Editorial Introduction
Sources and Expressions of Power in Global Food Coordination and Rural Sites: Domination, Counter-domination and Alternatives

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This Special Issue results from the interest of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Agriculture and Food (RC40) in sponsoring a seminar to examine how important features of power in the global system and in rural sites, such as domination, counter-domination and alternatives, are shaped by the values and strategies of organizations, institutions and social actors and the nature of their social relations. The papers in the present issue were given at a Mini-Conference, which was part of an RC40 initiative to contribute to the XXII Congress of the European Society for Rural Society held at Wageningen, August 2007, the theme of which was 'Mobilities, Vulnerabilities and Sustainabilities: New Questions and Challenges for Rural Europe'.

Concern with the interpenetration of power in the global circulation of food has been given urgency due to contemporary changes in the way food is produced, distributed, communicated, perceived and consumed (Braun, 2007; Patel, 2007; Tansey and Rajotte, 2008). Along with the fast replacement of local food cultures and diets with industrial, processed, and package food in developing countries, new configurations of power have emerged as an effect of the interplay between the state, multinationals, supermarkets and consumer organizations, social movements and producers. This concern has both academic and practical implications.

In the context of food studies, the attempt to make sense of our social and political environment through food was a challenge to the existing social science consensus that dominated the late twentieth century. Then, the agenda for food studies went to stimulate visions of post-industrial agriculture, social change and to confront dominant paradigms (see Arce and Marsden, 1994; Lockie and Kitto, 2000; Murdoch, 2000; Goodman, 2002). These visions raised relevant issues, both theoretically and in the interpretation of contemporary social life, but they could not have been formulated without a rigorous scrutiny of the impasse in development studies (Booth, 1985).

Have research and the debate about food ensured that these new visions are not swallowed up by the technical, affluent, service society? This is a difficult question

to answer, but certainly food studies have contributed to sensitize us to the varieties of interpretation and possibilities of food analysis in a post-industrial society. In this guise, food studies have shaded important lights on the social processes of agrarian change and society. They did this by identifying social practices and representations of food in specific social domains created by social actors, whose dealings with their socioeconomic potentials and constraints sprang responses to commoditization and policy processes, such as the political struggle over access to productive resources, supply links and markets opportunities (see Arce and Fisher, 1999). Scholars realized the significance of this food agenda and directed their attention to processes involving social- and cultural-specific domains. Food studies started to conceive a counter-dominant vision to the dominant interpretation of a post-industrial global society confronted with social, economic and environmental problems. The latter were mainly an outcome of the modernization diffusion of packaged and standardized technology practices, but also of the scientific consensus in the designed value of a 'futuristic' service economy (for more details, see Arce and Long, 2000).

The counter-dominant view to this dominant one bears witness to social actors' food experiences and actions, and it does not allow these local experiences to disappear, showing instead how the hierarchical centralization of the food industry and agricultural industrialism represented social and political contradictions that beg mediation of consumers and policy-makers. Since the 1990s, food studies have been replete with these encounters between contrasting bodies of food knowledge, texts and descriptions of practices. As the agenda advanced, we became more aware of the relevance of food domains and the relevance of the counter-dominant view to the mainstream of rural sociology (van der Ploeg et al., 2000) and rural development sociology (Long, 2001). The field of food studies today includes organic foods (see Buck et al., 1997; Tovey, 1997; Morgan and Murdoch, 2000; Goodman, 2004; Guthman, 2004; Raynolds, 2004; van der Ploeg and Renting, 2004), fair trade (see Raynolds, 2002; Wilkinson, 2007; Arce, 2009; Fisher, 2009; Robinson, 2009; Tallontire, 2009), Slow Food (Miele and Murdoch, 2002; Jones et al., 2003; Pietrykowski, 2004; Fonte, 2005), and innovative webs of producers and consumers (Goodman, 2003; Patel, 2007).[1]

As an illustration, organic food has gained today a market share of about 3–4% in developed countries, and local, natural and ethical foodstuffs are forecast to have a major impact on shaping the procurement up-take of food, while reinforcing food choices (Ambler-Edwards et al., 2009). Notably in Europe, retailers have identified food as a business opportunity as it meets an increasing demand for better environmental management, ethical standards and higher food quality (see Sonino and Marsden, 2006). Web sites of these companies announce their intention to provide even more clean and green foods[2] in the near future.

