally, especially in the relation with its bigger (and most influencing) neighbor. Tourism is then one of the main forces of this changing situation, and it is worthy to underline again how the sector is now favoring the development of small private businesses that are mostly linked to hospitality and food. Moreover, how this is resulting in the food offer scenario of the country is another intriguing question that raise, even more if we look at the reality of Havana, the capital, where most tourists decide to spend part of their trip and where new restaurants and family owned accommodations are consequently growing exponentially.

Within this context, one of the most remarkable quotes related with tourism in Cuba is this one: "the three worst things in Cuba are breakfast, lunch and dinner". How is this perceived weakness of Cuba dealing with the fact that food is generally recognized as one of the main factors and driven forces of the tourist experience, this is another point that required attention. Out of what is specifically defined as food tourism, food is still necessarily part of everyone's holiday experience. In successful tourist destinations, eateries are usually present in high number and some of them are directly addressing tourists as costumers. This phenomenon is visible in city centers, where most of the attractions visited by tourists are located. Recognizing the tourist boom that developed in Cuba in the last couple of years, it is logical to imagine that the food offer would have been preparing for these new arrivals. In fact, thanks to the reforms that allowed new private business to raise, in Cuba the current situation seems to differ considerably from what was a previous poor food scene. Guidebooks and websites started to celebrate this new food revolution happening in Cuba and the new private restaurants are indicated as the main actors (Johnson, 2015; Adler, 2016; Sainsbury, 2017), able to rescue the dishes of Cuban traditional cuisine (Ruhlman, 2017). As Ana & Lubiński (2014) claim, this dynamic tourism scene in Cuba implied various changes in relation to foodways, with the development of new eateries, new food served and new acquisition flows. The multiple elements of foodways, which Alkon et al. (2013) help us to define as "the cultural and social practices that affect food consumption, including how and

what communities eat, where and how they shop and what motivates their food preferences”, are then directly linked to and influenced by (and influencing?) tourism food offer.

The private restaurants in Cuba are known as *paladar*, a word that literally means “palate”, and it come from a Brazilian *telenovela* which was popular in Cuba in the ‘90s. In the show, a woman was owner of a restaurant in Rio de Janeiro which was called precisely *Paladar*. In the ‘93 the Cuban government legalized the constitution of the first family restaurants, which started to be known as *paladar* (Scarpaci, 1995). This kind of business was one of the first forms of self-employment developed in Cuba, a deeply socialist country where the state had always exercised its control over the entire economy. The second way of liberalization in the job market happened between 2007 and 2011, when more than 201 kinds of professions became allowed to practice with a self-employment form (Fernández, 2017). With the license for *paladar*, new rules allowed the restaurant to become more competitive, for instance the number of possible seats were increased until 50 and it was possible to employ non-family members (Taylor & Zuberi, 2015). Today, the presence of *paladar* in the island become quite considerable, especially looking at the main touristic destinations, Havana for instance. The most popular areas of the city, where tourists are used to lodge and do sightseeing, are now populated by many *paladar* that do not only offer Cuban cuisine, but that are also specializing in different kind of food. The food scene in Cuba is not only changing because of the *paladar* growth, but also due to another kind of private business, which is known as *Casa particular*. *Casa particular* are family owned accommodations, which normally work on a form of B&B and with the option for dinner. Even if some of these *casa* are addressing Cuban clients, most of them are working in the tourism sector, especially in the localities more visited from tourists. *Casa particular* are offering a contrasting experience compared to the classic all-inclusive hotels and resorts that were before the only accommodation option existing in the island. These family accommodations share with *paladar* the trait to offer an authentic experience that allow the guest to feel more in touch with the local culture, creating an informal place for meeting and sharing between tourists and locals (Kozak, 2016). Eating is an activity that can constitute a strong interaction between host and guest, a three-dimensional experience that allows the tourist to link with the destination place and culture (Sims, 2009). It is interesting to question how Cuban identity is participating in this dialogue between host and guest, especially within the context of the food served in these two types of settings.

Creen (1991) properly defined Cuban food as revealing the “history of Cuba and the diverse groups of people who have inhabited the island. Cuban cuisine is a melting pot of ingredients and cooking techniques from around the world”. Native population, slaves coming from Africa, calorizators from Spain, and later the migration of other nationalities contributed to define what is today recognizable as Cuban cuisine and food heritage. Having a close look at the composition of Cuban dishes, we see that they are normally centered around an animal protein, which is usually pork, chicken or eggs, together with the always present rice and beans, and other elements such as roots, tubers and finally fresh vegetables (Westfeldt, 2018). For Cubans has always been challenging to bring all these ingredients on the plate, especially after the collapse of



Soviet Union, which was strongly supporting with food, technology and financial aid (Bono & Finn, 2017). The U.S. embargo and an inefficient food production and distribution, have also contributed to a poor food offer (Bono & Finn, 2017). In the light of the new food offer that is promoted by *paladar* and *casa particular*, how this is influencing Cubans' relation with food and Cuban food culture is an interesting point of discussion.

## 2. Problem statement and research questions

“Visit Cuba NOW before it changes” is becoming a *mantra* in the last couple of years. Apart from having a marketing goal, this advice is developing from a reasonable perspective on how Cuba political economy is recently evolving. The different elements raised in the previous chapter, from the tourism boom in Cuba to the raising of new entrepreneurship, are showing us a scenario of transformation.

Different dimension of Cuba foodways are involved: an economic and political one, with the interaction between state, new privates and tourism; and a socio-cultural one where the focus lay on the perception of Cuban food as identity and heritage, and on its developing within the tourism phenomenon. It is useful to sharpen the view on these two dimensions, especially when looking for perceptions, so it is necessary to localize and circumscribe the reality taken in exam. I am looking at the example of Havana, which can be the most representative scenario where all these elements show their full representation. As already mentioned before, Havana is not only one of the main tourist destinations, but also a compulsory passage for visitors interested in other Cuban locations. In addition, being the capital of the country, it is possibly offering the best setting for understanding links and dynamics between the state, the new privates and the tourism sector within the sphere of Havana foodways. This last element is including an umbrella of practices and perceptions in which locals are embedded nowadays when dealing with all aspects of food, from acquisition to consumption. Recognizing the peculiarity of Cuba food system, where food is both treated as a public good (through the food rationing system) and also as a commodity (through the sale), it is interesting to see how the surging private sector is entering and interacting in this system. Havana represents an opportunity to study how tourism, in its new form of private entrepreneurship, is developing within a country anchored to a strict socialist economic model. This study aims to explore the perceptions of these new entrepreneurs that are working in the tourism food offer, in relation to the challenges that they encounter, being among the ‘pioneers’ of private business in Cuba.

### 2.1 Research objective and questions

Considering the element above discussed, with this research, I aim to **understand the interaction between the new entrepreneurship working with tourism food offer and Havana foodways.**

From the research overall goal, I developed the following main research question:

- **How does new entrepreneurship working with tourism food service integrate within Havana foodways today?**

Coming from the objectives above mentioned, the following sub-questions are developed:

- SQ1: Which is the current food offer in Havana?
- SQ2: Which are the challenges for these new entrepreneurs working in tourism food sector?
- SQ3: How does tourism influence local's food practices?
- SQ4: How does tourism relate with Cuban food culture?

Some clarifications are needed. SQ1 is purely descriptive, I look at the present situation of food offer in Havana to then address the emerging private sector. SQ2 is referring to the difficulties that these new entrepreneurs working in tourism sector have to deal with. The context is that one of a political system that only recently has allowed their existence, and of a food system that presents several limitations and weak points.

## 2.2 Scientific relevance

Cuba is a country experiencing a rapid economic transformation, which has an impact on its society and culture. The self-employment has been object of analysis of some scholars, which have mainly focused on the business nature and political framework of entrepreneurship in the island (Scarpaci, 2009; Orozco & Hansing, 2014; Henken & Vignoli, 2015; Hingtgen et al., 2015; Ritter & Henken, 2015). The attention of the scholars has also been directed towards the tourism sector forms of self-employment, which are becoming important representatives of Cuban entrepreneurship in light of the recent tourism boom. Within the sector, the food offer is showing the potential for a continuous development which can foster the success of these new entrepreneurs. Paladar and casa particular, the two main actors of tourism-oriented food offer, are not a new phenomenon in Cuba, but the recent reforms have increased their possibility and capacity to become successful businesses. The relation between this rising entrepreneurship with the reality of Havana foodways, haven't been addressed yet. Cuban production, distribution and consumption of food is still suffering structural problems that are mining the everyday access to food for locals. There is the necessity not only to understand how the Cuban food system is challenging the development of these new entrepreneurs, but also to investigate the interaction between food culture and new entrepreneurship. Tourism has the potential to valorize local culture, and food it is a prominent vehicle for the representation of heritage and identity. My research recognizes the current role of new entrepreneurship in this process and intend to explore the influence of tourism on the local food culture.

## 2.3 Social relevance

The description of the challenges encountered by the new entrepreneurs working in tourism food sector might reveal useful information for the sector organization and better planning of future interventions. Moreover, recognizing the successful development that the tourism-oriented food offer is currently knowing, might offer strategies for overcoming problems that are present in other food sectors. The recent tourism boom is a great opportunity for Cuba, but it can also present many threats to the functioning of a system based on a socialist economic model, where the private business has been reluctantly promoted by the state only as a necessary measure to support the national economy. In fact, the success of private entrepreneurship might promote inequality within Cuban society, especially in respect of food acquisition power. The study is also aiming to explore the way tourism is influencing local food culture, which is represented in the context of food offer. The way identity is represented and propose to tourists, can have a direct impact on the way it is reformulate and transmitted within the local environment.

### 3. Literature review and conceptual framework

In this section I present the way to the development of the conceptual framework that will be the theoretical background for my study. Before doing that, I start with looking at the tourism sector in Cuba, and the rising entrepreneurship that has a prominent role in the sector. An overview of this phenomenon is necessary in order to understand the local reality where theoretical elements will be introduced. Then, I look at the relationship between food and tourism, how is defined by scholars. Later, I explore the broad concept of foodways, identifying the elements that tell the story of Cuban practices and perceptions around food, with a focus on the historical process that followed the revolution. Identity and cultural heritage in the context of food and gastronomy are the latter concepts integrating the conceptual framework.

#### 3.1 Tourism in Cuba

During Cuban history, there have been specific moments when tourism needed to adapt to political changes that occurred in the island. Hall (2001) wrote on this relationship, starting from the early 20th century, when international tourism developed in Cuba. At that time, north American tourists founded in the island a perfect destination for its warm temperatures and its easy accessibility. Tourism slowly grew and became the third export commodity (after tobacco and sugar) and, after the two world wars, the arrivals from North America increased considerably. Havana and Varadero coast became the main tourist destinations, creating spatial and structural concentration of wealth and benefits (Hall, 2001). In the 50s, the first wave of mass tourism reached the island. Casinos and brothels knew a rapid development, fostered by the economic and political agreement between the dictator Batista, U.S. governments and local gangsters (Hall, 2001). In 1959, with the revolution of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, this dark face of Cuban tourism had to be cleaned, while keep promoting the island as an international tourism destination was still a priority for Fidel (Villalba Garrido, 1993). The challenges that followed the U.S. embargo affected Cuba tourism, but investments by the government led to a continuous tourism growth, international and domestic (Hinch, 1990). The financial support from Soviet Union was strategical for the island tourism development. With the collapse of Soviet Union, Cuba made a transaction from "semi-colonial state status to an independent status exposed to the rigors of the (capitalist) global economy, of which international tourism is clearly an integral element" (Hall, 2001). Tourism development became one of the priorities, for its capacity of generating revenue and accessing hard currency, which was decriminalized. The first examples of private businesses showed up, with accommodations and restaurants. New imported products became available in the stores, complementing the goods provided by the governments. The tourism boom of the 90s drove many young people to choose tourism related

studies or switch from other jobs to the tourism industry (Wonders & Michalowski, 2001). The tourism growth continued until mid-2000s, when there was a drop of tourist arrivals and spending, caused by new restrictions for foreign investments and the world economic crisis of 2008 (Feinberg & Newfarmer, 2016). This negative trend was affecting the following years, and a clear tendency inversion started in 2015, when Cuba counted over 3,5 million of international arrivals, promising a positive trend also in the future (Feinberg & Newfarmer, 2016). Another important element in the current tourism growth is the role of the private sector, which during the last decade had slowly gained more space where to develop itself. The government, especially under the lead of the president Raul Castro, changed its approach towards self-employment, which in the tourism food sector find is major representation.

### 3.2 The timid rise of entrepreneurs

Is there space for entrepreneurship in this long lasting communist country? Today, it seems we can answer affirmatively. Several reforms during the last three decades opened the way to a restructuring of the Cuban economic system, with the addition of elements typical of capitalist economy. However, the state is still practicing its central power and we are far from defining the economy as a hybrid of socialism and capitalism. To fully understand the current characteristics of this phenomenon, it useful to give a look at the steps that brought to the development of these private businesses in Cuba.

Before the revolution of '59, the national private sector in Cuba was representing a large reality within the country, together with a considerable presence of foreigner companies, a state sector and some cooperatives. When the revolution stroke, the first couple of years the state decided to cancel almost the entire private and cooperative sector, adopting nationalization policies. In the '68 there had been a new offensive against the privates, which hit the smallest remaining private businesses. The result was a difficulty for the state to replace their services (Scarpaci et al., 2016) and the quality, quantity and variety of products (Ritter, 2014). Nationalization was seen as the solution to avoid capitalism and the chaos of the market, creating instead rationality and central planning (Ritter, 2014). For Cuba, a turning point, under all the aspects, have been the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989 and the consequent economic crisis that terribly hit the country. This time, known as "special period", was a new starting point for entrepreneurship in Cuba. The emergency in which the country found itself, bring the government in '94 to allow some forms of self-employment and promote some reforms as an attempt to avoid an announced bankrupt on a national level. Some of the reforms were: the decriminalization of the U.S. dollar, limited legalization of private accommodation renting, and the facilitation of foreign investment (Scapaci et al., 2016). Ritter (2014) give us an interesting key to the interpretation of these phase, pointing out how the new self-employment professions were actually recognizing some figures already existing within Cuban society. In fact, during the previous decades of pure socialism, as a

paradox, Cuba created a nation of entrepreneurs (Ritter, 2014). How this happened? Ritter (2014) sees the origin of it in the economic problems that many Cubans were facing, and the consequent reaction with the creation of a network of informal professionals, able to sell, repair, and exchange the needed goods. In addition to the socialism, Cubans created the “socialismo” (where the word socio means partner, buddy), a system based on the reciprocal exchange of favors (Ritter, 2014). What necessity and survival strategies produced in Cuba, bring to this importance on gifts, sharing, and making loans between people (Hingtgen et al., 2015). After the first reforms in '94, there have been other rounds of opening to the private sector, which has been possible also because of another important moment of Cuban history: the substitution of Fidel Castro as president by the brother Raul in 2006. Between 2007 and 2011 many policies regarding small enterprises were promoted, aiming to contrasting the growing national debt and the significant surplus of workers in the state sector (Palomo, 2016; Fernandez, 2017). Therefore, the list of self-employment licenses were expanded to 201 kinds of jobs, and some additional measures were promoted to facilitate the working of these new private businesses, such as: the possibility to hire employees, expanded seating in restaurants from 12 to 50, health and safety standards extended to private sector (Palomo, 2016). Between the various obstacles that entrepreneurs encounter, one of the most significant especially in the perspective of hospitality and eateries, is the lack of a wholesale market for self-employed workers (Hingtgen et al., 2015; Scapaci et al., 2016; Palomo, 2016). The difficulty to access products is then encouraging people to point at the black market, where many goods are available when not reachable in the normal markets or shops (Scapaci et al., 2016).

Within the tourism sector, two kinds of private businesses are playing an important role on the current tourism scene in Cuba, especially regarding the food offer and the local gastronomy: *paladar* and *casa particular*. These places represent an important scenario where food and tourism are connected in Havana today.

### 3.3 Food and Tourism

The importance of food within the touristic experience has been increasingly recognized by scholars, as food strongly represents intangible heritage and become an important attraction for tourists (Richards, 2012). Particularly in the context of experience development, food can play a major role on enhancing the level of the tourist's immersion in the cultural surrounding (Richards, 2012) and in the sensorial dimension of the destination (Mak et al., 2012). As noticed by Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán (2012), gastronomy can help developing tourism in places that are out of the major tourist route or that have lost appealing as destinations. In advertising a tourist destination, food is often presented as an attraction with the qualities of exoticism and authenticity (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Richards (2012) identifies several ways in which food can develop the tourism experience, **which I am below presenting:**

- **Linking culture and tourism:** food can offer to the tourists a representation of the local culture, and an opportunity to meet the locals and share a common experience.
- **Developing the meal experience:** meals are necessarily present within the tourist experience, offering the opportunity to create memorable moments.
- **Producing distinctive foods:** food can become iconic of a certain destination, contributing to brand the place.
- **Developing critical infrastructure for food production and consumption:** around food production and consumption can grow a critical structure of different actors (chefs, critics, journalists, bloggers, etc.)
- **Supporting local culture:** local cultural development can be promoted by food experience, the latter becoming motivation for the creation and maintenance of local cultural capital.

Food is offering multiple opportunities for the development of the tourism experiences. And these opportunities stress the relationship between tourism and foodways. In fact, we can observe in Richards's (2012) work that he mentions food production, consumption and food culture, core elements of what we identify as foodways (later debated in the next chapter). To ensure an increasing satisfactory experience for the visitors, measures are taken in respect of hospitality management and food supply, especially where tourism is a major economy (Mak et al., 2012). While on one side local gastronomy can become a product of the tourist experience, Torres (2002) explains as in mass tourism reality, the tourism industry tries to satisfy tourist's demand rather than attempting to drive tourist's food consumption towards local gastronomy. In this way, tourism industry demand for products is defined by tourist food choices and, in turn, enhance or restrain links with local food production (Torres, 2002). On the relation between tourism and food production, Feagan (in Everett, 2012) writes how tourism alone cannot improve the food quality of a place, but it can be a channel for questioning and stimulating the food production and distribution.

