FOOD AND AGRICULTURE IN URBANIZED SOCIETIES

Pathways for a Better Future

Edited by Sergio Schneider, Potira V. Preiss and Terry Marsden

RESEARCH IN RURAL SOCIOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

VOLUME 26

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE IN URBANIZED SOCIETIES: PATHWAYS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To all of those who spend time, energy and engagements to fight against hunger, climate change and social inequalities in these uncertain and disruptive times.

We also would like to dedicate this book to Flaminia Ventura. She was a tenacious agrifood scholar and generous colleague.

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CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE IN URBANIZED SOCIETIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN INTRODUCTION

Potira V. Preiss, Sergio Schneider and Terry Marsden

The dawn of the twenty-first century brought an unprecedented situation to humanity; we became a mostly urban society with 55% of the world living in cities, a number projected to rise to 68% by 2050. This situation brings a series of challenges to society. On the one hand, cities currently retain disproportionate power in relation to rural areas in terms of political, economic and cultural influence, being the places where decisions are made and international trends are defined. On the other hand, they harbour a growing context of social inequality and poverty, consuming an expensive and increasingly unsustainable amount of natural resources and generating 70% of energy-related greenhouse gas emissions (UN, 2018). A situation that is unsustainable in both environmental and social terms.

The way food is produced, processed, transported and consumed impacts soil, water and biodiversity and, despite this, it has not been able to generate more food security for humanity. According to a recent FAO report, it is estimated that between 720 and 811 million people worldwide will suffer of hunger in 2020. Adult obesity continues to rise, with the prevalence increasing from 11.7% in 2012 to 13.1% in 2016. The high cost of diets combined with persistent income inequality mean that about 3 billion people are unable to eat healthy.

The global food system is largely based on the exaggerated use of inputs and pesticides that contaminate the natural basis of production, as well as the very food we consume; in addition to spending an immense amount of energy in transport and supply, which results in a negative energy balance of the system. Food production generates so much greenhouse gas pollution that, at the current rate, even if nations were to reduce non-food emissions to zero, they would still

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not be able to limit the temperature rise to 1.5°C – the climate target from the 2015 Paris agreement. A large proportion of food system emissions – 30–50%, according to some estimates – comes from the livestock supply chain. The problem is that the current food system is flawed, wasteful and have high impacts on natural resources. Without substantial and structural changes being made, in a few years the global food system will deplete the natural resources that are the basis of the production.

The report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) shows that agriculture has direct effects on biodiversity, climate and their changes. The report's message is clear: 'How we produce our food matters and food choices can help reduce emissions and pressure on the land'. IPCC data show that emissions have been higher in the last decade than at any other time in human history. The challenge is structural and will involve the participation of the most diverse sectors, since our way of life is primarily responsible for climate change. And one of the aspects that will need to be transformed is the food production, transport, distribution and consumption chain. In its Chapter 5, the IPCC publication brings hundreds of evidence on the correlation between climate change and food production, which should have unequal impacts according to regions and population groups that have historically been impacted by low production and access to food, such as the countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

This challenging framework can, must and needs to be changed. The outputs are varied and require actions at different levels and need to involve different actors. In this scenario, individual attitudes towards eating are of paramount importance to change the way we eat. The options and possibilities of making decisions about what, when and where to eat are confined to the sphere of individualities, of individual practices, but nevertheless they have a broader meaning, which affects society, the environment and the climate regime.

Providing quality food to an exponential population that also lacks income and health, in a world of finite resources, is a difficult equation to solve. In particular, this is because most of the answers and paths we have followed so far have proved to be inefficient or insufficient. This process ends up changing the international social, political and academic agenda, causing rural development research to progressively consider food and urban issues. For decades, resources and knowledge were invested in agriculture with the belief that increased productivity and technology would be able to generate surpluses to remedy the population's food shortages.

In the contemporary era, food and nutrition are no longer just a set of raw materials from plant and animal origin used to nourish people. Food, consumption habits and the act of eating have become drivers of social interaction and hence a source of social distinction. What you eat, when you have meals or ingest food, with whom and where this social act takes place has become a way in which individuals demarcate their differences with each other and build their identities. Therefore, food and nourishment have become a social fact which deserve a sociological approach, the sociology of food.