These new configurations may be interpreted as the result of counter-tendencies to the negative environmental and social effects that a large number of people are attributing to the dominant view of modernization policies. The latter provided a comprehensive recipe of technological and institutional measures aimed at widespread industrial transformation of the agricultural sector. It was underpinned by expert technological knowledge denying that local people, producers and consumers, can in fact think, argue and act for themselves – individually and collectively – in a semi-autonomous fashion to achieve progress.

Whether food studies are seen as the fruition of the idea of freedom in the market or as the manifestations of the contradictory social conditions of freedom, the fact is few studies have yet grasped the full significance of introducing a counter-dominant

view to the course of food and agricultural modernization. For example, the conventional foundations of rural development sociology simply assumed that the outcomes of struggles between producers, retailers and consumers are primarily determined by the balance between natural and cultural categories dividing human action amid needs (essential things for survival and human existence) and wants (those extra things that serve to satisfy our desires).

This conceptual representation of human action presents a problem for food analysis. Because the interacting division resides not in social actors' actual interactions and negotiations to accommodate each other's needs and wants, but in classificatory schemata – scarcity and the finite nature of resources, increased population pressure – there are (or not) limits to commoditization, industrialization and science, which take us away from the situation and everyday processes standing at the outset of what is considered adequate practices by individuals and groups. In other words, human action does not reside in abstract classificatory schemata, but in processes characterized by specific features that made possible and desirable for actors to construct and revise their practices on the basis of day-to-day experience.

However, the distinction between needs and satisfiers has provided insights into the power nature and commercial outcome of hierarchical, large-scale food industry and its changing features of the reorganization of allocative practices – i.e. capital, technology and labour (see Bonanno et al., 1994). Nevertheless, the complex and subtle analysis of understanding both local and global agricultural issues – specifically, the sustainability and inequality dimensions in the reactualization of rural life – remained deficiently explored, because most scholars lacked an appreciation of actors' actions and capacities to negotiate and even extract political and economic benefits for themselves (for an exception, see Marsden et al., 1993).

To view food and agriculture differently, a dynamic approach became necessary. Constructionism contributed to the understanding of how social actors' practices and uses of resources to produce food generated an interplay and mutual determination of social, cultural an environmental factors and relationships. Recognition of both the cognitive and social dimensions of practices contributed to positioning the main role played by human practices and their interactions. This occurred around the mid-1990s, and it was only then that we were ready to follow social actors' practices and food performances to explain producers', retailers', and consumers' differential responses to market demands and policy interventions. As a result, a common position emerged that called for reduced differentials between dominant and counter-dominant forms dealing with food.

One advantage of this position was to explain different practices as local reactions to similar conditions of the modernization of food and agriculture. Capturing the experience of food circulation and consumption focused on the effect of modernization intervention policies and technologies and how these factors affected the existing lifeworlds of individuals and social groups, usually causing adverse environmental, health and equity problems among the most vulnerable populations in the North and the South.

Thus, we assumed a dynamic, contradictory, and unstable global world of differential patterns of food production, retailing, and consumption, created in part by actors themselves and their practices to maximize the continuous/discontinuous flow of resources and information, which established organizational forms of need-satisfier strategies (stressors) around food in rural sites. These need-satisfier forms were emergent properties of actors and their dealings with various markets and insti-

tutions. The stressors were contingent upon local knowledge to respond to, cope with and shape the world around rural actors. The latter generated different ways of dealing with situations, while accommodating themselves and their localities to global food demands and the changing food designs of retailers interested in displaying a variety of foods to an increasing number of window-shopping consumers, representing a range of new possible lifestyles (for an excellent review of rural research and key issues on food, see Phillips, 2006).

Despite obvious differences, this orientation ranged from neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian to phenomenological analysis (see earlier issues of the *International Journal Sociology of Agriculture and Food*). However, its paradigmatic similarity lies in the acritical attitude of highlighting the social and environmental benefits of reducing existing levels of industrialized food consumption, while stressing the environmental, health, and social-justice problems associated with industrial quantity rather than quality of food. This convinced enough scholars to argue that it was essential in any transition to a more equal and sustainable agriculture to ensure the development of the concept of food quality. It was thought that extending the concept with a policy dimension it could contribute to reducing existing food-practice differentials. It is clear, in other respects, that a stress on food quality implies continuing room for differentials, democratically discussed by the full range of food-oriented actors.