The Cuban tourism scenario differs from a global context where cuisine and foodways are important elements of the tourism experience. In fact, gastronomy is not included between the main attractions of the island and, also in the most popular guides, food is mentioned as being a weak point of what Cuba can offer to visitors (Ana & Lubiński, 2014). On the other hand, Cuban cuisine is knowing an interesting development and popularity outside the country, for instance in Miami where the Cuban community is numerous (McEvoy in Ana & Lubiński, 2014). Therefore, what makes the Cuban gastronomy not so exciting for tourists is not an issue of the cuisine itself, but it possibly taking origin in the broad context of Cuban food system, foodways and tourism.

### 3.3.1 Encountering food: *paladar* and *casa particular*



The work of Ana & Lubiński (2014) well explored the main ways tourists can access Cuban food, which compose part of the food environments present in Havana: *casa particular*, *paladar* and restaurants.

The *casa particular* are a sort of family owned bed & breakfast, they offer accommodations and most of the time they also include breakfast, which normally consist of eggs, fresh fruits, fruits juice, bread with butter and cheese, coffee and milk. The offer change in comparison of the price that visitors decide to pay, being in average around 3-5 CUC or included in the price of the room. Everything is prepared and served by the host, and the familiarity of the setting is one of the main point of attraction that the guests evaluated, even if the hosts almost never share the meal with them. Dinners are less requested then breakfast since the price is slightly more expensive compared to the *paladar*, nevertheless in some cases the quality of the dinners is mentioned by some guides as a worth reason to choose that accommodation (Ana & Lubiński, 2014).

The second option for discovering Cuban food are the *paladar*, family owned small restaurants. The capacity of attracting tourists is based on the cultural identity that define these places and distinguish them from the state-owned restaurants. The *paladar* offers a familiar and 'authentic' setting where original Cuban food is served, and the locals are also eating there to have a familiar meal. Despite this accredited *Cubanidad* (Cubanity) of the place, the *paladar* nowadays are shifting to more tourist-oriented restaurants, while out of the tourist cluster other *paladar* continue to offer affordable meals for Cubans with a similar menu of the touristic ones.

### 3.4 Foodways

When discussing the cultural and social value of food, many scholars refer to the concept of foodways, which includes these dimensions related to the food experience. Foodways represent the beliefs, habits and cultural practices related with food production and consumption (Hall & Mitchell, 2002). For Long (in Smith & Costello, 2009) foodways are the set of physical, social, cultural, economic, spiritual behaviors related with food. The author includes in the construction of foodways the following characteristics: food preparation, preservation, cooking techniques, menus planning, presentation, eating styles, food culture and origin, and food consumption. These practices have a symbolic value since they express how people "establish, maintain and reinforce their (sub)cultural, ethnic, and individual identities" (Penaloza in Williams et al., 2012). In Williams et al. (2012) three mechanisms have been identified in foodways: how people add cultural and symbolic value to certain food, the ways of producing food and the ways of eating. The symbolic value of food and foodways is well elaborated by Jones (2007), who explores how people, events and places are defined by food and how food influence people's emotions, opinion and perceptions. Alkon et al. (2013) describe foodways as what and how communities eat, where and how they obtain food, and the reasons of their preferences. Foodways constitute part of the

culture of a precise community and they can tell a lot about the difficulties and challenges that a community has dealt with over time when looking for and eating food. Even in the case of the most rural setting, foodways are nearly always embedded in wider economic systems, linking the small farmer to the global economy. Food is “often gifted, donated, turned into payment for labourers, exchanged for other foods, or sold in the market” (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016). After going through this variegated definition of the term foodways, we need to identify which are the main characteristics of the concept that are suitable for this study.

As mentioned above, Alkon et al. (2013) well describe practices and preferences included in foodways. Looking back at Havana’s context, it is clear that the tourism food offer is necessarily shaped by the country’s food system, especially in regards of food production and distribution. Consequently, food acquisition become an important expression of foodways. The understanding of the practices related to obtain food (where and how) would open a window on how the new entrepreneurs, the locals and the food system interact. Same is valid for the eating habits, which include the preparation (how) and consumption (what) of food. The third element identified by Alkon et al. (2013) is composed by the food preferences, being this characteristic fundamental in the perspective of food offer. Said so, Alkon et al. (2013) gave us some interesting tools to look at the foodways which can be well integrated by the Penozza (in Williams et al., 2012) referment to establishing, sustaining and maintaining identities.

### 3.4.1 Food acquisition (where and how)

To better understand the dynamic of food acquisition in Cuba, it is useful to look back at the recent history of food production in the country and the consequent food acquisition system that developed.

#### 3.4.1.1 *Where food comes from*

Food acquisition is necessarily linked with the process of food production, which in Cuba is shaped within a socialist economic model. While almost the entire world shifted to the neoliberal economic paradigm, the resistance adopted by Cuba in all these years can tell an interesting story about the challenges that an alternative economy presents. Many authors looked at the peculiar storyline of Cuban agriculture system, which has known various transformations in different historical periods (Altieri & Funes-Monzote 2012; Altieri et al. 1999, 2012; Boillat et al 2012; Buchmann 2009; Riera & Swinnen 2016; Rosset et al. 2011). Turning point in the Cuban food system have been the early 1990s, when the fall of the Soviet Union impacted enormously on the island economy, being Cuba highly dependent on the trade relations with that country. From that

moment, Cuba undertake a solitary road which made the island a laboratory for an alternative political-economic model.

From the revolution of 1959 until the 1989, the island was focused on exporting monoculture, especially sugar, and Soviet Union could offer a safe market (Riera & Swinnen, 2016). In 1989, because of the end of support from the Soviet Union, no more fertilizers, pesticides, tractors and fuel were arriving in the island, causing a big crisis in the sector, which at that moment was the most industrialized of all Latin America (Boillat et. al, 2012). From 1990 it started what in Cuba is known as *period special en tiempo de paz* (special period in peace time): industry closed, public transportations and electricity consumption was limited, and the agriculture sector had to increase the food production, with 50% less inputs (Boillat et al., 2012). For the decade 1993 – 2003, the government tried to stabilize the economy through a soft liberalization. In the agriculture sector three reformed were promoted: the creation of “Basic Unit of Cooperative Production” (UBPCs), before managed as state farms; the promotion of agricultural markets where farmers could sell their surplus production; and the authorization for self-employment in 150 different occupations, agriculture included (Riera & Swinnen, 2016). Another contribution to the economy recover of Cuba has been the development of urban agriculture, as a response of cities residents to food shortage and supported by the government with policies, expertise and subsidies (Altieri et al., 1999). Afterwards, Cuba received external support from a new ally, the Venezuela of Hugo Chavez, who became a strong economic partner. There was a return to more centralized economy that, together to natural disasters, impacted negatively on agricultural production (Riera & Swinnen, 2016). When the power shifted from Fidel to Raul, new reforms allowing form of privatization were promoted. Farmers were allowed to sell part of their production in kiosks or to hotels and restaurants, and more state-owned land was given to cooperatives and farmers under usufructs (Riera & Swinnen, 2016).

As claimed by institutional sources (WFP, 2017), Cuba continues importing around 70-80% of its food needs, an impressive amount which would be symptom of an inefficient and insufficient agriculture system. However, Altieri & Funes-Menzote (2012) underline as these percentages represents only the food that is formerly distributed by the government through the basic provisioning. This service allows Cuban to have basic food products for highly subsidize prices. Considering the overall food availability in Cuba, which is also composed by an informal food network not recognized officially, the amount of food imported in the island knew a constant drop from 1980s until 2000s, when imports raised again due to hurricanes devastation of Cuban agriculture and they reached 50% in 2008 (Altieri & Funes-Menzote, 2012).

Two main successful elements of food production in Cuba have been the development of urban agriculture and agroecology, which both took origins in the Special Period as a response to the emergency of food shortage.

Because of urban agriculture, the high populated cities of the country, Havana in the first places, could improve the food offer in both quality and quantity. At the same time, the choice of

promoting urban agriculture was considered by the government as an attempt to enhance community development and environmental sustainability promotion (Koont, 2009). Home-garden create direct benefits (food, medicinal plants) and indirect benefits (products sale, exchanged and donation) as found by Buchmann (2009), who also underline the resilience capacity of the local community in the face of needed self-sufficiency due to the political and economic isolation of Cuba. A part of promoting urban gardens, the renovation of Cuban agriculture passed through the conversion of industrial food production to a sustainable model based on agroecology, organic production and social learning (Palma et al., 2015). Agroecological farming started in Cuba as a solution to the economic crisis and the consequent impossibility to import goods and later it became an example of how land and labour productivity can increase, following this sustainable model (Rosset et al., 2011).

#### 3.4.1.2 *Places of acquisition*

The work of Garth (2009) is useful to investigate food access and acquisitions practices, that she explores in Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city of the island. She individuates five ways in which Cubans generally obtain foods: the government food rations, gifts and trades, black markets purchases, and CUC purchases. Bono & Finn (2017) had also explored in which ways Cubans have access to food but focusing more in the physical places where the acquisition take places. In this case all the participants of the study were located in a rural area and they revealed these main sources of food: local bodega, state market, local private markets, nonlocal private markets, *la shopping*, individual gardens, individual harvests, local farmers, cooperative farmers redistributions, and gifts. The importance of cooperation between community members for achieving a satisfactory food provisioning is stressed in both studies, on a formal level with the engagement in cooperatives and on a more informal level with families and social networks. Once again, the Special period is mentioned as a large impacting moment of the recent Cuban history for its effects on food availability, and to some extends its consequences were visible for many more years for some Cubans whose access to food continued to present some difficulties (Garth 2009). Garth (2009) noticed *Santiagoueros* express different ideas of needs and desires in relation with food availability, that is why she claimed as necessity the understanding of individual conceptualization of need when discussing food scarcity. Since 1962, to overcome some of the difficulties that the population might face when accessing food, Cuban government has developed a food rationing system, which is guaranteeing for every Cubans a monthly ratio of products almost for free (Riera & Swinnen, 2016). This ratio includes rice and beans, which are the base of Cuban cuisine, but is lacking other important elements of Cuban diet which need to be acquired in other ways.

The coexistence of two official currencies is also shaping the way Cubans access food. These are the convertible peso (CUC) and the Cuban peso (CUP). The CUC is equated with 1 US dollar and

its mainly used by enterprises. In the tourism sector, all transactions are made with CUCs, so foreigners only need to change their money in CUCs and do not use the other currency. The CUP is pegged at 24:1 US dollar and it's used by the local population. Through the CUP, Cubans have access to cheapest services and goods, but a complementary use of CUCs is increasing and allow them to access more "luxurious" products (Feinberg & Newfarmer, 2016). Within tourism sector, including private food offer, CUCs are easy to circulate, reaching the hands of the Cubans that work for it.

### 3.4.2 Eating practices (what and how)

Rivero (2017), in its work over the African influence of Cuban gastronomy, explored the history of what are currently recognized as traditional dishes in the island. The huge variety of native fruits that the island showed to European conquerors entered part of Caribbean cuisine and became also objected of exoticism, as defined by non-American people. Many products and dishes came from European countries as Spain, France and Portugal (*Paella, Pollo asado al vino, Bacalao*). However, the three basic ingredients of Caribbean gastronomy (rice, beans and plantains) where carried by slaves when travelling from Africa to America, together with many other products harvested in their countries. The name of some Caribbean dishes appears to take origin from African words, as the *fufú* in Cuba, which it might come from western Africa. One of the most important ingredients in Cuban food are the *viandas*, a various group of roots and tubers (sweet potato, manioc, *malanga*), which are perceived by Cubans as a necessary component of everyday meal (Dawdy, 2002).

Cuban cuisine is described as fusion, hybrid, diverse and ethnic mix (Ana & Lubiński, 2014) since it developed through the encounter of European, Latin and African traditions. Dawdy (2002) recognized the connection between national cookbooks and national identity and this seems also the case for Cuba culinary history. In 1857, the first Cuban cookbook was published, and it was later followed by other books where it was possible to identify that dishes that even today are part of Cuban gastronomy. Folch (2008) investigated racial representations in pre-revolution Cuban cookbooks and explored how non-white Cubans were trivialized and ignored in these early (1900-1959) cookbooks. While the readers of these cookbooks where engaged in this skills exchange, in the elite Cuban houses, Afro-Cuban women were still in charge of the kitchen and they carried the knowledge which was mostly orally transmit (Folch, 2008). Folch (2008) individuates also a trend, especially in the cookbooks of the decade pre-revolution, to focus over time on white European dishes, while Afro-Cubans ingredients and plates where obscured.

Especially in the context of Cuban revolution, where new ideas on class, society and race where challenging the previous time of US domination, the "development of Caribbean cuisines is a sign of political and social change, as food provides a site for self-articulation, agency and creativity" (Mintz in Ana & Lubiński, 2014). Further on her reflections on Cuban cuisine, Dawdy

(2002) explain how the consequences of the revolution had a profound influence on the island gastronomy. On the other hand, the dishes identified as traditionally Cuban, remain the same as the ones belonging to the previous time. Cubans are used to look at variety as the formula for a satisfactory diet and, since the revolution, this aspect has been subjected to critics from part of the Cubans. Even though the government was able to guarantee a nutritional equalization, recognized by international observers, some of the products identified as fundamental in Cuban diet were scarce, or not included in the basic provisioning, as *viandas*, pork and black beans (Dwady, 2002).

To sum up, we can look at Cuban gastronomy as the integration of products introduced by African slaves, which built the basic of the everyday food, with European dishes and the presence of native fruits and *viandas*.

### 3.4.3 Food preferences

Food preferences results from *habitus* (habits), which are composed by a set of characteristics developed through social experience, and, in this sense, social classes are an example where food preferences are not equal, as embodied in each class *habitus* (Bourdieu in Debevec & Tivadar, 2006). Looking at the socio-political context of Cuba, it could seem then that Cubans' eating preferences have gone through a delicate balance between the fluctuating rhythm of food production and availability. Cubans have been trained to an adaptive construction of their behavior regarding food practices. Attempts to shape locals eating preferences have also been made by the government in recent years. A "Healthy Diet Guide" (Ministerio de Salud Pública, 2009) was part of the national program to improve food culture on the island and it included "not only which foods are healthiest and in what combinations, but also recommends best modes of storage and preparation, timing of meals, and ideal weight" (Pérez, 2009). In fact, some critical aspects of food and nutrition security in Cuba are related with the diet that Cubans adopted over time. Pérez (2009) individuates several unhealthy eating habits owned by Cubans, which can be summarized as the following: animal-origin products more consumed than fruits, vegetables and cereals; red meat preferred to white meat and fish; overconsumption of sugar and salt. Being these elements related with tastes and habits, to achieve a healthier diet Pérez (2009) suggests working on the mentality and behavior of Cubans through education and communication initiatives. A change in food preferences has also been the result of necessities measures, for instance the promotion of urban agriculture to overcome food crisis during the 'special period', which have created unplanned outcomes, as the increase in the consumption of fruits and vegetables (Borowy, 2013).

Food choice is a way to express preferences, identities and culture meanings (Sobal et al. in Mak et al., 2012). Koc & Welsh (2001) explain how individual and collective identification, in terms of certain cultural practices, can be represented by food preferences. Concepts as culture and

identity are then deeply connected to what are people's food preferences, and it is now very interesting to look at this relationship. With tourism private sector starting to operate within Havana foodways, it might be worthy to contextualize the way tourism, food preferences and local identity are linked. To do so, the concept of heritage can offer useful tools for a better exploration of culture and identity.

### 3.5 Heritage, identity and food

In the tourism studies, food has often been linked to the concept of heritage and its cultural value have been recognized and underlined also for tourism purposes. Heritage can be identified as the aggregation of patrimony of tangible and intangible goods that a community receive from the past, conserve in the present and carry to the future (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016). In the case of gastronomy, the tangible elements are ingredients and cooking equipment, while the intangible can be tastes, recipes and eating habits. All these elements confer cultural values to places and take part of what constitute their identity, together with other prominent dimension of culture as for instance religion and language (Timothy & Ron, 2013). Bessièrè (2013) defines some aspects constituting food heritage: the historical characteristic, the belonging of a certain territory and the ways in which people claim it as their own heritage. Therefore, ethnic group identities are created and fortified by food as heritage indicator, and food can also become point of confrontation and contention from two different groups (Timothy & Ron, 2013). Everett & Aitchison (2008) shows how the theoretical link between food and identity can be confirmed by the role that food-related industries play in the formation of regional identities. In this way, tourism has the potential for "strengthen identities and regenerate local heritage", in a context where local products, festivals, culinary and agriculture skills find in tourism an opportunity for their preservation (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Looking at tourist guidebooks or contemporary cookbooks, it is clear how food has been used to represent a specific community, often referring to discourses of traditions and heritage (Brulotte & Di Giovine, 2016).