Today, different studies (Godfray et al., 2010; Ingram, 2011; Ponisio et al., 2015; Reganold & Wachter, 2016) show that we have enough food supply to feed

the world population with a calorically consistent diet; however we still have around 811 million people facing hunger (FAO, 2021). The problem is that the distribution is quite faulty, although the way that food is produced, transported and consumed is highly wasteful, overburdening our ecosystems (IPES-FOOD, 2016). The industrial agriculture that dominates the productive landscape severely impacts natural resources, notably freshwater, as well as soil and biodiversity. In order to produce the food we consume, we make widespread and excessive use of agrochemicals, a destructive practice for ecosystem fauna and flora that also affects the health of farmers and consumers.

Among those who access enough food daily, food quality has become a problem since diet-related noncommunicable diseases is extending worldwide within individuals, households and populations, leading to a new phenomenon called 'double burden of malnutrition'. The evidence on the harmful effects on human heath caused by the excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods are quite solid, as well the consensus that we need more diverse diets with the increase of healthy foods, such as nuts, fruits, vegetables and legumes (Monteiro et al., 2015; WHO, 2020; Willett et al., 2019).

At the same time that phenomena like malnutrition, obesity and climate change worsen, they increasingly coexist and interact with each other leading to be considered pandemics. This consolidates the notion that we live in a Global Syndemic as argued by Swinburn et al. (2019). The authors argue that besides those phenomena coexist and interact with each other, they have in a common the hegemonic food systems the as driver, as well as inadequate political leadership and governance to enact policies to respond to them. To effectively address this scenario a systemic approach is needed, but also work collaboratively in terms of reducing the influence of large commercial interests in the public policy development and strengthening governance at all levels, to implement actions upon through international guidelines, resolutions and treat.

These challenges and issues were at the core of the debates held in Third International Conference on Agriculture and Food in an Urbanized Society, in September 2018 at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS, south of Brazil. The first two editions of that Conference run in Europe, being the first held in April 2012 at Wageningen University in the Netherlands addressing 'The Multifunctional Agriculture and Urban-Rural Relations' and the second in 2015, at Roma Tre University having as its central theme 'Reconnecting Agriculture and Food Chains to Societal Needs'. With the consolidating of the international character of the event, its realization in other continents were incentivized and Brazil was chosen to host the third edition considering its implementation on recent decades of innovative experiences involving different dimensions of food systems that allowed the country to be removed from the Hunger Map in 2004 with a set of public policies that foster sustainable forms of agricultural production led by family farmers to increase healthy diets and a general increase of countries food security anchored by participatory governance process.

The changes of focus of the rural development research have strongly influence the Conference, in the third edition the name of the Conference changed to include 'Food' due to its relevance in contemporary societies and the main theme

addresses was 'Healthy food, socio-biodiversity, and sustainable agri-food systems: innovations from consumption to production'. Originally, this book aims to assemble a selection of chapters which emerged that synthesize the shared knowledge and key matters and themes addressed during the conference which received more than 1,000 participants from 30 different countries between renowned academics, policymakers, public and private agents, activists and social movement leaders.

During the development of the book, we faced the arrival of a new striking pandemic – COVID-19 – with unusual cascading effects impacting on all sectors of society. As we now write, the restrictions to international mobility of goods and people associated with COVID-19 continue to affect the global food supply given it is a high degree of international co-dependence (FAO, 2020a, 2020b; Salazar et al., 2020). This is aggravating the already ongoing socioeconomically and ecological crises and the urgency to redirect the food systems pathways. It demonstrates the complexity of food systems, their increasing vulnerability and the need to adopt a progressive approach that considers social prosperity for all and environmental sustainability for the planet.

In some ways, the announcement of first Food Systems Summit by the UN Secretary General, in 2021, seemed to acknowledge the dire conditions of the global food system and the urgency of an international collaboration towards its transformation. However, the results of Summit strongly base on productivity increase, technological and private solutions, failing to address properly clime change and social inequalities, as well to include civil society actors on decision making process, have led to highly rhetoric and frustrating outcomes.