The Practice of Quality and Dominance

It is increasingly evident, however, that under the cover of 'constructing quality' (Marsden and Arce, 1994) a new struggle for power is occurring (Lang and Heasman, 2004; Wright and Middendorf, 2008). The engagement of important players in Europe and in the USA into the market of ethical food is based on hierarchical innovations to coordinate food production and circulation (see Barrientos and Dolan, 2006). A new techno-normative food order is proposed under the banner of quality, health, environmental and social standards (Campbell et al., 2006; Dolan, 2008; Nadvi, 2008) by marketers' expert knowledge in coordinating food circulation. In short, a transformation process of agricultural and market social practices is being achieved in different rural sites of the global world. In this respect, the commoditization of food is publically presented as a positive performative consequence of trade quality standards, which makes it an attractive innovation in food policy practice and research.

Trust is an important organizational aspect within contemporary food and quality commoditization processes (Goodman, 2003; Meijboom, 2007). Academic discourses, like conventions and the new post-industrial commodity objectives, are frequently reified with interests of their own. Within these discourses, images of the social become important to legitimize profit and distinctiveness. Trust can be coated in an added value that brings with it a representation to nostalgically stop the fragmentation of consumers' actions and food markets. Trust, as a bundle of natural and organic values and social relations presents a challenge to academic understandings and also to the coordination of agents and agencies with differential capacities and abilities to produce, procure and distribute food (modern, socially responsible, organic, traditional, safe, nutritional, etc.).

Hierarchical organizations, such as governments and multinational businesses, identified commercial potential in this situation of uncertainty. However, the lack of an interlocked social reality of food, on the one hand, made visible the existence of

potential new communities of producers and consumers in need of managing and governance. On the other hand, production, retailer and consumption practices and commodity texts[3] produced an image of allocative practices between the 1990s and the end of the century that finally established the circulation of goods based on third-party standards and certification (i.e. no longer needing to rely on trust) to avoid conflicts and contradictory objectives (see Raynolds, 2002), because they could result in inefficiency or, even worse, chaos.

Hence, the overlapping of commodity texts, both in academia and in public debates, generated a social context for food issues related to the variety and proliferation of standards (Bush, 2000) that intersects with and becomes intertwined within the people's everyday encounters and experiences. These experiences draw on diverse sociocultural backgrounds, logics and rationalities that blend and juxtapose elements of common sense and expert knowledge, constructing notions of what is good for the body, the environment, rural jobs, the economy, equality and global fairness. Within these texts, it may be that scholars do more than reconceptualize an old idea of institutional regulations and the market (see Daviton and Ponte, 2005). This grafting process, which repositions trust in food studies, may help us to appreciate the nature of social change in institutions, markets and people.

Let us look briefly forwards to the new set of relationships in which trust is transplanted to explore the sources and expressions of food and power. Such a perspective requires the recognition of standards as partially connecting peoples' actions, ideas and representations of food, space and time (Callon et al., 2002). However, these linkages are never totally integrated in a global food configuration or into uncontroversial forms of global governing of food. This conceptualization brings to the fore that norms and standards that are part of a 'procreative model' of governance may reify social relations with a proliferation of food certifications and technical progress. In the end, this may benefit the profitability of the rate of capital rather than the sustainability of resources.

In short, it seems that norms and standards of food are set up by policy-makers, food retailers and international bodies (FLO, ISO, EurepGAP standards, etc.) based on a social characterization and 'objectification' of consumers' orientations and as part of a global flow in search of quality and 'price for value' (Fulponi, 2006). The policy mediation of these food interactions is done by means of the grafting process based on quality standards to recover trust and to establish new connections that will have to deal with the regulation and ordering of alternatives, but are also linked to various notions of global order and interests.

Consumers' interactions with food are seen by policy-makers, corporations, food retailers and scholars as politically living and potentially manipulative hybrid forms of a contemporary social relation, with externality being expressed through meaningful objects (cf. Daston and Galison, 2007). For consumers, these food objects represent a history of resource conservation, strategic business models, private–public alliances, alternative markets, and forms of local social organization – a mixture of images and 'morality' narratives that help to circulate and distribute food quality (see Hughes et al., 2008).

These issues are addressed here partially by the authors' contributions to this special issue. In different ways, each contribution preserves the significance of food studies, conceptualizing the specific domain of sources of power and socio-political issues arisen from global food coordination. Such contributions are part of a theoretical legacy of the influence of actor-oriented and actor-network perspectives in food

studies, but also of a critical view of the spatial imagery of orthodox accounts of globalization that disregard social agency by presenting a kind of 'politically-correct' and global universalism (e.g. Araghi and McMichael, 2006). This is a systematic, intellectual abstraction that plays into the idea of a 'world-system' of historically logical actions, which, rather than understanding the social as partial and contested processes of events, is reluctant to accept that there is no homology between norm and action, such that ideas and things are objects commonly out of harmony.