In 2010, the role of food in the place identity formation was formally recognized, since food was officialized as part of the cultural heritage from the UNESCO, who inserted three cuisines (Mediterranean, French and Mexican/Michoacan) and one gastronomy product (Croatian gingerbread) in the World Heritage list (Brulotte & di Giovine, 2016). Following this process of 'heritagization', food entered, long before the UNESCO investiture, in the attention of public policies and projects, from a conservationist aim there was a shift to a more active plan of cultural development (Davallon in Bessièrè, 2013). The way food, often everyday dishes, has been 'elevated' to heritage status, have passed through the reinvention of traditions, where the transformation of social elements perceived as traditional changes their meanings (Di Giovine, 2014). The necessity to considered heritage other than a representation of the tradition is also claimed by Bessièrè (1998), who underlines the everchanging nature of this process that is socially

constructed more than fixed. Moreover, he looks at the process of heritage as a “dialectic interplay between ‘interior/exterior’ and ‘tradition/innovation’, which he theorizes as such:

*The dynamics of building up heritage consist in actualizing, adapting, and re-interpreting elements from the past of a given group (its knowledge, skills and values), in other words combining conservation and innovation, stability and dynamism, reproduction and creation, and consequently giving a new social meaning which generates identity. In this way, heritage elements would produce and reproduce identity and unity. (Bessière, 1998)*

Investing in food heritage and recognizing its potential have been one of the main interest of the tourism phenomenon. Cultural heritage, food and identity are central elements in the tourist experience, from the national space until the personal level (Timothy & Ron, 2013). As Bessière (2013) pointed out, tourism can be identified as a “consumption of a series of local rites, including manifestations of local heritage, allowing for the individual’s social and cultural integration within the local group through the absorption and reproduction of cultural codes”, and then the gastronomy can be identified as one of these codes.

As we saw, food industry is connected with the process of heritage and formation identity, where a role is also played by the tourism industry. Therefore, an overlapping point between these two sectors is the tourism-oriented food offer, where the interest in representing identity and heritage is linked to the tourist demand.

### 3.6 Summary of the chapter

The concepts above explored are integrated in the following conceptual framework (Figure 1), which will be the theoretical background for this study.

Tourism is linked to Havana foodways, which are influencing several elements. The first one is Havana food offer, which is composed by a diverse range of eateries, including the new privates working in the tourism sector. The three elements included in Alkon et al. (2013) definition of foodways, are linked to the challenges that the new entrepreneurs must deal within Havana reality. The concept of identity is complemented by the one of cultural heritage, showing a correlation between the overall foodways and the formation of (food) cultural heritage. Tourism, in the Havana context of new entrepreneurship working with food offer, is dialoguing with local foodways, and therefore necessarily contributing to the process of identity and heritage.



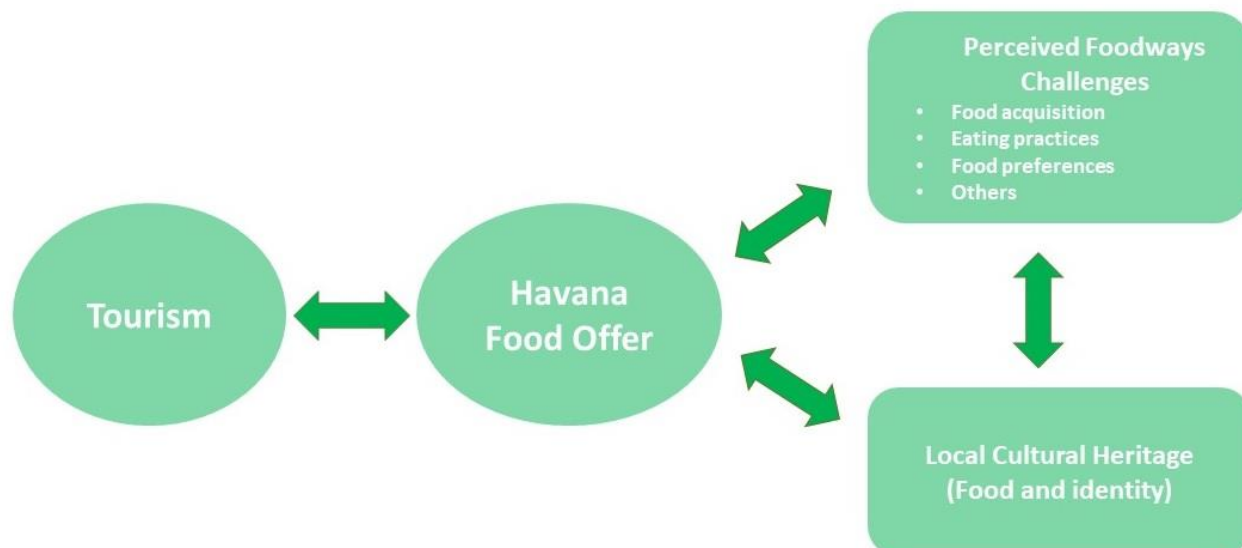


Figure 1 - Conceptual framework

Looking back at my research sub-questions and carrying them along the way of the theoretical discussion, I can better define which are the challenges that the entrepreneurs must consider (still keeping some space open for challenges that might be directly express by them) and reformulate my SQ2. The SQs will then become the following:

- SQ1: Which is the current food offer in Havana?
- SQ2: Which are the challenges for these new kinds of entrepreneurs working in tourism food sector in terms of food availability, eating practices, food preferences and others?
- SQ3: How does tourism influence locals' food practices?
- SQ4: How does tourism relate with Cuban food culture?

## 4. Methodology

In this section, the research setting, study design, sampling, methods and data collection procedure are presented. My study took place in the city of Havana, the capital of Cuba, and it is identifiable as case study. I adopted an interpretivist approach, where qualitative methods, as semi-structures interviews, informal conversations and observation, are chosen for data collection.

### 4.1 Research setting

The city of Havana is included in Havana province, the smaller province of Cuba which includes 15 municipalities, from *Habana Vieja* (the historical centre) to further sub-urban areas. There is no official statistics about the number of *casa particular* and *paladar* located in Havana, anyway in **Table 1** is possible to see the data of *cass particular* on the national level, with the distinction between the allocation for international tourism (paying in CUC) or domestic tourism (paying in CUP).

**Table 1: Cuba hotels and B&B rooms (*casa particular*) (2015)**

<b>Total rooms</b>	86.268
<b>State sector</b>	64.231
<b>Private B&amp;B</b>	22.037
<b>International (CUC)</b>	15.946
<b>Domestic (CUP)</b>	6.091

Source: Feinberg, R. E., & Newfarmer, R. S. (2016). *Tourism in Cuba: Riding the Wave toward Sustainable Prosperity*. Brookings Institute, Latin American Initiative.

In **Table 2** are presented some interesting data on international tourism. Gastronomy is not the main Cuba attraction, but looking at the revenue from sectors, it has an important part on what Cuba can gain from tourists.

**Table 2: Cuba international tourism (2015)**

<b>International tourism presences</b>	3.524.779
<b>Countries of origin</b>	Canada Germany UK France

	Italy
	Spain
<b>Total revenue</b>	1 940 170,2 CUC
<b>Accommodations</b>	28,8%
<b>Gastronomy</b>	38,9%

Source: Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información (ONEI). (2016). “Turismo Internacional Indicadores seleccionados: Enero – Diciembre 2015”. Havana, Cuba. Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información.

The three areas of Havana that are taken in consideration are *Habana Vieja*, *Centro Habana* and *Vedado*. *Habana Vieja* is the oldest part of the city and the main core of tourist attraction. A large number of *casa particular* and *paladar* are placed there, offering the visitors a central location where to start their sightseeing in the city. *Centro Habana* is the adjacent neighborhood, which is also visited by tourists especially for their accommodations. Being in between of *Habana Vieja* and *Vedado*, is strategically positioned and affected by the presence of many tourists. *Vedado* is one of the more modern neighborhood of Havana, where the huge hotels of the pre-revolution period are still existing, and the nightlife of the capital offers many attractions here. Out of these areas, Havana is not so much experienced by tourist, therefore these neighborhoods became my only areas of interests.

## 4.2 Study design and approach

The research is an example of case study, aiming at exploring real-life phenomenon while analyzing a limited number of elements and their relationship in a specific context (Zainal, 2017). Case studies are dealing with questions on how and why things happen, favoring the research of contextual realities (Anderson in Noor, 2008). The nature of this study is explorative, and I adopted an interpretivist approach. In the interpretivist approach, the primary source of data are people’s interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understanding (Mason, 2002) of their actions, other actions, social and natural contexts (Blaikie in Mason, 2002). With this approach I am able to focus on the quality and depth of the data collected, with no interest in generalization.

## 4.3 Sampling

Considering the qualitative nature of my study, I used purposive sampling, where the selection for the sample is made according to the needs of the study (Boeije, 2009). The main actors engaged in my study were inhabitants of Havana. In relation to the focus of my study, the new entrepreneurs were the main actors that I needed to involve in my research. Therefore, managers/owners of *paladar* and *casa particular*, located in the three touristic area of Havana (*Habana Vieja*, *Centro Habana*, *Vedado*) have been interviewed. Apart from them, other

respondents have been chosen to have a better picture of the influence of private tourism-oriented food offer in the way locals relate with food (RQ 3). These other respondents are not working in the tourism food sector. They have been contacted through a snowball sampling and they have been complementing informal conversation that I had with locals during my stay. In qualitative research, it is always problematic to decide the sample size in advance. The theory-saturation is generally reached when, from the sample, a clear picture of what is going on is obtained and the data stop giving new insight on the social process observed (Mason, 2002). However, two clearer principles about sample size can be more useful: “the sample size should help to understand the process rather than representing the population and it should be a dynamic and ongoing practice” (Mason, 2002).

Table 3 shows an indication about the typology and number of people that I interviewed.

**Table 3: Sampling**

	<b>Casas Particular</b>	<b>Paladar</b>	<b>Other Habaneros</b>
<b>Number of Respondents</b>	7	9	6

The respondents of casa and paladar formed a homogenous group of people, linked by the common characteristic of being self-employed workers managing/owning a tourist-oriented *paladar* or a *casa particular*. The third group of respondents did not resemble the same request for uniformity, since they have been chosen for their complementary perspective on what is tourism influence of the food practices and identity in Havana. Locals not having access to CUCs, ex self-employed workers and a farmer are the respondents chosen for this group.

#### 4.4 Data collection

The four research questions address different research objectives, which is why different techniques have been developed to better gain a fully understanding of what I am studying. These techniques included: semi-structures interviews, informal conversations and observation.

In order to answer SQ1, I mainly used observation method, which I complemented with informal conversation and interviews. I spent two months within the area of Havana that was subject of my study. I was hosted in different *casa particular* in the neighborhood of *Centro Habana* and this gave me the possibility of living close by the life of my local hosts. Sometimes I had my meals at the *casa*, but most of the time I was eating outside, choosing for lunch a local *cafeteria* (simple local restaurant) and for dinner a meal in a *paladar*. Thanks to this full immersion, I could collect enough data to understand how the food offer in Havana is currently composed.

SQ2, SQ3 and SQ4 was answered by conducting semi-structured interviews. I reached the interviewees by mapping the casa particular and *paladar* located in the three areas of interest, and then I was visiting some of them until I could plan enough interviews. Other interviewees were identified by snowball sampling. These are some examples of the questions asked to the interviewees:

- How is food availability influencing your activity/menu?
- How food production is preparing for this kind of food demand?
- How Cuban identity is present in your menu?
- How is your activity influencing your (households) food access/consumption?
- How you see the current situation of gastronomy in Havana?

In a few occasions I was able to conduct mobile interviews, following the person doing groceries at the agro-markets and stores where he/she bought the needed products. A strength point of the mobile interview is its ability to explore people's behaviors and perception of the surrounding environment (Evans & Jones, 2011). Following a *Habanero* on his/her daily grocery at the agro-market was an example of how a mobile interview could offer more insight in the person experience of the place than a "static" interview. In this context, I preferred to not guide the interview with many structured questions, trying to let them choose what was valuable to say in that specific place and time.

#### 4.5 Validity, reliability and ethics

In her work, Bell (2013) shares the main difficulties that she encountered while conducting qualitative research in Cuba, trying to advise future scholars on how to appropriately deal with validity and reliability of their study. Being her fieldwork centered on interviews and participant observation, I can find similarities on the way I proceeded with my data collection. The major threats to validity laid on the restricted access to locations and confused authorization procedure, which consequently influence the access to interviewees (Bell, 2013). My access to the entrepreneurs was not problematic, as I accessed them in their workplace which is open to public. However, the lack of an academic visa precludes me the access to possible important key informants. About participants reliability, Bell found an unexpected availability on criticizing the government and its policies, so she felt free to offer her own opinions (at the end of the interview) to deeper stimulate the interviewee on the topic. I shared this opinion regarding the freedom that my responds felt in commenting the government actions, and I also choose to offer my perspective on the topics explored in the interviews, at the end of the conversation. On the researcher side, reliability might be threatened by the higher probability for researcher to attract disaffected people, which negative point of view on Cuban government could unbalance the impression on Cubans' opinions (Bell, 2013). Being my study exploring the challenges of these

new entrepreneurs, I was aware that their perspective would have include the government as active part of their reasoning. Within this context, their perception of the state would have been important for me. Triangulation of data it's a useful way to "reveal varied dimension of a phenomenon leading up to a layered and thick description of a subject under study" (Boeije, 2009), which I developed through the use of different methods (interviews, observation and informal conversations).

Following on Bell's clear statement of her positionality, I also needed to reflect upon my affinity with some socialist values and, especially my appreciation of Cuba as example of resistance to the hegemonic neo-liberal political economy. Moreover, I did not attempt to be neutral in the process of researching, since I recognized how my backgrounds and my ideas were part of me during the fieldwork. Having said that, I tried to follow Bell's advice for other researchers, to "question their prior assumptions and be prepared for unexpected difficulties, whilst wholeheartedly embracing the opportunity" (Bell, 2013).

Before every interview, I explained the purpose for the data collected to the interviewees and I asked them the consent to use the data. Since my study was also including participant observation, agreeing on consent with the people I was interacting with, it was more complicated. Therefore, I tried to reveal beforehand my role as researcher whenever possible.

## 5. Results

In this chapter findings are outlined based on the four sub-questions. Firstly, SQ1 is answered by the analysis of data mainly collected with observation. Secondly, SQ2 is amply explored with the analysis of new entrepreneurs' perceptions. To their challenges already identified, other have been added since they were considered relevant for the respondents. Afterwards, SQ3 and SQ4 are answered with the integration of data from new entrepreneurs and other respondents. Here, the influence of tourism food offer on locals' food practices and Cuban food culture is pointed out. Quotes have been inserted to support the analysis and, where possible, better stressed respondents' perspective.

### 5.1 Food offer in Havana

Today Havana present a much more variegated food offer scene than ever before, a fast development of the sector that followed the touristic boom of the last three years. The categorization of the eateries that has been made until now, simply defines *paladar* and state restaurants, plus the *casa particular* as complementary food service. During my stay I had the chance to recognize that many kinds of eateries developed in the last couple of years, recalling different styles and typologies of services, but all part of the private sector. But let's start looking at where the food offer is concentrated in Havana. Since I am focusing on the tourist oriented private sector, which is offering the greater space for gastronomy development, it has been relatively simple to define the area taken in exam: *Habana Vieja* (Old Havana), *Centro Habana* (Centre Havana) and *Vedado*.

*Habana Vieja* is the most touristic area of the city. The place is largely shaped by the sightseeing activities, the historical buildings have been restored in the last decade, and most of the people encountered here are indeed foreign visitors. Here are concentrated the majority of tourist-oriented *paladar* and eateries. *Casa particular* are also largely diffused, together with some prestigious hotels, while local housing seems to be concentrated at the margins of the area, especially in the south.

*Centro Habana* is a very fascinating neighborhood, because it offers a pleasant mix of real life and touristic feeling. At a first impression, considering the bad estate of buildings and street, and the scarce lighting in the night, tourists are generally disoriented. "It seems like if the place was just being bombed" I heard many tourists commented, and I initially had a similar feeling. To me, the place was looking like it had been recently emerged from the sea. A harsh decadence. What really stands out is the number of *casa particular* located in this area. It is very easy to spot them, because

of the distinctive sign that they put at the door and which is almost always blue<sup>1</sup>, meaning that the casa is offered in CUCs (to tourist). In almost every street is possible to find some of these signs, a phenomenon that expanded in the last couple of years. *Paladar* are significantly less here than in *Habana Vieja*, but it is interesting to notice that some of the most prestigious ones are here located.

*Vedado* is a very different quarter, that can be defined as the modern one of the three. Many important buildings and offices are here located, such as government, university, embassies and hotels. In this area is possible to find many *paladar* and *casa particular*, being the area of touristic interest.

Generally, tourists spend their stay in Havana moving between these three areas, where they have accommodations and meals. Regarding the accommodation, today the choice is still between the hotel, owned and run by the state or state plus foreign company, or the *casa particular*. *Casa particular* can offer different number of rooms, each one with a capacity of maximum three beds. Only a few *casa* in *Centro Habana* have rooms with bunk beds, choosing a hostel kind of service. Breakfast is always proposed to the client, while dinner is only in some cases propose as a service of the house, in others it is possible to offer if the client directly request it, even if not normally performed as a service. When tourists are looking for food outside, the choice is between different kind of eateries, even if for foreigner visitors there is the tendency to homogenize through some particular places. Defining the kind of eateries currently present in Havana is a difficult task, since in the last years many new kinds of businesses developed. Starting from the general distinction between state-run restaurant and private *paladar*, there is space for deeper analysis in regards of the second category. While state-run restaurant can have different range of price and quality of food, they do not differ so much in terms of type of service, being definable as classic restaurant service. Regarding the private *paladar*, these places have been evolving in different kind of eateries, which present diverse aims and style of service.

The classic *paladar*, which offer Cuban cuisine in a familiar setting, is still existing in Havana and it seems a highly successful format. These paladar are mostly located in *Habana Vieja*. The range of price is between 8 to 25 CUCs for a main dish, and the clientele is mostly composed by tourists, with few Cubans. Out of this typology of restaurant, there are many restaurants that are looking for another identity, which has a more international orientation. Here the dilemma. If *paladar* has been defined, by Cubans and by scholars, with that characteristics of familiar and classic place where the *Cubania* is represented, these other places would not be definable as *paladar*. Today *paladar* became a word that cannot include anymore all the private eateries, as also many locals suggested me.