To seriously face the challenges to change food systems is not only urgent, but essential with we wish to survive and thrive as a society. What are the right tool and institutions to ensure just and equitable food systems in a post-pandemic world? How can we build a future for global food governance that welcomes the voices of the multiplicity of actors involved and creates clear boundaries for private and corporate power? How can we value territorial realities and innovations as we also move forward with an international clear agenda for transition? What are the public policies that can help us to work systemically in food chains, moving away from technological fixes and fostering truly sustainable and healthy practices from farm to fork? Can we build a new economic framework that provides quality livelihood for peasants, family farms and indigenous population at the same time we improve natural biodiversity? Can we create strong State approaches to food security and sovereignty that can survive the political backset? What is the role of the science and academics in this process? Those are some of the questions that we aim to address and explore in this book.

In addition to this introduction, the book presents nine chapters focused on debating the main contemporary challenges of food systems and the paths that can indicate a better future. In Chapter *Public Food Policies in Difficult Times: Consumers and the State*, Tim Lang explore the role of the State in food systems, from its current reluctance to confront corporate power and uncritical consumer freedom, to its responsibility in facilitating transformations and setting the context for a low impact living with high life quality and sustainable diets.

In Chapter *Sustainable Agri-Food Transformations and the Rise of Disruptive Governance*, Terry Marsden writes about disruptive governance and its profound effects upon the stability and security of food and farming systems, taking as reference the UK and Europe changes and evaluating how those trends may impact the sustainable food transitions and the utility of a regime theory approach.

Drawing from the Canadian context, Chapter *Responsibility for Food Sovereignty in an Urbanizing and Risky World* is authored by Bowness and colleagues, who use the notion of relational responsibility to address the metabolic rift in the global food sovereignty movement, considering the ways in which urban people exercise solidarity with those who cultivate and harvest food on the hand, and struggling against the corporate food regime on the other.

In Chapter *The Role of Business in Sustainable Development: Becoming Benefit Corporations in the Agri-Food Sector*, Jacopo. G. Orlando and Gianluca Brunori address the role of business in sustainable food systems, considering the concept of corporate social responsibility as a way to assure not only economic returns to shareholders, but also social and environmental benefits for society.

Then, in Chapter *Fostering New Rural-Urban Relationships Through Markets, and the Key Role of Governance*, Sergio Schneider and Abel Cassol analyse governance in traditional agri-food markets in Brazil, exploring how economic interactions between actors are embedded in a set of social institutions which define modes of governance and participation that can fostering new sustainable rural-urban relations.

In Chapter *South Africa After COVID-19: Identifying the Overlooked Economic Actors Needed for a Just and Equitable Food System*, Wegerif focuses on the post pandemic reality in South Africa examining the possible pathway for the creation of a just and equitable food system that contributes to achieving the right to food and livelihoods for all.

Based on Brazilian experiences over the last decades, Potira V. Preiss and Fernanda Vasconcellos reflect in Chapter *The Role of Civil Society in Sustainable Food Systems: Insights From the Brazilian Experience* on the role of Civil Society in sustainable food systems, taking into consideration the different dimension of action to propose innovative solutions and construct democratic food citizenship.

Then, in Chapter *Urban Agriculture as a Way to Address Social Inequalities From an Agroecological Approach, at Rosario, Santa Fé, Argentina*, Couretot, Ottmann and Lattuca present the historical process of the Urban Agriculture at Rosario (Argentina), setting up an internationally recognize public policy which guarantees democratization at agroecological food production with social inclusion in low income neighbourhoods.

As a whole, the book articulates discussions that highlight three common arguments: (1) the need for a systemic and complex approach at food systems, which considers their multi-scalar and multi-sectoral nature with a strong interdependence of rural and urban processes; (2) the need for radical changes in the way decisions are made, focusing on power imbalances and creating effective governance structures in which the multiple actors in society can be heard and considered, in democratic and participatory processes; (3) recognition of the strategic role of public policies and the State as an inducer of trends that protect

public interests, fostering the institutional bases for innovative processes to blossom and creating clear boundaries to the private interests of the mainstream economy and neo-liberal political forces.