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<sup>1</sup> When the casa is offered in MN, the sign would be red.



*Paladar is basically the Cuban term for defining a restaurant. But you use now the word paladar to identify more a typical restaurant. And since gastronomy here is always more internationalizing, there are other terms than paladar. (Eduardo)*

These new places are more properly definable as restaurants since they are not inspired by the same philosophy of the classic *paladar*. And these restaurants are offering different kind of cuisines: traditional, international, and fusion. However, I intend to keep the name of *paladar* also for these other restaurants, to practically stress the distinction between state-run and private eateries. In respect of the international ones, Habana knew a quick growth of international *paladar*, which is a new phenomenon compared to other countries. Italian places are common and numerous, but also Indian, Japanese, Iranian, Mexican, Russian, Greek and other foreign restaurant showed up. *Habaneros* are looking amazed at the opening of these *paladar*, which are distributed in all the three neighborhoods. The range of prices vary, but they mostly represent an offer which is addressing tourists and locals that have access to CUCs. Others *paladar* can present both Cuban and international dishes on the menu, and other are trying to develop a fusion cuisine, where the two elements combine. In terms of place identity, some *paladar* chose to become more similar to pubs, bars or other status appealing for foreign tourists. Some eateries are also definable as fast food, serving pizza, burgers, sandwiches and simple Cuban dishes, with a minimal service and a lower price compared to the other *paladar*, between 2 to 5 CUCs per dish. Here is more common to meet Cubans, mostly because of the lower price. A further option to eat is represented by the *cafeteria*, which are places normally frequented only by locals. These places are often located in private house, in a room where a couple of tables are arranged. The cook is normally the woman who lives in the house, helped by other relatives. The food is the most traditional one, there is not so much choice and the price are thought to be affordable for locals, being the main dish around 25 CUPs (1 CUC). *Cafeteria* are addressing local clients and tourists are almost never choosing to have a meal here. I was often eating in *cafeteria* for lunch, and I could understand why these places are not popular between tourists. The place does not have any indication or sign that clarify that is possible to eat there, and it looks far away from foreign standards of cleaning and hygiene. In addition, tables are shared between customers and the relationship between employees and client works in a different way than in a normal restaurant, where there is a sort of basic service that clients expect. What is interesting to notice, is that in these places is possible to find the same dishes that are offered in many *paladar*, sometimes with same quality level, and cost 1/10 of what is the price in the tourist-oriented eatery.

A gastronomy boom is perceived in Havana, which is described by the sector as very much promising for the next future.

*The private paladar you could count them within your hands' fingers. But now there are 800 restaurants here in Havana. Without mentioning the other provinces, so we are talking about an incredible evolution also in the numbers. (Eduardo)*

*It will grow dizzily, accelerating. There is a gastronomy boom now in Cuba, a boom. (Gerdardo)*

*I think is big, we can gain more but it's already a very good moment for gastronomy in Habana.  
(Mercedes)*

This boom it is affecting all the places that I had above described. The eateries diversify for kind of food offer, typology of service and being state or private managed. With my study, I went exploring only the *paladar* that are tourist-oriented or more popular between tourists and the *casa particular*, since they are part of this new movement related to entrepreneurship and Cuban cuisine.

## 5.2 The new entrepreneurs

In this section I explore the challenges encountered by the new entrepreneurs working with tourism-oriented food offer. From the challenges previously identified, food acquisition is the most relevant for the respondents. Challenges on eating habits and food preferences have been addressed in the next chapter, since these have been founded as linked to the way tourism influence local relation with food. However, other challenges have been pointed out by the respondents, representing elements perceived as crucial. New business culture, competition, contraposition with the state and instability are the challenges below presented.

### 5.2.1 New business culture

From the perspective of these new entrepreneurs, a change is taking place in the relation between workers and costumers. Service and attention to the client are becoming essential elements within the dining experience and workers need to be prepared to respond properly to the expectations of managers and the wishes of the clients.

*Don't think that if you are gaining money you can stay relax. You need to respond to people, and you need to respond to the people that have been recommended to come, and overcome their expectative. We try to please every client. (Yanet)*

*Working a lot on service, which is a theme that here we still have lot to recover, for the special period, the shortage, it got lost a bit the service, it actually got lost a bit. The attention, the efficiency, of me perceiving your necessities, before that you could ask me. And you remain pleased at the end. (Ernesto)*

These entrepreneurs express high expectations on how their employees should behavior at work, clearly distinguishing this way of working from what was normal to expect before in Cuba. Manuel explained that private sector is new and business culture was not existing, the change on looking at the restaurant as a property is slowly happening in the mind of people. It is this concept of property what, for Manuel and other managers, is shifting the minds of new workers for

having another approach on their job. Carmen refers to the moment when the state took control of every kind of business, as the cause for Cubans to having lost the meaning of property, saving, and respect for money. Today these meanings seem to be rediscovered by Cubans, through the possibility for them to work as self-employed. The business man takes over the state in the role of manager, and this is the stimulus for having new kinds of workers. Nevertheless, for some managers it is important to make a distinguish between their attitude towards their employees and what would be definable as a capitalism approach, even if the barrier seems to be blurred.

*Many people are looking at the private sector as capitalist, but I find that the capitalist is still different, you don't give to the capitalist what he wants, and he kick you out. Here, we try, or at least me in my personal case, to train the person before reaching the point of lose them. Training, teaching...is the idea of the family. Because you see the result. I don't gain anything on taking a person and kicking it out, I have to start again from zero. During a week, I can see if you are on the way I need you. (Ernesto)*

*The stimulus to work, I stimulate the worker, it gains more money, it put effort, more you sell more you gain money. There is a Marxist/Leninist principle, which says: to everybody, in relation to its job. If I work more, I have to gain more. If you work less, you gain less. There must be inequality, in all society, who works more gain more, who works less gain less, who doesn't work doesn't gain. In a society, capitalist as socialist, the labour force is fundamental and it needs to be stimulated. (Jose)*

Their attitude towards their employees, presented as a fair and respectful deal between the two parts, is undeniably aiming to what is the main goal for a business, gaining more. Becoming part of a family is the way for the worker to embrace that goal, despite the different salary that he gains compared to the employer. On the other hand, it is useful to remind how higher are the salaries for someone working in this sector and not for the state. Even economic inequality is above justified, here it turns around and becomes a measure of equality: to given work, given salary.

The 'perfect employee' figure seems to take shape and some ideal characteristics are identified. Carmen wish to have a worker which is honest, trustworthy, hard-working and punctual. And for her it is not easy to find people able to accomplish her wishes, she explained me that they often justified their delays with random excuses and they do not understand that working under her leadership entails different responsibilities than working for the state. The relationship between employer and employees need to be reconstruct, as the *Habaneros* seem to not fully understand how they should relate to their managers. In this way, the employees express a complementary element for the formation of this new class of entrepreneurs, which cannot succeed without working on the creation of a new class of workers. How to achieve that? Different strategies are adopted by the managers, there is freedom on choosing how to build up these skills. A freedom which we might see, stressing a bit the link, as another component of the 'liberalization' happening in the work sector.

*I did not choose people from schools, but from street, people that they did not have experience on this field. I could teach my way of working. Here is very different way of working than state. Here everything is equal, there is not strong hierarchy. (Manuel)*

*You must consider that my workers, nobody come from gastronomy, almost everyone is graduated, lawyers, architects, nobody, few, only two did gastronomy school. But our service is very familiar and informal, and it is appreciated. (Luis)*

Even if in other cases workers are coming in major number from gastronomy or hospitality school, it is worthy to reflect upon the mentioned statements. These employers express the need to have a staff sharing the same vision on how to work. In their views, coming from sector schools do not guarantee this kind of employees, or it is even avoidable since the students would be already shaped in a way which is not the most suitable for them, and which seems to be more reflecting the work philosophy of the state. Once again, considering the difference of salaries between state employees and tourism private sector employees, it is not surprising that former students of such different study backgrounds decide to work as waitresses.

In Havana, a proper work mindset is necessary to survive as a business. The new entrepreneurs feel they have to put extra effort to make things running well, and just a minor fault could make the difference, especially in the initial phase of the business. As Elena claimed, the life expectancy for a small business can be months, and not only because of competition but also for rhythm of work. She had a small *cafeteria* on the side of her activity as *casa particular*, but after few months she started to not sell as much as before, and she had to stop. Carmen also explains how much time she, and her husband, are sacrificing for their *casa*.

*Because this kind of business, if my husband is not here, I need to be here, and vice versa. So we never go out together, how could we have holiday together! 24 hours per day, because the few hours we can sleep are with one eye open and one closed. Even when you have people around that can help you in your work, this means a big responsibility, with society, with the client, because the name is not make in one day. Here, there is not excuse like I feel sick, I am not going to work for a reason, here you need to respond.*

For *casa particular* owners, being the business located in their home, the work schedule doesn't exist, and they express the feeling to be constantly caring about the business. Work days and weekends present the same duties, with tourists arriving also in the very late evening. Elena explained that on Sunday she can still go to visit her parents outside Havana, because her daughter can come to her place and take care of the *casa*. Once again it is shown how important is still for Cubans to rely on relatives and the collectivity. Elena also shares her experience of many years working as a *casa particular*, and the risks that this job entails. She installed a double external door in the house which is then closed it in the night, in this way she avoids that guests bring in other people, but it also means that they have to ring the bell and she has to open them at every time of the night. Opening the house to stranger means that these owners have to learn how to deal with different situations.

When walking around *Habana Vieja*, *paladar* and other touristic oriented stores are dominating the place. Moreover, some *paladar* workers are working directly in the street to catch the tourist who still haven't decide where to eat. All in all, it shows a situation where businesses seem to compete and try to offer something better or different, to become more attractive than others. Someone is directly referring to competition as characteristic of a new economic model that seems to take more space in the current Cuba, and it seems to offer a fresh air within a system hyper closed and centralized for long time.

*The private one offers everything fresh, because there is competition, competition is what you have. I mean, if you cook better than me, you sell more than me. Everyone fights to do something more. And this is very positive. this is capitalism. And I praise this system. (Daniel)*

Even though someone seems to strive for a systematic economic change, competition also shows how some of them are finding their way to succeed and others not. As previously stated by the *casa particular* owner, many businesses do not choose the right strategies and stop to work after a short period of existence. This is also the consequence of competition. So, looking at the competitors and what they offer, is very important for the new entrepreneurs, within a dynamic scenario that today in Havana is presenting new attractiveness for tourists. Now competition exists, and the new businesses must play with it.

*Where people should change a bit mentality is the theme of competition. We as Cubans are a bit afraid of competition. When I think that actually there is not competition. There is not a real competition. It can be that exist a competition because there are many restaurants, but it is not real...in Barcelona, one here, here, here and here, and that is real competition, one of the side of the other. But here you find only 2/3 and they are full. So there is space to work. Here they are going to open one in front, people are like worried. But this is good, it is very good. First because it gives ambient and life to this block, simply you do the same as before, you work good, good service, good food, punctual service...but the question need to be this, why they should come here if everybody else has the same. (Ernesto)*

For these new entrepreneurs, competition is promoting quality of service and goods, in a far system of rewarding the worthy workers. They look positively at competition since it contributes to a lively environment in the surrounding area and it is also a stimulus to improve themselves.

The relation employer-employee and the competition are two elements of the new business culture that is developing around the entrepreneurship in Havana, bring new challenges for the process of self-formation of the self-employed job. The last one, trying to become different from what the state represents.

### 5.2.2 Being non-state

When telling about their activity, the new entrepreneurs often compare themselves with the state and its activities, as hotels or restaurants. Many of them see their function as complementary of what is the state offering because their businesses are covering different needs that customers are expressing. With the tourism growth, there are new kind of tourists, so the offer need to take into accounts a larger variety of expectations from the tourists.

*Much more tourists now in casa particular, before they were students coming to study here in Havana, now they are tourists that come to visit the city and they want to experience the Cuban, meet the Cuban, so they prefer the casa to hotels. And prices here are much cheaper than hotels. (Juan)*

*The difference is not much, the hotel worked based on something, we worked based on something else. But the objective is the same, offering Cuban food and international food, with higher or less quality, but the objective is the same. (Alejandro)*

*Look, I don't think we compete with the state restaurants. Because, you should already know that in the guidebooks, what are mentioned are all paladar. The state restaurant is not there. In the guidebooks what is shown to foreigners coming to Cuba, are casa particular and paladar. People talk a lot in TripAdvisor, people look at reviews, they come here and ask you that plate showing you a picture. And we do it trying to make it very similar, and we pleas you. In other places, like in the state ones, they would say "no, this one we don't do it anymore". (Yanet)*

The distinction they see between them and the state own restaurants and accommodations, is at the basis of the way they work. It is defining what they are aiming for, which is not only characterized by the wish of making profit, but there is an interest of offering a high-quality product and service. The large coverage that traditional and social media are giving to these new options for tourists, is seen as a proof of the good work that the new entrepreneurs are doing in Cuba. Tourists seem to directly express to the private, the negative experience they had with the state.

*In state-run restaurant, workers are not paid enough, so they happen to steel food from there. If there is a chicken, they say "ok let's take one piece each and bring it home." And this influence also the quality of the food and the place. (Mercedes)*

*Because the state, they are workers that gain a salary which is not enough, they are not interested in the quality, in what they offer. When private restaurants did not exist, gastronomy in Cuba was very bad. In all the world they were commenting that gastronomy in Cuba was bad. We started, the first privates, and through the years, gastronomy in Cuba moved forward. But not thanks to them, thanks to us. (Jose)*

It seems there are different factors that contribute to the lower level of quality of state run businesses. Workers are not motivated to work well, and they are directly or indirectly affecting the all activity. Between the new entrepreneurs and the workers, there is a different relationship which is, in first place, defined by recognizing their effort through a better salary. The difference between state and non-state seems to become more and more accentuated. The new

entrepreneurs do not only feel different in their way of working and managing their activity, but they also see themselves as the advocate for the rebirth of Cuban gastronomy. There is a sense of pride and responsibility on the words of these new entrepreneurs, who decide to take a direction which sometimes present some troubles, but it can also offer high gratification.

*An environment like this is very different than a state-run restaurant. For example, yesterday there was the birthday party of a 66-old woman and at some point we offered her a bottle of sparkling wine, she got emotional and she cried, and then we hugged each other's. Something like this would not happen in a state-run restaurant. (Mercedes)*

Different kind of relations are possible in these private environments, between all the actors involved. The customers is perceived as a guest that need to be treated in the best way possible, offering more than what it expect. The emotional moment is complementary to the food experience and it defines the character of the place, once again making distinctions between private and state places.

All in all, we saw how privates feel the need to distinguish themselves from the state, trying to give at different value to the motivations that move them for their work and their approach towards customers' needs.

### 5.2.3 Instability

The private sector in Cuba is relatively recent and the system itself is constantly reshaped by the laws that the government is promoting in the last two decades. A sense of instability is then perceived by these new entrepreneurs which often do not share the decisions that the government makes.

*Because it started like this, by time it is structuring all, at state level with laws and rules. So, sometimes, you know, you have an inspection, but it is not written anywhere. (Luis)*

*Now licenses are stopped. They are revisioning the legal operandi. I want to be optimistic and I think positive changes will come. It seems in February/March they will be back on giving licenses. Cubans are very creative and sometimes they are not completely in the legal side. (Mercedes)*

In their perspective, the state is still trying to define the legal framework in which these new private businesses can operate. The possibility of having businesses that try to elude some obligations is translated in the extra care that the state is putting on controlling these activities. However, this strict control exercised by the government is perceived as mining the job of good workers which respect the rules but see themselves negatively affected by this approach.

*In Cuba there is way of saying and the government always applied it. We say in Cuba pagan justos por pecadores (the innocents pay for the sinners). In Cuba, if we have 15 people working and one person makes a mistake, it is very easy for the government to say: now it is forbidden for everybody. And should not be like this. You must punish that one. Put a fine. Do not punish everybody. In Cuba it has always been like this. (Jose)*

It seems there is an attempt to generally control a system which is changing fast and need quick responses. And the consequence is that there is not trust on the action of the state, the new entrepreneurs interpret its measures as damaging and unfair. As Luis suggests, the starting of the private sector is a process that the government is still studying, so sometimes it responds by giving something and later by taking out something else. It is trying to understand how it should be regulated and supervised as a rising sector. This lack of knowledge in relation to what characterized the sector is denounced as the major problem that new entrepreneurs have to face, not feeling supported by the state, but rather an obstacle to their prosperity.

*We need to see how it's going to be, it seems to me the government has very little experience with the private things, they do not have knowledge, if not they won't do many things that they intend to do. We need to see if they will stimulate this work, or if they will compromise it. I think they have no experience at all about this, and it does not interested them, because in 22 years, that I kept working here, to me never they asked me, as you are doing here, how is your job, which are your objectives, I could not transmit them my experience because they are not interested on it. (Jose)*

The new entrepreneurs look with uncertainty to the next future. The government seems not able to communicate with this sector, missing to understand how the promoted measures are affecting these activities. The lack of communication shows, in the eyes of the private, a lack of interest in how they work. Hoping for a change in the approach the state is adopting, is what they can only do for the moment.

The feeling of instability came back various times with several respondents, showing a shared experience on what seems to be a characteristic of Cuba economy and society. This instability is not only due to internal dynamics of the country but is also a result of international politics. United States have still a large influence in what is happening in Cuba, even more today when the country is crossing this transition phase. In my daily conversation with *Habaneros*, I could understand how highly appreciated was the ex-president Obama and its politics of opening towards Cuba. But today, with Trump, the situation is different, and people look again at U.S. with concern. For these new entrepreneurs the effects of his politics are evident, and tourism was directly affected by it.

*Last year, two years and three years ago we had the boom of American tourists and we worked very well. This year we had a huge down in the summer, especially for the arrival of Trump in the U.S. and its crazy politics. He said to Americans that if they go to Cuba they cannot stay in state-run hotels, because in that case they would violate the embargo. Therefore, Americans say: where we go? Then also tour operators are*



*told that if they sell something related to...they can also be subjected to fines. This cause that American tourism, but not only Americans, also European market had a huge down because of repercussions of what is happening in U.S. (Eduardo)*

The origin of the problem is political, and this is also recognized by Cubans. The consequence of Trump politics is hitting the tourism sector in a moment that would be instead favorable and promising. With Obama, the new entrepreneurs had expectations, and these are now challenged by the recent measures thought to strategically weaken Cuba emergent economy.

*And it's a year that Trump did this thing to not leave Americans coming with cruise ships, thing for Cubans that are cuentapropistas (self-employed), became very difficult because you are not selling as you expected, predictions were others, we didn't gain as we spent. I think that if Trump will end its politics, Cuba will be the paradise of the international tourism. (Roberto)*

*The year that ended, the 2017, was very bad. The problem is that, reinforcing the embargo law, what happens is that it is more difficult that Cuba can buy all what it needs, all the import necessities, from food to tools, all what a country need to work fine [...] Moreover, other countries have fear, I am thinking about South America, because if it might happens something, everything become a bit more bothersome. (Maria)*

*Habaneros* feel threatened by the new Trump era, even more the ones that were directly benefitting from the warming of the relations between the two countries. The year 2016 is celebrated by these new entrepreneurs as a tremendous year in terms of arrivals and visibility, and everything was well boding for the following year. Therefore, some Cubans decide to make some investments, adjusting the house to rent some rooms or opening a *paladar*. However, the year 2017 did not go as people expected, and many new entrepreneurs complained the little gain compared to the big expenses they took charge of. Apart from taking these unpopular measures, Trump was also linked to a negative propaganda that *Habaneros* referred to the period post-hurricanes. The hurricane Irma strike the country in September 2017, causing damages in the island and in Havana. The sum of damages is perceived by these entrepreneurs in a different way than what was represented on the media. As Eduardo told me, on the media you could heard that the hurricane destroyed everything, services were in poor conditions, there was no food, it was probable to get poisoned with water, and there was no safety. For him, it was an incredible anti-Cuba propaganda, and all this had a huge impact on tourists' wishes to visit Cuba.

*Now Havana should be full of tourists, but there has been the hurricane, Donald Trump, which was trying to sell Cuba as a shabby country, which it is completely false. You see it, it is everything working here. He directly says to Americans to not travel to Cuba. The attack was direct. At this time of the year, it was super crowded. (Gerdardo)*

The fact of being Havana much less crowded than the past 2/3 years, was confirmed by all respondents and other informal conversation I had. During Christmas time they recognized an improvement with a slow increasing of presences, a trend that they hoped could continue in the next months.

State reforms, external political relations and natural disasters are some of the elements that contribute to the perception of instability that the new entrepreneurs feel. Out of these, food acquisition represents the core of the problem for the new entrepreneurs.

## 5.2.4 Acquisition

In Havana there is abundance of stores, markets and other places selling food products. The neighborhood of *Centro Habana* is the one presenting more selling points, a logical consequence for being the densest populated of the entire municipality (ONEI, 2016). For a tourist, it is very hard to understand where to go to find the needed product. This because some stores are clearly oriented to locals and do not seek for foreigner customers. It is obviously the case of the *bodega*, where Cubans can get the monthly supplied products for extremely cheap prices. One time it happens to me to enter in one of these *bodega*, when I was looking for a bakery. I saw they were selling bread, so I asked how much for it, but they replied saying that it does not have price for me, I could give how much I wanted. It was clear that they were not often serving tourists, and it is probably not legal. These places are very far from looking like stores, and the same is valid for some shops that sell products like rice, beans and cans for CUP prices. *Agromercado* are more accessible for tourists, prices (in CUP) are exhibited so it is easy to buy what is needed. *Centro Habana* is definitely presenting the highest concentration of *agromercado*, complemented by the street vendors that walk the neighborhood streets selling vegetables and fruits. What is more familiar to foreigner's eyes, is the CUC shop, or '*la shopping*'. This store is selling imported products, from food to electronics and house tools. The prices are displayed in CUC, even if it is possible to buy in CUP.



Figure 2 - An agromercado in Centro Habana

It is one of the places where water bottles are sold, an important resource for tourists, but also for locals working with tourists. *Habaneros* are looking within this spectrum of places to find what they want to cook in their kitchen, and the same places are visited by owners and managers of *paladar* and *casa particular*. The lack of a wholesale market forces these businesses to turn to the *agromercado* for the needed products. Everyday fresh products are needed, as Luis explains, so they go for a round in the *agromercado* to

buy vegetables and fruits. Pork is also sold in *agromercado* and the price is in CUP. For the other products, CUC shops are a required stop. The *organoponicos* (urban vegetable gardens) represent another place where quality and variety of products is higher than in markets or stores. When asking if they were an option for the eateries's grocery, people indicated them as an excellent option in theory, but complicated in practice because of the location. As Yanet explains, most of them are placed in other parts of the city, so only by bus or cars would be possible to reach them, and this means a not sustainable cost, also in terms of time.

*Paladar still buy in the minorista (retail market), they are in process of opening a mayorista (wholesale market) so we can have a more centralized access to the products, but this is still not a reality. (Mercedes)*

*In the agromercado, you go in the morning and you see people with a list, buying stuff that you see it's not for a house. They come with a bike taxi. They buy it there. For them it's also not cheap. (Elena)*

Not having access to a wholesale market is perceived as a main problem, and it creates a dependency on places like *agromercado* and stores which the first function is to provide products for the population, not for the business activities. Difficulties are also reflected in the amount of time that is required to get the needed products, since different places needs to be visited every day. For this reason, another self-employed figure developed in Cuba and it became a useful service for *paladar* and *casa particular*: the *subministrador* (supplier).

*We have a 'messenger', a guy with a license that go do shopping for us, he comes in the morning, we organize the shopping, we give him the money. (Mercedes)*

*There are people that, I don't know if they are legal or not, that become subministrador of places like this. Little restaurant, cafeteria, that have their own subministrador. I have this man, which is my subministrador, the one who buy. I say, I need a can of coconut sweet because I want to make the dessert, and he goes to buy it. But I also have the general subministrador, as I am calling them, that if I need prouder milk, fish...(Carmen)*

In the complex web of food access in Havana, it seems necessary to have a trustworthy person with time and skills to acquire all what is needed. Considering that the black market is also a resource for food products, the intermediary is even more strategical for completing the wishing list provided by *paladar* and *casa particular*. In Cuba, social network are still an important source of food and having a person moving through the different levels or this unofficial food system is suggested to be a good way to overcome the challenges that food accessibility presents in Havana. Another way of accessing products was revealed by some interviews, being the *camiones* (trucks). These *camiones* are managed by farmer cooperatives and come to the proximity of markets around evening, when they sell the products to the privates that the next day will resell them at the *agromercado*. For eateries, it is an opportunity to get cheaper products.

*Many times, the privates come to the camiones and there they get products even cheaper. All paladar generally, that I know, also the ones of excellence here in Havana Centre. All these people buy there. These*

people have a buyer, a person that is in charge of buying all the products, and they are getting it from there, not from other places. And they are fresh products. (Daniel)

Maybe they also have direct contact with someone. Because you know in the night they come with the camiones here close to the agro market, if I would have a paladar or a cafeteria, I would directly be in contact with the people of the camion without intermediary. To buy directly form the camiones. Smarter people do like this. Because of all these shops that started, the ones that resist are just a part. (Elena)

Acquiring products from the *camiones* is close to a form of direct acquisition from the producers. For now, the new entrepreneurs interviewed were perceiving the possibility of directly buying from producers positively but recognizing how it is not a common practice. It seems there is also some confusion on what is legally allowed or not, due to the high number of reforms that the government promoted in the recent years. Nevertheless, some entrepreneurs are exploring this possibility and they can already see some outcomes, complementing what is available in the market.

We started to define and look within all the range of products, we went changing supplier, we identified every supplier with that raw material where we have better quality and better treatment, so with one



Figure 3 - A sign at the entrance of a paladar that show how some products are fresh and directly acquired from a farm

supplier we have all vegetables, which needs a delicate transportation, lettuce, chard, parsley, all these herbs that need a delicate conservation and treatment, and then the agromercado products like yuca, malanga, bonyato, pumpkin, coconut, it is something that we can acquire in the agromercado. And then the CUC shop, where we acquire what is chicken, the meat, the beef meat, fish...for pork, which is one of our more consumed and sold product, we have defined 2, 3 supplier that kill the animal and the next day they bring it to us. It is a cycle, the freshest possible. (Antonio)

The shops where you have most of the products in CUC, where you find pasta, peeled tomatoes, oil, and for this kind of things we can't avoid referring to the market. But about meat, vegetables, let's say that we have the 80% guaranteed by our fields, and the rest 20% we buy it at the agromercado. (Eduardo)

No, we don't have direct producers, hopefully we would have direct producers. But we don't have them. We have always to go to the agromercado, the common one for all population, and some shops which are expensive. (Yanet)

Becoming (partially) independent from the market is a winning strategy in Cuba, even in Havana where most of the food produced in the island is available. Some entrepreneurs chose to acquire a piece of land

where growing some food, especially what they defined as *gourmet* products such as rucola, cherry tomatoes, herbs which would be extremely hard to find in other ways, and impossible on a daily basis.

Eduardo own two pieces of lands, one for vegetables and herbs and the other one for animal products. Apart from providing him with high quality products, these places became also a tourist destination. Through a tour operator, he sells the tourist experience of spending one day in the countryside of Havana, visiting the two farms and having a lunch in a restaurant located there, where food is prepared with the locally grown products. This kind of tourist experience is relatively new, he confessed, and he also told me about being one of the first paladar



Figure 4 - The subministrador is loading the car with the products he is going to sell to Havana paladar.

having a farm that provide him the products. Ariel, a farmer, is supplying food for around 30 *paladar* in Havana. Its organic farm is also located in Havana countryside, and every couple of days a contracted *subministrador* is going to the city with a car overcharged of fresh and variegated products. He will do the round of all the *paladar*, since they do not have a commercial spot in the city, providing them with products that will be unobtainable other ways.

*It's logic that in the restaurants, hotels, places that have a higher food culture, and have larger acquisitive power, these vegetables go there. It doesn't mean that they are taking out from Cuban table, it means that there is segment of the production that is going to this market niche. (Ariel)*

As any other farmer, Ariel is also selling part of his harvest to state enterprises, who dispatch it to institutions and state organization, such as hospitals, schools, army and others. Thanks to the good work of Ariel, this high quality and variegated food can reach the local society and he hopes he can show to the government how self-employed workers can contribute to the socio-economic welfare.

All in all, the new entrepreneurs are trying to find new ways to approach the market to satisfy their needs. The lack of a wholesale market force them look for alternatives, like directly connecting with producers or use the informal networks of suppliers. Looking at the availability and variety of products, challenges are present but there is also space for opportunities.

## 5.2.5 Availability and variety

As a foreigner, when entering a shop in Havana, I was always feeling surprised by what I could (not) find. Entering in a CUC store, the closest store to a supermarket, it is a kind of shocking experience at first, for someone like me who is living in Europe. Shelves were filled with just a few range of products, sometimes even one or two. And someday it was just an empty shelf, so for instance I was not sure if that day I would have found water bottles or not. Being the CUC stores visited by locals and entrepreneurs, the availability of products is a sensitive issue which all the respondents mentioned. And not only the CUC stores are involved, because also markets and other forms of food acquisition suffer of this problem. When I asked which kind of products were the most difficult to find, I had many different answers, pointing out different needs but also a general situation of uncertainty in relation to food availability.



Figure 5 - The shelf of a main CUC store

*Here, many times is also difficult to find national products, for example today the Crystal beer, we have two main beers the crystal and bucanero, I don't have it! It is a continuous, in the morning we go around the city for many shops and sometimes simple things missing, like toilet paper. [...] Until 2 years ago, beers easy to find, I had bottle beers, now many bars so these products that are the main products for them...beers it is difficult, then let's not talk about fish and shrimps, these things that we don't have now in the menu because...Well today I found toilet paper and a bit of fish so we will offer fish, but... In the last 2 years it became more difficult to reach it. (Luis)*

Searching around for products become a difficult task for these entrepreneurs, which often, as Mercedes explains, are relying on the capacities of their *subministrador* to reach the needed products. As Juan suggested me, the growth of *paladar* and *casa particular* is a possible contributor to the difficulty of finding some basic products, especially considering how these activities are mostly concentrated in the three touristic neighbourhoods of Havana.

*As a chef you need to 'jump through hoops' to bring a decent product on your table, the problem is the market which is poor. (Eduardo)*

Having more continuity in the food offer is a common wish for people working in the sector.

*And me as private, if I could ask to the state sector, I would ask that it could help a bit the private one, in relation to the offer, that there will not be lack of things, that when I go out looking for a banana, that I can find that banana, doesn't matter the price because I have the necessity and I take it, but that there are the products, that do not lack, this is very important to run a restaurant. If I could say something would be this, that it could maintain a stable offer. (Yanet)*

Business needs relate with customers' needs, this is what the new entrepreneurs are learning. There is a menu, dishes need to be prepared and served every day and missing something could negatively influence the client experience, which is the first concern for a business. In this aspect, everybody is necessarily paying attention to what is available and, once considered that, is finding the best way to respond with its food offer. Seasonality of products is another important element regarding the availability of food. Indoor agriculture is not developed in Cuba, and even if the climate is quite stable during all year, there is still a seasonal rhythm and difference between dry season and rainy season. In *Casa particular*, where fruits and vegetables are dominating the breakfast tables of tourists, it is easy to see the alternation of seasonal products. As Elena explained me, in a period of the year she is offering tomatoes and *mamey*, while in another time mangos and avocados. Cubans generally perceived the seasonality of products simply as a fact, since it has always been the case and it is normal to adapt and cook based on what the season is offering. However, someone is seeing the potential of a continuous availability of these products, in terms of food offer. For Eduardo, more than a matter of climate, the problem is structural, and it could be possible to organize a productive agriculture the entire year, for instance by building greenhouses or structures to repair products from the rain. The market is depending on the products available on that period of the year, and consequently eateries are also dependent on what is the food offer.

*Because if it is not season, if there is not that product in the season, I cannot offer you what you wish, what you would like to eat. For example, if you like avocado, but in this period, there is not. So, this is shocking a lot the tourists. (Daniel)*

Tourists' expectations become an important element to take into account and being able to satisfy that expectation is a mission that the new entrepreneurs feel they must accomplish. During my stay in Havana, an episode was told to me that at first I identified only as peculiar and later I realized that it had actually a huge impact on these businesses. What happened is that the hurricane Irma highly damaged the farms dedicated to eggs production, breaking the roofs of the burns where the chickens were located. Animals were not only killed but also shocked for the accident and they were not producing more eggs. A curious accident like this, had an enormous impact on the amount of eggs available in the market, being a problem for all the population, which see eggs as the most affordable animal protein. In addition, it creates a big issue for *casa* and *paladar*, being eggs a common product consumed by tourists. Roberto explained me that he could not serve omelettes for a long period and even if they later appeared, the prices were much higher than before. Elena found a solution, going every two weekends at her parent's place, a village out of Havana where was possible to find eggs. She was buying several boxes that could

last enough for her and the guests. Carmen, managing a *casa* that hosts more than 10 guests per night, confessed me that she had a very hard time because of this eggs shortage.

*Today there are eggs but very expensive, at 5 CUC the carton. But I need to maintain my service, so I'm not gaining but I am maintaining the service. But the first days, I remember, with the hurricane, there were not eggs anywhere. So I had to find alternatives, I was serving hot dogs sausages, people were looking at me, and this? I was saying, this is what we have, sausages or nothing. Or I was buying a mortadella of chicken, and I was putting it, it's not eggs but it is protein. Someone was eating it, other no, but I was saying there are not eggs, I cannot do anything. So, eggs dishes were not prepared, and desserts, that almost all have eggs, I could not make eggs dessert, so I was doing arroz con leche (rice pudding) which doesn't have eggs, or fruit jam, I needed to find solutions. I could not do anything empanizado (breaded), like the fish fillet that I make it breaded, I made it natural in the grill. Finding solutions and adapting on how you find products at the market. [...] It has been difficult actually, because I remember that there were not! No eggs! and I thought what I'm going to do! Something that is so basic! Still today it's a problem, because it's expensive and we are buying it in the black market, and it's a risk. Because there is not. It's so expensive. (Carmen)*

Having to buy eggs in the black market sounded very odd to me, but it well describes which are the difficulties of the food system to properly satisfy the population needs, which are now more than ever integrated by the needs of tourism sector. The sincere and deep concern Carmen had in that period, shared by other *Habaneros* working in the tourism sector, has to say a lot about the responsibility role that these entrepreneurs feel in relation to their customers.

Even if Havana is suffering in terms of continuity of food offer, what seems to receive a more positive opinion is the variety of food that nowadays is possible to find in the city. In CUC shops, especially the few big ones that recall a shopping mall, there are products imported from different parts of the world, such as pasta, sauces, cheeses, olive oil, chocolate bars and many cans products like olives, peppers and others. Some *agromercado* are also increasing their variety, and farmers are producing new products. *Paladar* and *casa* are taking advantage of this increased choice of products, using new ingredients in their kitchen and enlarging the food offer.