Together this collection of chapters represent both a critical analysis of the current urban and agrarian interactions which are leading to dysfunctions in global agri-food systems, and some emerging processes which could lead to the development of more sustainable food systems built upon redefinitions of the role of the state, public policies and the market. In addition the expanding and innovative role of civil society can lead to new empowerments in food systems at different spatial scales.

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PUBLIC FOOD POLICIES IN DIFFICULT TIMES: CONSUMERS AND THE STATE

Tim Lang

ABSTRACT

Data on the food system's impact on environment, society and health point to a policy mismatch between current food consumption trends and long term viability. The role of public policy in this state of affairs requires critical attention. Public policy is generally weak and still dominated by a fixation on productionism and failing to integrate equally pressing concerns. Instead the facilitating power and responsibilities of the state are too often side-stepped. A new public policy approach is required that addresses the multi-criteria nature of how we assess contemporary food systems and their challenges. The role of the state is key to any transformation but states have been weak to support the creation of better infrastructure that would normalise what society and eco-systems really need namely sustainable diets from sustainable food systems. A genuinely systemic policy approach is required for urban populations, one which gives equal emphasis to all sector of food supply chains, not just primary production. The chapter explores ideological and practical logjams which hinder the pursuit of twenty-first-century progress. These include a reluctance to confront limitations in mainstream economics and uncritical acceptance of consumer power. Only the state has the potential legitimacy to facilitate a food system transformation and to provide the foundational economy which would normalise low impact living and eating.

Keywords: Food systems; public policy; food policy; the state; consumers; progress

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THE PROBLEM: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN FOOD?

In some respects the post World War 2 reconstruction of agri-food systems has been a remarkable success. It has produced more food, fed more people, helped raise life expectancies, begun to meet consumer aspirations. And yet, it has also created what is now an accelerating disaster, the recognition of which is only gradually and with some reluctance being recognized by policymakers and decision-makers. In this chapter, I explore some of what this means and why its serious implications demand a major public policy re-set. Yet this is not happening. Thus, it is not naïve to ask a deceptively simple but actually fiercely difficult and fundamental question: what is the point of public policy for food? And are the lines between the state, civil society and commerce so blurred that the point of public policy in food has – like the state itself, some argue – been fatally weakened?

I should declare an interest. I have served on a few advisory bodies at the national, international and local state level. I chaired a national inquiry into Scotland's diet-related health. I was a UK government Sustainable Development Commissioner. I have been an advisor at the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee. I have worked on and for bits of the United Nations. I have been and remain on the Mayor of London's Food Board since 2008 with very different Mayors. I have spent more days, weeks and years than I care to remember engaging in meetings and pow-wows with state bodies. I don't want to over-egg this experience but it's simply to say I have had a bit of an inside view at times, enough to see the limitations of such roles but yet to learn from them, not just from the academic, formal literature or publicly available documents.

I have had this experience as from what is called the 'critical friend' perspective. I remain a critic of much in public policy on agri-food which I find generally weak and out-of-date compared to what should be done. Even so, I still retain a belief (and hope) that there is public value in articulating a clearer role for the state in food policy, which is the theme I explore in this chapter. If we don't try to tame and harness the state in the name of expanding food democracy, we cede it to forces which make matters worse. For the last half century, that has generally meant the triumph of neo-liberal political forces with their tarnished gods of individual choice and freedom. Choice and freedom are fine aspirations and slogans until we realise that not everything is reducible to individual choice and that few people have the power or money to create the depth of infrastructure to make life better. The foundational economy, as the Manchester group termed it, is precisely that infrastructure for housing, schools, roads, water and health needed to provide the conditions to enable for better lives for all (Bentham et al., 2013; Foundational Economy Collective, 2018). It does not come cheap and aspirations to create it have been whittled down to a matter of markets and individual choice. If left to individual choice, it becomes a bonus for private gain, to which few can have access, and experience shows that it leads to pockets of private splendour amidst public squalor and deficiency. Gated housing