*The offer also went growing, for example before you were going to a market and you found pork meat, now you go and you find pork, and ham, and mutton, leaver, many options. (Carmen)*

*That is one of the best agromercado of Habana, it's even considered gourmet agromercado. You can find kiwis, cauliflower, all vegetables [...] all kind of fruits, included exotic fruits, mamey, guanabana are there clean, they are already packaged in nylon, like in Europe. It's already prepared, pre-elaborated. (Maria)*

*You start to find thing that before were unimaginable, now there are people producing some things, or make you some bread that before...for example, ice cream they start to open, the development is bringing on this growth of the sector. (Luis)*

The entrepreneurs recognize that the market is offering a larger variety of products, and they see it as a logical response to the development of the food (tourism) sector which is pushing the



borders of what is possible to prepare and serve in Havana. Farmers and eateries are then linked and support each other on growing in new directions. Alejandro showed a lot of passion when he told me about the nice products that farmers are harvesting today in Cuba. He brought me to his *paladar* kitchen to show me the products he just collected in the morning, fresh vegetables that included rucola and other variety of salads. Some years before his paladar was awarded as one of the best restaurants in the Caribbean

*And with the resources that I had, in that time, and now it's double, it's triple, and I was able to do that, and now that there is everything! there is everything! there is everything! In Cuba we have the condition for working. In each part of the world many things exist, but our bread is hard, and we have to eat it as each country eats its own. (Alejandro)*

What Alejandro transmit me, was the idea of facing the issue, taking the maximum advantage of what is available and building something from that. Finding alternatives became a sort of karma, which I have heard again and again from most of these entrepreneurs.

On one side, availability of products is still a significant obstacle to what is the satisfaction of the needs of locals, entrepreneurs and tourists. On the other side, variety of products is increasing and offering new opportunities to develop Cuban cuisine.

### 5.3 Havana foodways between tradition and innovation

In the following section we see how the challenges above identified are forcing the food offer to find alternatives also in the practical realization of dishes, a process of adaptation that have been always part of Cuban recent history. I also explore how locals and entrepreneurs are building the identity of their places, where there are indications of both tradition and projection to something new. The role of the private food offer in rescuing Cuban traditional is indeed pointed out, and later I am discussing the influence of this businesses on what are local's food habits and desires.

#### 5.3.1 Finding the way

Finding the way to overcome the scarcity of products is something that every Cuban learned and practices during the daily life. Cubans went through period or hard crisis, as the unfortunate 'special period', and they learned how to find alternative solutions at everyday problems. Preparing and eating food have been some of the activities more largely affected by the condition of scarcity. Even today, when there is a larger variety of products, people are ready to deal with the unstable offer of the shops and they developed some strategies to solve it.

Habaneros conducting *paladar* or *casa particular* are experiencing more pressure on trying to overcome the defect of the market. Carmen told me that buying big quantities of food can help, but it cannot be done with fresh food like vegetables or fruits. Fish is one of the product which seems to present more difficulties in terms of availability and quality. In this respect, Roberto exclaimed, with fake astonishment, “how is possible that Cuba is an island and do not have a big variety of fishes”. In fact, the fish fillet served in *paladar* seem to be always of the same kind, and, apart from that, what is normally cooked is only lobster and shrimps. In CUC stores is possible to find frozen fish and shrimps, but the quality is low, the price high and it might be missing from the shop. Lobsters are present in all the most touristic *paladar*, but it is not always clear where they come from, since they are not largely commercialized and one of the cited source was the black market. Some of the interviewees were acquiring fish from CUC shops, but the majority told me to have built relationship with fishermen, who can bring them fresh fish every day.

Yanet explained me that, once she heard the hurricane was coming, she asked his *subministrador* to bring her more fish, so she could freeze it and serve it the next weeks. Eduardo took another approach to overcome the fish problem. He created a fishing organization, he bought a boat and he has someone going to fish directly for him. In this way, he is legally allowed



Figure 6 - A fish grill dish in a *casa particular*

to transport big quantities of fish and he has always a fresh product to serve at the table.

The menu creation is another process which shows how much is important to adapt for offering a continuous quality of service. Maria, for instance, when explaining me about her problem on finding high quality beef, she confessed to not serve beef at all, so she does not complicate things for her. Luis told me that they chose to have a simple menu which can guarantee a continuity for the entire year. Even in my experience, it happened that in some *paladar* I went, a few dishes were not available that day. Being able to properly work the raw material can also contributed at the creation of a sustainable menu. This was suggested me by Yanet, who explained how she creates from the same piece of beef different dishes in the menu, such as *mignon*, *fillet*, *ropa vieja*, *picadillo* (minced meat) and *vaca frita* (fried beef). In this way, her menu looks extended, but the list of ingredients is not. As already mentioned, the products that are missing are different, so it is very important to know how to improvise with other ways or to explain the client the situation. Mercedes has also an extended menu and sometimes cheese, chicken or pork cannot be find. She explains to the clients and offer them alternatives within the menu. Someone else look at the need

of changing menu as an opportunity to be creative and innovative. Ernesto gave me the example of Spain, where there is a big trend of changing, even completely, the menu for each season, or between lunch and dinner. In his *paladar*, he has a fixed menu with the dishes that is possible to offer the entire year, and then a blackboard where he writes what is available extra menu, depending of what he finds fresh in that period. For entrepreneurs that developed a direct link with food production, through agreements with farmers or having their own farm, is easier to plan a sustainable menu.

*It is a logistic choice, I never had a day where something was missing. I create relations with producers and they give me what I need. I still buy in agro-markets and CUC shop. The menu was design with the idea that I could always get the products in the shop. I am working with three farms and they provide me also seeds that you could not find here. (Manuel)*

The problem of food availability is still perceived but there is today space for adapting a positive attitude also in terms of business opportunities. Being creative is a celebrated quality within Cuban kitchen, a creativity that come from necessity and is now fostered by the will of taking a role in contributing to Havana gastronomy offer. The role of chefs is not far from what the Cuban families had to deal with since long time.

*So, women, already they are not women, because our women, our sisters, they are magicians. And when they enter in the kitchen, sometimes you feel like saying "god, what now?", and they create, and they do something like, wooww! And how is the plate called? I don't know: 'hurry up, that I am hungry'. I am saying how necessity sometimes force you to improvise, your imagination to fly. (Raul)*

The same creative effort is experienced by cooks that have to take in Havana.

*To summarize, if you want to have a right idea of what is Cuban cuisine, you have to start thinking that the chefs, the cooks, are working in a tropical surrealism of cuisine. Because they make amazing things, without...without! To give that little taste, the secret of the cuisine are the different flavours of food, right? And when many things are missing [...] Cubans are good in the cuisine, really. (Roberto)*

After all, the new entrepreneurs, in their research for a solution to the precarious food availability, are developing a creative approach which has been at the base of local's strategy to survive periods of scarcity.

### 5.3.2 *Paladar* and *casa particular* today

Cuban traditional cuisine is protagonist in the kitchen of Havana eateries. Also the tourist oriented ones, show the interest of working with Cuban products, recognizing the importance of transmitting an idea of tradition and identity to the guests. Jose is resolute on avoiding selling

imported things, proudly offering national rums, beers and soft drinks instead of whiskey, coca cola or others foreign products.

*I always think that who come to Cuba, come to find a mojito, a cuba libre, a Cuban rum, because whiskey they have in their country. (Jose)*

This thought is often shared and justified by the popularity that both *paladar* and *casa particular* are knowing in term of quality of food. Luis has a menu composed by traditional dishes of Cuban cuisine, he told me that clients coming there already know what they will eat, because of TripAdvisor reviews, so they are always satisfied. Antonio agreed on the importance to give the best expression to Cuban food, because that is what the tourist is looking for, when coming to Cuba. Keeping the *Cubania* in the plate is felt as a priority and a winning strategy.

*I always wanted that the restaurant could be very Cuban, even though we offer also international food and the foreigners are the ones that visit it more, more than Cubans because prices are not for the Cuban wallet. We wanted to maintain the Cubania, maintaining the Cuban dishes: ropa vieja, vaca frita, arroz a la Cubana. (Yanet)*

Obviously, there are different degrees on how much the menu is Cuban, depending of the *paladar*. *Casa particular* are much more oriented to offer the typical Cuban dish, due to the simplicity of the preparation and choice of ingredients. Moreover, tourists seem looking for things that are traditional in Cuba, eaten in Cuba by the Cuban family, as Jose told me, so there is nothing better, to fully experience a Cuban house, than traditional homemade food.

Eating Cuban and meeting the Cuban. This seems to be the key of what identify, since the beginning, *paladar* and *casa*. As Elizabeth suggested me, tourists often decide to eat in restaurants that are typical Cuban, because they want to see the culture, sharing space and time with Cubans. For some entrepreneurs, having Cuban customers is seen as a marketing strategy, as they would suggest that the place is real Cuban. This is what Gerdardo explained me, why he tries to keep the place affordable for Cubans.



*Figure 7 - A traditional Cuban meal offered in a casa particular. There are beans, rice, chicken, viandas and salad*

*How good you would feel entering here and finding half place with Cubans and half with tourists. Because after a bit you will talk together and later drinking together. And you are interested in chat with a Cuban, and he will ask you about your country. It is very important. So, having Cubans at your place, it would give a different sound. (Ernesto)*

But what does it mean affordable for Cubans? For sure we are talking not in terms of what is the Cuban salary of a state worker. Cubans frequenting these *paladar* can be people working in the tourism sector, or in other profitable self-employment position, or having relatives abroad that send them remittances. Even if these tourist oriented *paladar* are not reachable for all Cubans, the menu present prices that can vary substantially and the intention is to be attractive also to Cubans. Yanet has prices that start from 3 CUCs and go until 15 CUCs, she gives the choice to the client if ordering a simple dish of spaghetti, or a fancier lobster. But her goal is to make feel everybody comfortable with the price and satisfy for the food. Luis is also intentionally keeping prices low compared to other tourist oriented *paladar*, his will of having Cubans is related to the origin of the place, which was first born for Cubans and only later successfully addressing tourism. In many occasion, these entrepreneurs seem to be spontaneously interested in offering quality food and experience to their compatriot. Mercedes, for instance, explained me that they have an accessible menu because they wanted to address the national market, also because Cubans are present all year. Being tourism also a phenomenon related to seasonality, opening the place to both locals and visitors it is also a strategy to keep working well during the low tourist season.

Treating the client like a friend is perceived as part of what can be the ideal Cuban experience in a *paladar*. As Luis explained me, the attempt is to cut the distance between waitress and client, favoring the communication, and an attention to the decorations recalling a Cuban house. Entrepreneurs perceive a shift in tourists' expectations and motivation, in relation to accommodation and food offer. Tourism is not anymore that tourism that was looking for hotel, told me Luis, they prefer the streets, the casa, and experiencing the local life. Same story for the *casa particular*. More and more tourists are preferring casa rather than hotel, and this is not only for money convenience, as Juan commented, but because they want to relate with the Cuban family. While at the beginning many guests were students coming to study in Havana, now tourists are choosing this alternative to the hotel. Carmen's casa has space for many people, and when it is full there is a big opportunity for guests to chat and exchange stories. The sense of familiarity is not only due to the Cuban family setting, but also to the proximity to the other guests. Carmen well pictured this atmosphere.

*Because here, internet is bad, so they cannot stay at the phone and they need to look at their eyes. We offer a place for them, which is the bar, it's a terrace, it's an improvised bar, it's something simple and improvised, where people arrive, chat and if they want to take a beer they take it and they can eat (Carmen).*

The informal setting is the preferred one of many tourists and being in a casa the contact with the guest is closer and friendly. Jorge told me that he likes to welcome guests with a mojito and then explaining them what they should or should not do in Havana. It is a different setting than a

hotel, because guests are welcomed in the house of the host, where the breakfast/dining room become place of exchange and intimacy.

But in Havana there is more happening today. The winning formula of *paladar* as a space where to meet and eat the Cubans has being slightly stressed by some of these activities, with the intention to provoke curiosity in other tourists. Some entrepreneurs are trying to make something unique in Havana food scenario, stepping out of the comfort zone of the Cuban stereotype *paladar*. That is exactly what Ernesto confessed me that he is trying to do with his place, surprising people that have a concept of Cuba based on stereotypical elements like *guantanamera* song and the *mulata* (mulatto girl), while Cuba is more than this, he enthusiastically confessed me. For him, the name *paladar* is far away from the concept of his place, which he developed more as a pub/ lounge bar. Music is a bit louder than in other restaurants, there is sometimes live jazz or a dj, and cocktails have a prominent role in the menu. The atmosphere in the place is indeed very different from what would be the typical Cuban *paladar*, it has a more international taste, and this returned also when Gerdardo explained me how he developed it, being abroad and taking inspirations from places he founded in Europe. A similar concept has been adopted by Antonio, who is also trying to create a place where to experience something alternative to what is the common Cuban *paladar*.



Figure 8 – The daiquiri cocktail, a symbol of Cuba cocktail tradition

*There is a movement, very interesting, where we can consider ourselves within the pioneers, of this movement which is the gastro-bar, which give lot of importance to the cocktail, and they accompany the food with a nice cocktail. So, it is a new concept which is appearing and it's the gastro-bar, basically the restaurant has lot of strength in the food and the bar is only a support, in this case, bar and kitchen act at the same level. And this is possible in Cuba because Cuba, in the old times, has been leader in cocktails, if you look at the cocktails in the world, many are Cubans, so this is something, is not only the rescuing of our food, but also of our cocktails. (Antonio).*

In his vision, the project of bringing something innovative, a place where cocktails have the same attention than dishes, is complementary to what is Cuban history in relation with food and beverage culture. Tradition and innovation. Some of these new entrepreneurs are showing the interest on looking back at what the Cuban heritage brought or left behind, and how these elements can be re-elaborated and assimilated in the present Havana food

scenario.

Having local customers is still considered important, as part of a business strategy. In fact, it is an element that contribute to identify the character of *paladar*. A character that is today also finding new ways of expressions, far from the stereotypes of Cuban tourism image.

### 5.3.3 Food across time

The 'special period' was often cited as a moment of real difficulties in terms of food availability. During that years, Cubans struggled to have enough food on the plate and this delicate situation had also consequences in what is the food heritage, and its transmission and maintenance. The lack of products and ingredients forced Cubans to change their diet, for long time they perceived that what they were eating was not corresponding to their wishes but to necessities. As Luis told me, there have been a couple of generations that have really lost big part of the culinary culture, for this products shortage that took place between the 90s and early 2000s. This translated in a loss of part of the culinary culture, as Ernesto commented, because older generations could not transmit their knowledge to the newer generations, which is the key for the homemade food preservation. At that time the situation was so critic that people were only trying to survive. Therefore, some traditional dishes disappeared and only recently they have been re-discovered. Some new entrepreneurs see the current moment as favorable for the revival of old recipes that got lost in the last decades, in a current situation that offer a larger variety of products. Alejandro told me that Cuba has been a gastronomy power in the years before the revolutions. Today a big part of what was forgotten is reconsider and developed again.

For some chefs this challenge is an enormous stimulus to be more creative. The traditional dishes can be also revisited, and they become something different. That is what Ernesto is aiming to do. He explained me that in his paladar he makes an incorporation of the modern with the already existent cuisine, developing a hybrid. He takes a traditional and well-known dish, and he switch some ingredients with others coming from other countries. The hybridity of this dishes is opening new frontiers in the current Havana food scenario, addressing the curiosity of guests that want to be surprised.

*For example, the tamal is something that more Cuban is impossible, what do I do? I turn it around, I wrap it in jamon serrano, with a chimichurri sauce. Look, Cuban tamal, Argentinian chimichurri sauce, and Spanish jamon serrano. What I'm doing is to make it a bit fusion. (Ernesto)*

Other paladar are also expanding their menu and including dishes that are not properly traditional, looking at what is cooked abroad and mixing ingredient of the tradition with others. Antonio for instance, is recognizing the value of Cuba being an island, preparing a rice dish with fish and seafood, instead of the traditional rice with chicken more familiar to many Cubans. Having foreigner visitors growing also means that the food offer need to take in consideration their preferences, prepare for that and accommodate their needs. As a consequence, more international food find place in the menu of paladar, complementing the Cuban dishes. Some places try to find a balance, as Yanet that for any kind of main dish that the tourist orders, is

serving as complements rice and beans. “It needs to incorporate the *Cubania*” she explained me, “in some moment they clash with the Cuban”.

How the interest in new ingredients and foreign products developed in the recent years in Havana? Many factors contributed to this opening of the gastronomy horizons undertaken by local cooks. An important change has been the possibility for more Cubans to travel abroad, due to a change in regulations and more financial availability owned by part of the population. Many of the managers I interviewed had travelled abroad, in Europe or U.S., and they were referring to this experience as source of inspiration not only for their work, but also for conceptualizing their vision of work. They claimed to have acquired a larger view on what are the potentials for Cuban cuisine in the current context. Ernesto even suggested me that the eateries that are now triumphing in Havana are the ones owned and managed by Cubans that left the island and then came back, with “another way of doing things”. Havana itself has also been destination for many international chefs that decided to start an eatery in the city, and others that have been invited to give classes to local cooks. Italian chefs are the most present in the city, many Italian restaurants opened, and this is also facilitated by the familiarity that Habaneros already have with Italian food. What Eduardo is noticing, is a movement in Havana that has its focus on gastronomy, there is more expertise and a broader view on what cuisine represents. Havana offer an international compound of embassies, restaurants and workers which are source of inspiration for local cooks, without having to go abroad. Gastronomy and hospitality schools and culinary associations are also having an important role in the formation of a new generations of chefs, providing formation and organizing event where students, professors and professionals meet. Internet is another important source of knowledge, and today in Havana is not anymore so expensive to access it. Professional and also amateur cooks can access internet and look for recipes and information on products, as Ernesto told me he does.

The Cuban culture is represented through food in a way that re-discover the elements of the tradition that have been lost during period of scarcity, in addition to the combination of external elements that transform dishes into something new and equally valuable.

#### 5.3.4 Habits and desires

When discussing how much Cubans are opened to try new kinds of food, I was always answered by skeptical faces, which at first underline the necessity for Cubans to have rice and beans on the plate, and later allowed some space for recognizing how eating habits are indeed changing in Havana. Manuel told me that Cubans do not show so much interest in trying something new, as they are used to eat what they always see and there is no curiosity to explore new flavors. The availability of new products is a recent phenomenon, as Maria explained me, so time is needed to allow people to approach new ingredients.



Elena explained me how much the eating habits of Cubans have been shaped by the political relation between the island and other countries, and how these changed during time. For instance, she mentioned me how today there are many products coming from Vietnam, and Asian food is becoming popular also in the Cuban home kitchens. The *arroz frito* (fried rice) is recalling an Asian version of rice dish, with the use of soy sauce. Before the 'special period', Elena told me, there was a lot of can food, produced by the Bulgarian food industry. Cans of stuffed peppers, stuffed cabbage, rice with vegetables, all these foreign foods became commonly consumed at that time. Today in Havana is not possible to find this kind of food, but many other cans and jars, coming from Asia or Europe, are available at the stores. And Cubans are getting familiar with it. The variety of spices and herbs increased, complementing the basic Cuban seasoning of onion, garlic and pepper. Laurel, cumin, curry, thymes, parsley and rosemary are some of the seasonings available in Havana today. Carmen told me that these herbs and spices are not expensive products, so Cubans can access them and change a bit their way of cooking.

Cubans are also eating outside, and there they start to experience new ingredients, maybe starting from a familiar dish. As Yanet explained me, a well-known product like pork can be served with sweet and sour sauce, and in this way they are also assimilating a new recipe and maybe they will later try at home. Mercedes is sure that her local clients are curious about the non-Cuban dishes she offers, asking about it and showing a broader culinary knowledge than in the past. Out of eateries, also in informal context Cubans are showing to be open to new food. Yanet told me that now, when friend meet for a potluck meal, it is possible to find things like a salad with tuna and capers, they are already introducing new ingredients in their food and they want to share it with others. Another source of inspiration is television which is for instance promoting more consumption of vegetables. This kind of food is generally not perceived as a daily component of Cuban diet, but it is possible to notice that some people, because they saw it in television or because was suggested from the doctors, are adding more vegetables on the plate. And someone is also choosing vegetables for their taste. Elizabeth confessed me to love vegetables, she likes to cook with vegetables like watercress, pepper and red beet, which are not commonly consumed. Between the eating habits more subject to change, there are fat and salt consumption. Today Cubans seems to be more aware on the health issues that the large consumption of these products can cause. Carmen remembers her parents and grandparents, using only pork fat and a high amount of salt on their food. Today, she thinks, people are used to consume oil instead of other kinds of fat, probably also for availability of products, and are conscious of the opportunity to eat differently. For her, meeting her guests and cooking for them had a big influence in her eating habits.

*While cooking for them I realized that it's not necessary lot of seasoning, sometimes the abuse of seasoning kills the flavor of meat, I love vegetables soup and before I looked at it as soup of grass, this is grass! But now I say, so delicious! The use of salt, halved, the fat at the minimum, better grilled, I love it. Everything reduced, the use of sugar, I almost take my coffee without sugar, people say ah you are taking bitter coffee, yes only the necessary. If I need to take it without sugar it doesn't bother me. Is that if you say to a Cuban,*

*take this, he says it's missing salt. The consume of fruits, vegetables, abuse of salt, sugar, fat, these are things that changed my culinary and eating culture, the two. (Carmen)*

She explicitly referred to culinary and eating culture, being conscious that the changes she adopted are not singular elements but need to be consider as a whole set of practices that now she carries with her. Maria also told me how she adapted to the preferences of her guests, avoiding to fry meat and cooking in other wealthier ways, after realizing that fried and fat food is dangerous for her health. Eating habits are also related to the individual economic situation, which guarantee a different acquisition power. Vegetables for instance are perceived as expensive and they are not prioritized compared to other basic products such as *viandas* or beans. Therefore, moving out of what is the familiar mix of tomatoes, lettuce and cucumber can be out of reach for many Habaneros. For the new entrepreneurs, having access to CUCs means that they have more possibility in terms of choosing what to eat and trying more variety of products. Yanet is conscious of that and its privileged position.

*Yes sure. I think in Cuba everybody is eating to live, while for us it is the opposite. We are living to eat, we are not eating to live. We are living to eat. For example, in my house we are three people, me, my mother and my aunt. They are older, and they are eating now things that before...now they are not eating all the time rice and beans, and it is also about the economic issue. (Yanet)*

Cubans are coming from a long period when food has been seen as a necessity, which was not always fully guaranteed. Desired food is mostly linked with the memory of previous times, *pre-periodo special* or *pre-revolucion*, when some products were more available and still part of the Cuban diet. Beef is probably the most discussed product, since it became rare and expensive, and it has been out of the Cuban plate since decades. As Elena remembered, when she was a child, pork was not strongly consumed, and beef was instead part of the diet. Today desires are taking more space and are more achievable for some of them. Beef is often present in many *paladar*, and it is also sold in CUC shops, but with prices that are only accessible for people gaining in CUCs. Many people mentioned squids as a desired product, which was even distributed through the basic provisioning and at some point, it disappeared. Fish in general is perceived as more difficult to find and expensive compared to other animal products, but it is also important to underline that fish has never been seen as part of the daily diet. Shrimps and lobster, very much served in *paladar*, might be appealing for Habaneros but they do not represent a sort of food that would be often cooked in Cuban kitchen. There are also fruits that people look with desire but that are expensive and scarce, such as *mamey*, grapes and *guanabana*. A Cuban dish that is prepared for special day of celebration is the *arroz imperial*, a dish with rice that combines many other ingredients, such as chicken, shrimps, lobster, mayonnaise and cheese. It is a very delicious but expensive dish, Tania commented, so she can prepare it once or twice per year.

Eating outside is very common in Havana, where many *cafeteria* works from morning until late afternoon. Cheap lunches and snacks are easy to find, but then *Habaneros* are usually eating at home. *Cafeteria* are closed at night, so the remaining option are not affordable for all people.

Anyway, going outside for dinner is common in case of birthday or other celebrations within the family. Caridad explained me that the Cuban family goes together with all relatives to a restaurant or *paladar* and look for a place where to experience something different from eating at home, sharing the special moment.



Figure 9 - A chicken dish in a tourism oriented paladar. There is no rice or beans, and salad accompany the meat. In addition, there is large attention to the service and look of the plate.

*that I normally don't cook at home. So, I go, I set and I enjoy it. To me it would be as if I would be dancing with the 'Havana de Primero'. (Tania)*

The desire that bring *Habaneros* to eat in paladar, is to try something special that would be difficult or expensive to prepare at home. The large variety of eateries in Havana allow them to choose between different ranges of price and kinds of food.

*I go to eat outside once or twice per month. I like to eat something*

Some *Habaneros* are experiencing the touristic paladar also due to their approaching and hanging out with tourists. What is sometimes appealed as *jineteo*, is a reality of Cuban tourism which has its expression on the flirting that Cubans turn to tourists. It can take various forms, from sexual, to romantic, to friendship kind of relations and it often entails that the two parts are spending long time together, with the Cuban taking the role of informal guide. Therefore, it is very common that tourists invite locals to eat and drink, and in these situations, *Habaneros* have the possibility to eat dishes that are out of their economic possibilities. This kind of processes are also contributing to enlarge the point of view of locals in relation to what is the current state of Cuban gastronomy in Havana, but is based on a dependence relations between the two parts. It can be seen as contributing to the process for Cubans to step out the comfort zone, as the new entrepreneurs commented, and try new flavors and ingredients.

How to acquire the needed food is for some *Habaneros* still challenging, since the prices of products are perceived as unrelated with the average state salary. The basic provisioning is supplying them with some basic food, but it is still complicated for them to satisfy their needs. With the development of self-employment, an inequality condition is growing in Cuba and some of these self-employed workers are increasing substantially their acquisitive power. Caridad explained me that it depends on the kind of self-employed position, since some of them are not

gaining more than state-employees, and they are just able to buy the piece of beef occasionally. But others, that are running a good business, and the tourism sector offers the right conditions, can have much more than the rest of the population. Products like yogurt, butter, cheese, and beers, and many other that are sold in CUC stores, are becoming reachable for them. Having family abroad is also contributing to improve the acquisitive power of families, that own more financial resources through the remittances.

*Since there are two coins, there are two markets, there is a market for tourism and a market for common Cubans, where there is not the same quality on the elaboration of the products. It's not the same client, I mean, it's not the same hunger that have wish to eat. (Raul)*

These 'two markets' are now defining new customers. The market that address tourists is also looking at locals that can pay for quality and variety of products. And, above all, Cubans that have the possibility to choose what to eat. Tania told me she cannot eat pork for health reasons, therefore she prefers to eat fish, which she partially receive from the basic provisioning, and chicken. She confessed me that she can eat what she prefers because her economy allows her to do so, being a new entrepreneur that is gaining in CUCs. Elizabeth, which also work in the tourism sector as a self-employed, explained me that compared to the period she worked for the state, now she can go to the *agromercado* and buy what she prefers, not having to worry about the prices. Cubans that do not have these economic resources, must address the 'other market', which is presenting different level of quality and variety of products. Caridad for example is always going first to a state *agromercado*, checking what is available there, then she tries in another state *agromercado* and only later she goes to the private *agromercado* to find the other needed products. For her, the state *agromercado* guarantee a more accessible price, but the availability and quality of products is lower. Rice and beans are provided through the basic provisioning and other national shop that sell them for cheap price. These two elements are the basic of Cuban cuisine, and the government has been able to guarantee that they would not lack from people's plate. However, as Ariel told me, the Cuban family is also worried to have a kind of animal protein in the table, which can be egg, pork or chicken. In addition, a source of carbohydrates is also requested, coming that from roots or tubers. What there is in the Cuban plate, is a question that was easily answered during my stay in Havana. More complex was to understand what is the real plate that is eaten by *Habaneros*. And this is highly depending on having access or not to the CUCs. As Raul severely confessed me, the two plates are not always corresponding.

*But on my view, the typical dish of the Cuban is arroz congri, or rice and potaje (beans soup). The real Cuban do not have specific dish, the real Cuban eat what he can. Today that you eat, you have to feel privileged, tomorrow it is possible that you don't eat, because there are people that often have to eat only rice with potaje (Raul)*

The inequality of salaries, combined with the perception of a market that offer expensive products, is what contributes to locals' struggling in relation to their acquisitive power. For Ariel, if the government would allow more commercialization, even if controlled, all population would

benefit, not only the private businesses but also the single family and their capacity to eat what they need and wish.

All in all, the familiar feature of *casa particular* and *paladar* on offering a place where the locals and the foreign meet, is directly influencing food habits of hosts. Moreover, the alive food offer in Havana is a scenario where desires are currently formed, but their realization is linked to a rising economic disparity within the local population.

## 5.4 Summary of the results

In this chapter I have reported the finding of my study, which have been involved 22 interviewees, in addition to observation and informal conversation collected within two months that I spent in Havana. At first, I explored the challenges encountered by the new entrepreneurs working in the tourism-oriented food offer. Food acquisition is a mayor problem for them and it originates in a food system that seem to be not prepared enough to guarantee the satisfaction of the demand. In addition to food acquisition, other challenges are perceived as relevant by them. Some are related with the novelty of entrepreneurship in Havana, as the relations between employer and employee, or the competition. Others have to do with the instability perceived on various levels, as the internal politics of the state, or external relations with other countries. Entrepreneurs are defining themselves as the pioneers and the explorers of the new world that is appearing thanks to the opening to private business. However, the context of this process is presenting challenges, because the mode of conducts and the system where they are located is not fitting them. When looking at the challenges of eating habits and food preferences, we see how tourism is influencing locals' relation with food and Cuban food culture. *Paladar* and *casa particular* developed an own identity in the last years, which today is in some cases transformed to represent new kinds of eateries. A transformation process is also happening in what is the traditional Cuban food, which is mixed with external elements becoming a hybrid. The creative process is also favored by the need of finding alternatives to the lack of products. All this food offer scenario is opening the way to new food experience in Havana, an opportunity which is not equally distributed to the population but show some rising inequality.

## 6. Conclusions

Cuba is still today proudly glorifying its revolutionary history. The world is still looking at Cuba as a country mainly anchored to the past, a position which might originate in Cuba effort to maintain its political independence. In the last years, the economy of the country has been subjects to structural changes, which shows the perspective of a new phase for the island. The tourism sector, a major driving force for the country economy, has also been affected by these changes, since the Cuban government understood it had to implement new strategies to fully sustain this industry. An important step has been the recent opening to self-employed jobs, a phenomenon that is changing Cuban economic structure. The rising private sector is playing a prominent role within the tourism sector, where *paladar* and *casas particular* are addressing a big part of tourist arrivals. The system is also showing a growing economic disparity between people employed in the private and the public sector. Spreading today in the entire island, these businesses have a major concentration in the capital Havana, visited by most of the tourists. Food is offered by both *paladar* and *casa particular*, which are opening the way for a new Cuban cuisine revolution. This study seeks to understand how new private businesses, working with tourism food offer, relate with Havana foodways. Within the foodways concept, the findings touched upon food production, distribution, access, consumption and food as cultural heritage and identity. A qualitative approach has been applied for this research, which explored entrepreneurs' perception on the challenges that they encounter, together with the exploration of tourism influence on food habits and culture. Therefore, 22 interviews have been collected between entrepreneurs working in the tourism food offer and other Habaneros. Here I propose again the SQs that guided my study:

- SQ1: Which is the current food offer in Havana?
- SQ2: Which are the challenges for these new kinds of entrepreneurs working in tourism food sector in terms of food availability, eating practices, food preferences and others?
- SQ3: How does tourism influence local's food practices?
- SQ4: How does tourism relate with Cuban food culture?

Havana's food scene is today largely dominated by the private sector. *Paladar* and *casa particular* grew in number in the last couple of years, following the tourism sector growth. In the past, *Paladar* were mainly places where tourists could meet and experience the *Cubania*, through the environment, the people and the food. Today *paladar* developed in a diverse range of eateries, becoming also stage for international and fusion cuisine. *Casa particular* are also part of the food offer, since they always provide breakfast and often also dinner. In *casa particular*, the food is closer to what is the Cuban traditional food. Even if the state is also working in the tourism food service, through hotels and restaurants, today the private food offer is becoming a leading element in the Havana reality. The most touristic area of Havana knew a fast evolution with the recent measures promoting the development of self-employment. *Habana Vieja*, *Centro Habana* and

*Vedado* are offering many different tourist-oriented eateries, which vary for type of food, quality, service and price. The diversification of the food offer is linked to the tourism growth, which brought more and new kind of tourists in the island, expressing different needs. Therefore, the private sector seems responding better than the state in satisfying the growing and diversified tourism food demand.

The current coexistence of state and private sector is showing some challenges that the interviewees pointed out. The relationship between these two sectors is often perceived as a contraposition. The new entrepreneurs, conscious of the difference between them and the state, put themselves in an anti-state position. Their effort on offering a quality product and service is often perceived as opposing the state modality of working. And their possibility to prosper and develop as a business is also linked to the conditions that the state settled for them, which are often recognized as unfavorable. Among all, food acquisition is a major problem for the new privates that work with food offer in Havana. The lack of a wholesale market and the problems that food production and distributions face, make things very complicated for privates. Finding the way to respond to these challenges is the only possibility to survive as a business. Therefore, entrepreneurs built some strategies to overcome these difficulties. The choice of products suppliers and the choice of the menu are two important components of these business models. New forms of acquisition are also taking places, favored by the increased possibilities related with the growth of private entrepreneurship, as for instance the collaboration between farmers and eateries for the supply of high quality products. This kind of relations business to business (B2B) are arising from the attempt to overcome the lack of the system.

Being these new privates the main characters of what is Havana food offer today, they must deal with tourist wishes and needs and learn how to properly address them. This necessity, in terms of eating practices and preferences, is taken in account by new entrepreneurs which try to properly develop not only their food offer, but also the related service. Service and attention to the client are traits that remarks the difference between private and state sector, with the first one proving to be more sensitive in relation to customers' expectations. New elements of market culture are influencing the behaviors of the new entrepreneurs. They look positively to competition and its capacity to stimulates quality and offer diversity, in a context where competition is also a new phenomenon and still not largely developed. A competition that partially challenges also the state, since *paladar* and *casa particular* have an exclusive position in social medias, online reviews and tourism guidebooks. Another new trait of private entrepreneurship is the relation employer-employees. Employees are required to take a different approach when working for the private sector, a formation process that goes hand in hand with the formation of this new class of entrepreneurs.

Another dimension of the challenges that the new entrepreneurs encounter is instability. An internal instability is found within the legal framework for private business that has been often subjected to changes and it is also source of concern for the future development of the sector. In addition, an external instability is linked to the international politic relations of Cuba with other countries, especially the United States. After the positive appraisal of Obama opening, once again

there is a hostile climate between the two countries, which is perceived as extremely negative for the entire tourism sector. The privates express concern on external political influence and propaganda, as the case of the hurricane. Apart from being a natural disaster that affected the food availability, underlining Cuban food system weaknesses, it also became example for locals on how external forces are still exploiting Cuba reality.

Working in the private sector is a way of accessing hard currency, which give the possibility to enhance food acquisition power. Despite the problems of food acquisition in Havana, today it is possible to potentially achieve more variety of products and meals, through the CUC stores that offer imported food and through the larger variety of *paladar* in the city. However, both places are more easily reachable for Habaneros that gain salary in CUCs. Therefore, they have the possibility to satisfy needs and desires that for other locals are not accessible. Today, desires are finding a space in local's perceptions, besides being often linked to previous periods of Cuban history (pre-special period and pre-revolution). This dimension of desire is not easily assimilable within the current Cuban system, where the pragmatic socialist economy finds its realization in the supply of basic food for the population. Through experiencing new food and products, some Habaneros are opening their mind and adopting new eating practices. The meeting with guests and their preferences, is also part of the process of changing habits and it directly influences the hosts, especially in *casa particular*, where there is large familiarity between the two parts.

The informal setting is a main characteristic adopted by both *paladar* and *casa particular* in Havana, which is embraced with the attempt of letting tourist see and experience the *Cubania*. Having also Cuban customers is then linked to this intention of creating and preserving the identity of the place, which is complemented on the other side by researching new elements to introduce in the traditional food experience. Some *paladar* are pushing forward the limits of Cuban gastronomy, offering new ways of experiencing Cuban dishes and mixing Cuban tradition with other influences. A big part in this process is played by Cubans that travelled abroad and got influenced by international cuisine. They are not only generating new gastronomy elements, but also new ways of conceptualizing the overall gastronomy offer, through the creation of places like the gastro-bar. The evolution of Cuban cuisine in Havana is indeed linked to an internalization that occurred in the last couple of years, with the presence of international chefs integrating the gastronomy schools of the city.

In conclusion, the new entrepreneurs working with tourism food offer are tightly linked to the changes occurring within Havana foodways. *Paladar* and *casa particular* have always a more prominent role within the tourism sector, spurring a fast evolution of the city foodways. In Cuba the private sector is young and must deal with many challenges, having the state a large control on their actions and power. The problems encountered by the private food offer largely regards food access and availability, and some strategies are adopted to acquire more independence from the uncertainty of the market. Instability is found in other aspects of the entrepreneurship reality, and become a stimulus for expressing creativity, a quality trained by Cubans in order to alternatively respond to necessity. However, the rising variety in both food offer and market



products allows the consumption of new food, with the formation of new classes of eating habits and desires. These new eating habits start to be diffused within a certain group of Havana inhabitants, the ones that have access to the hard currency. The same group is also able to express and accomplish its desires, while the rest of Habaneros show to be cut off from the realization of these. Therefore, inequality is recently developing in terms of how locals can relate with Havana foodways. Accompanying the tourism boom of the last couple of years, Havana food culture is knowing a quick transformation with the contribution of the private tourism-oriented food offer. New dishes, products, ingredients, recipes, together with a new work philosophy, are influencing not only the way local identity is represented through food, but also adding new values to the formation of local heritage.

## 7. Discussions

In this chapter, the findings of my study are related to previous literature that studied the private businesses in Cuba, Cuban food culture and food acquisition practices in Cuba. Later, strengths and limitations of the study are pointed out, and from these I am developing recommendation for further researchers on the topic of new entrepreneurship in Cuba and its link with foodways. Finally, other recommendations are oriented to the Cuban society.

### 7.1 Findings in the light of other research

Ana & Lubiński (2014) looked at *paladar*, *casa particular* and state-owned restaurant as elements of Cuba foodways that are accessible to tourists. They point out that here food is ‘whitened’ (in form of international cuisine) or scaled down to *comida criolla*, being unable to satisfy the exoticism and creativity that tourists expect. However, in the last couple of years things evolved quickly in Cuba. I observe that creativity became an important feature of the contemporary cuisine in Havana, where cooks are mixing ingredients and dishes to innovate Cuban cuisine. *Comida criolla* and international food are integrated by hybrid/fusion cuisine. Creativity has always been necessary also in Cuban home kitchen, due to the fluctuating availability of products. In this way, the creativity process represents a link between home kitchen and *paladar* kitchen. And in Cuba, these two places are much ‘closer’ than in other countries because of the presence of *casa particular*, a place ‘in between’. Creen (1991) looked at Cuban food identity as heritage of different groups of people that lived in Cuba, including ingredients and techniques from around the world. This quality of Cuban cuisine is still at the core of what is the contemporary gastronomy scene in Havana, where the traditional mixed identity of Cuban food is challenged by new culinary experiments with other ingredients and dishes. The fusion process is contributing to the re-identification of Cuban food heritage.

Ana & Lubiński (2014) are also underlining how the double currency system is linked to two different food economies and create inequality, which is overlooked by the government. With my study I could notice how, with the exponential growth of self-employed tourism related business, this dual economy is consolidating its differences and creating two classes of consumers in Havana, each one accessing different variety and quality of products. I have found in Havana the same acquisition practices described by Garth (2009), such as the government food rations, gifts and trades, black markets purchases, and CUC purchases. However, the perception on food variety and choice have partially changed, showing a new conceptualization on needs and desires. Food has been traditionally treated by Cuban government as a necessity, a common good, out of the logic of offer-demand. The food basic provisioning is symbolizing this philosophy, and it is still a fundamental source of food for most of the Cubans. In my study, I could present how

other Habaneros are showing less dependence on the basic provisioning, while experiencing a larger freedom of choice in the acquisition of products from other sources. For these people, having access to CUCs opens their way to new needs and desires, which can be potentially achieved. And desire is taking a new turn in the perception of locals. Being originally anchored to the memory of pre-special period, characterized by higher availability of products, it is now represented also by the novelty of the food offer of eateries and stores. The way Bourdieu refers to *habitus* as the food practices embodied in a social class (in Debevec & Tividar, 2006), is reflected in the *Habaneros'* diverse food acquisition power, which is generating two different social classes. Having access to CUCs correspond to certain food *habitus* and desires, which are then integrating in the identification of a corresponding group. This group become closer to what are the food practices and preferences of tourists. They assimilate and perpetuate these new habits, distinguishing themselves from the other Habaneros that are excluded from this possibility.

Today, the “site for self-articulation, agency and creativity” (Mintz in Ana & Lubiński, 2014) provided by food is perceived by the ‘developers’ of Cuban cuisine as opposing Cuban government policies, and not U.S as previously argued by Mintz. The new entrepreneurs are fostering the potential of Cuban cuisine despite the limitation that they suffer within the national food system. Food is still political and it express resistance, but the message is shifting on a different level. Even if the embargo is still mentioned by the respondents as causing precarity within the Cuban food system, larger attention is posed to the national level. People base their perception on what they experience in the everyday life, with the places and the modality of acquisition of products. For instance, the lack of a wholesale market is a huge problem for them, as mentioned by Hingtgen et al. (2015), Scapaci et al. (2016) and Palomo (2016). They see this as a major priority, because it would create stability and avoid using precarious and sometimes illegal channels of food acquisitions, as also suggested by Ritter (2014). He recognizes how the self-employed workers look at the government as their enemy, who is aiming at their elimination. I could also see how entrepreneurs feel that the government is not able to understand their needs, and the perceived lack of communication between the two parts might be indicated as a contributing factor. The integration of socialism with what Ritter (2014) calls ‘*sociolism*’, namely, the system of informal favors historically part of Cuban society, is also translated in some figures that developed around the entrepreneurship, as the *subministrador*. This figure arises from the social network that every Cuban use to fulfill its products’ needs, and it is transformed in a legal framed job, which become fundamental also for the new entrepreneurs. Social relation are still playing an important role in what is the capacity of reaching products in Havana. Bono & Finn (2017) highlight how in the Cuban socialist society food is accessed in different ways than in a capitalist society, where stores and markets are covering the majority of needs. The entrepreneurs are also depending on other ways, as the entire population is used to do. Having a fisherman as a friend, or parents that can provide fresh eggs, are example of how much the business necessity and success are linked with the social relations that these entrepreneurs build around them.

Looking at Havana as a touristic destination, where today the tourism experience is created and represented also through food, we can refer to what Richards (2012) said about the ways food is linked to the development of tourism experience. The intimacy and familiarity of both *casa particular* and *paladar* represent an opportunity for guests to share the same place with hosts and, through the meal, connect to the local culture. In respect of the destination branding quality that Richards (2012) attributes to food, it is important to notice how the current evolution that Cuban cuisine is knowing has the potential to create a new image of Cuba as a food destination (which has always been the weak point of the country). Around food is also growing a “critical infrastructure of production, consumption and food culture” (Richards, 2012), represented by the food producers and chefs that are taking innovative steps in the sector, and supported also by internet and gastronomy schools. In a context of tourism boom, the growing food offer is questioning the capacity of the entire food system, as Feagan (in Everett, 2012) suggests tourism industry is able to do. While being developing its food offer sector, tourism is spotting the lacks and difficulties of food production and distribution.

Bessière (1998) give us the indications on how the heritage is build up, a dynamic process that is based on “actualizing, adapting and re-interpreting elements of the past of a given group”. The current reality of Cuban food offer shows that this process is perceived as very much alive compared to other period of time, indicating an important linkage between the work of these new entrepreneurs and the local food culture. Local heritage and identity are, today more than ever, influenced by the tourism-oriented food offer, resulting in the appearance of new products and dishes, food preferences, desires and perceived needs.

### 7.3 Strengths and limitations

This study aimed to understand the challenges of new entrepreneurship in Havana and its relations with food practices and food culture. The strength of this study is the use of a qualitative approach for a phenomenon that have been mostly addressed by quantitative studies. The previous literature looked at the entrepreneurship in Cuba under a businesses perspective, trying to examine its role within the Cuban economy and quantify its characteristics. My study instead wanted to explore the perspectives of these new entrepreneurs in regards of their connection with the local foodways of Havana. What are the perceived challenges, how they relate with food heritage and identity and how they influence locals’ food habits, these are questions that can be properly answered through an in depth qualitative approach. The rising entrepreneurship in Cuba is a current reality that offer many perspectives and ways to look at how it is integrating in the Cuban socio-political-economic system. I chose to pay attention to what these new entrepreneurs had to say about their challenges, and how they believe they are related with the development of food practices and habits. Another strength lies in the participatory approach that I developed during my data collection. I stayed for two months within the studied areas,

living in a *casa particular* and eating outside in *cafeteria* or *paladar*. I could become close to the daily life of Cubans, understanding the unspoken structures and behaviors that take part of everyday life and social relations. This proximity with the locals, allowed also by my excellent dominance of Spanish language, gave me the chance to collect a rich account of food practices and local food culture.

Between the limitations that my study suffered, I must mention the impossibility to obtain an academic visa for my fieldwork in Cuba. I tried to propose my study to the university of Havana, but without success, and I could not find alternatives that would have been valid for supporting me in the field. Nevertheless, I decided to leave, and I arranged the data collection by myself. The fact of having only a tourist visa, precluded me the access to possible key informants or representative of the state. Trying to contact and interview these people would have been too risky and I decided to prevent me from any kind of legal problems. Including in my study state representatives, state workers and experts of the food and tourism sector, would have add more quality to the research, also in light of the triangulation principle. A second limitation can be seen in the changing process that my research question went through during the fieldwork. At first, I wanted to include the tourist's perspective on Cuban cuisine, to have a broader view on the phenomenon of food offer in Havana. The exploration of the new entrepreneurs' role within the tourism sector had less relevance in my first opinion, but once I went to the fieldwork I changed my mind. During the first two weeks, I tried some interviews and I also practices observation and informal conversations, realizing that my interest was shifting on what was perceived more pressing from my interviewees. Therefore, I adjusted my research objectives and research question, giving more space to the analysis of the new entrepreneurs in relation to food and tourism. To do so, I had to prepare myself and calibrate my methods in a different way than what was my initial plan. Consequently, the sampling procedure had also to adapt to the new objectives, focusing more on entrepreneurs. Prioritizing the accounts of entrepreneurs, I could not offer the same space in my study for the representation of other Habaneros and their food practices and habits, which could have added more perspectives on the topic.

## 7.4 Recommendations

In this section, some recommendations for future research are proposed based on the limitations of this study. It follows an account of recommendations that can be sent to Havana local reality and Cuban society.

My study contributes to define some of the perceived problems in regards of food distribution and access in Havana. To better understand the real weight of this problem and its components, some additional researches would be needed. Quantitative studies on the food distribution network can be a proper way to look at the entrepreneurs and locals' needs and how the market

responds in terms of products availability. The data related to food sources and distribution are scarce and do not offer a truthful image on how much food is imported, locally produced, and then distributed. Considering the growth of tourism in the recent years, and the consequent rising of food offer in the entire country, further studies could evaluate the capacity of the food production and distribution system on adapting to this trend. The contribution of the different food suppliers and channels to the formation of the product offer, could be quantified and it would be good to understand how much weight each channel has in relation to *paladar* and *casa particular* demand. Food production in Cuba has been already object of study, but new researches could look at how the food offer is today directly linking to small farmers, or even combining the two businesses. Within the tourism industry, agro and rural tourism are well-known realities that developed around the world, and in Cuba it seems there is a start regarding this sector. Another interesting element of study is the state food offer, which could be addressed through a comparison with the privates on different element: access to products, quality of work, and food culture. Both quantitative and qualitative researches would be suitable for this exploration. Further research can be developed also around tourists' perception on Cuban food culture and both *casa particular* and *paladar* tourism experience. In my study the entrepreneurs referred to tourists' opinion and choices, showing the importance of tourism as a driver for the development of food offer.

The reflections that developed from my findings are presenting a scenario where the concerns of different parts need to be taken in to account, in regards of a tourism sector that is keeping on booming in Havana, as in the entire island. The state system is often the first recipient of concerns and blames, which is easily explicable in a country like Cuba where every aspect of society and economy is still strongly centralized. Therefore, the state has the responsibility to better listen to the concerns of these new entrepreneurs, which are currently feeling to be threatened by the continues changing of policy of the government. Communication is lacking between state and privates, and for the state is then difficult to understand what are the problems that the self-employed encounter. These entrepreneurs should try to have more visibility and representativeness within the tourism sector and local society, trying to unitedly present their concerns and suggestions. Looking at the entrepreneurship as an all could help to structure all private in a more strategical way, in order to resist to instability. Another element of concern should be the inequal food acquisition power that exist between state and self-employed workers, especially the ones working in the tourism sector. An effort should be done from the government to prevent further differences between workers, which could mine the socialism character of Cuban society with the creation of social classes. Today the government is trying to integrate elements that are normally associated with capitalist and liberal economy, within a communist system, and the process do not present a clear vision of the possible outcomes. To avoid a drift to a capitalist kind of economy, a possible strategy could be the integration of corporate social responsibility with the new Cuban entrepreneurship. The high taxes that privates pay, together with other measures, could be explicitly formulated as social responsibilities elements, linking the private sector benefits with the community welfare. This model could also be applied for the

tourism sector, through the development of food experiences where part of the gaining goes to the community. The link between privates and local community must be valorized and recognized as an additional way to contribute to the social welfare, as the food production is also showing. Tourism food offer is proving to have the potential to promote small scale agriculture and with an opening to more private commercialization, quality and variety of products could reach more Cubans' table.

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## Appendix A – Interview guide

**Interview n.** \_\_\_\_\_

Sample Group \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interviewee information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Profession: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Introduction:**

*I am a university student conducting a research to better understand the influence of new private food offer with the local culture. I am interested in paladar and casa particular, and their role in Havana food scenario. Your answer will be collected in a report which can be consulted by other parties (organizations, government, university, etc.). I am particularly interested in collecting your views and opinions, so there is no right or wrong answer.*

### **Instructions:**

*The interview will last approx. an hour. I would like to record the conversation with the recorder, are you fine with that?*

*The information you have provided will be treated confidentially and anonymously. If you have any questions you can always ask. Do you have any questions now?*

### **Questions:**

- Which do you think are the reasons for tourists to choose to eat in a *paladar/casa particular*?
- What the tourists are expecting from a *paladar/casa particular*?
- To what extent do you share the place with your guests?

- How is the Cuban identity represented in your menu/dishes?
  - How did the food you offer change over time?
  - Which are the plates that you would like to cook but you are not, and why you don't prepare them?
  - To what extent are you trying to satisfy the tourist's wishes or offer whatever you want?
- 
- Where do you get the products you use for your dishes?
  - Which are the most difficult products to find?
  - To what extent is the community supplying products to you?
  - How much are the producers prepared to satisfy the food demand?
  - How much the availability of products influences your menu?
  - How your activity influences the food habits of your household?
  - How your activity is influencing the quality of food of your household?
- 
- How would you describe the current state of food offer in Havana?
  - Which are the main challenges that you encounter/encountered with your activity?
- 
- Which are the Cuban dishes that you are used to eat?
  - Which other kind of food are you used to eat?
  - If you go to outside to eat, in which kind of place you go?

**Instructions for closing:**

*This is the end of the interview, we would like to ask you reference of other people that could be interviewed. Do you mind give me his/her contact? Thank you very much for your participation, I really appreciate your help.*

## Appendix B – List of participants

The real names of the interviewees have been substituted by fake names, in order to guarantee the anonymity. In the following list, the profession or kind of employment is also indicated.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Profession/Employment</b>
Jorge	Casa particular owner
Juan	Casa particular owner
Maria	Casa particular owner
Carmen	Casa particular owner
Roberto	Casa particular owner
Elena	Casa particular owner
Tania	Casa particular owner
Ernesto	Paladar owner
Yanet	Paladar owner
Alejandro	Paladar owner
Luis	Paladar manager
Eduardo	Paladar owner
Jose	Paladar owner
Jose	Paladar owner
Mercedes	Paladar owner
Manuel	Paladar owner
Raul	Unemployed
Daniel	State employer
Caridad	State employer
Ariel	Farmer
Elizabeth	Self-employer
Yadira	State employer