However, if we depart from a focus on the world system and logical action, but also from the ideology that makes every food study within the abstraction of food regimes come together (e.g. McMichael, 2009), we can imagine a state of the world of food (see Morgan et al., 2006) that involves an ensemble of situations and events, making connections out of local action, to constitute the first principle of the 'epistemology of the eye' (Daston and Galison, 2007, pp. 17–53; cf. Blanco, 2009) in food studies. Daston and Galison (2007) justify this methodological view by arguing that this representation of the world is more stable than a universal system of abstraction.

In line with such a diagnosis, we want to suggest that this is a way to embrace socio-political issues to re-imagine the food ordering of the world. It is at this point that the focus on network coordination (see Whatmore and Thorne, 1997) takes us into complex issues beyond a world system of logical actions (Gereffi and Korzeniewic, 1994), which locates power institutionally within a unitary and omnipotent 'global system'. In other words, a methodological departure opens the possibility for us to recognize multiple power sources that are not exclusively determined by an economic logic and a centralized source of power. This promises to rejuvenate new forms of social and policy analysis, while highlighting a methodological move from universal system abstractions to the study of specific linkages and particular forms of coordination, as an orientation that matters to food politics.

Exploring the turn towards quality standards and the greening of choices is not simply part of an institutionalized process of cultivating a negotiated growth, within representations of the market embedded in a diverse and complex world of food production and consumption sites. An associated issue is that we find ourselves endowed with a built-in set of values and beliefs. Hence, it becomes appropriate to rethink our notion of consumers as potentially environmental resource owners and as a constituency involving persons demanding social justice, rather than simply searching for quality and price.

At this point we must say that food is an aspect of a living social relation that does not match precisely those elements that seem necessarily to link and manage the 'stem' of consumption and the (hegemonic) 'root' that distributes and markets food. In this regard, neoclassical economics constructs a flat and holistic transactional space, where supply and demand rationally rule over individual and group decision-making processes. This view presupposes a total food system and leaves out issues of power, in effect providing individuals and groups with a taken-for-granted trust, identity and freedom of choice, which does not represent the complexities of food circulation or social relations. An excellent critical engagement with this neoclassical and flat representation of the market is Bush (2007), who assists us in re-imagining the market to embrace values and alternative food practices and processes.

Coordination of Global Food: Sources and Expression of Power

These critical notions about food and the market are central to take up in a recharacterization of contemporary social relations and the global coordination of food, which we will discuss in this section in relation to the need for a reflexive social analysis of sources and expressions of power. The task is to grapple with these issues theoretically and methodologically in order to appreciate the ways in which such an analysis can contribute to further research in food studies.

Thus, we must look closely at the way in which different actors and social groups deal with trade standards and attempt to create space for themselves so that they might benefit from new policy responses, a course of action that enters social actors' expressions of fear, risk and expectations of parallel markets of food, and their feelings and emotions towards world fairness. As such, trade quality standards have a feedback effect on social actors' actions and thus influence the broader processes of change. Actors are cutting the 'flat market space', creating a fragmentation of markets, often in unexpected ways. An illustration of this process is the wider popularization of farmers' markets in Europe. These new interactions and social relations between producers, retailers and consumers are reworked from within the space of commodity relations.

Power relations established by governments and multinationals in the course of their locally and nationally repositioning (see Bonanno et al., 1994) are relocalizing the range of choices. This social process enables the actions of actors to fragment markets and regain a degree of political freedom for action (see Bonanno and Constance, 1996). Some of the contributions to this special issue address this topic by discussing alternative food markets and the nature of multinational power.

The fragmentation of markets is an attempt to cut off food transactions from the asymmetrical relations of power that have established some actors as homogeneous and passive consumers. The representation of the fragmentation of the concept 'whole global market' is important for the redefinition of markets and food coordination, especially in a framework dealing with differentiation of consumers' agency and variations of power. These ideas are embodied not just in a critical view of pluralistic market representations and the food trade, but also in an approach to a world of social relations that are not easily co-opted and coordinated by powerful global and commercial organizational entities.

In this context of fragmented markets and semi-autonomous social relations, the ordering of food is not imposed through hierarchical force. Food standards guide, encourage and coordinate consumers' actions, whose agency is deployed rather than controlled by the government or multinationals (Bush, 2000; Dolan, 2008). On the basis of this, standards represent a new source of power on the fight over food (Pietrikowski et al., 2008; Wright and Middendorf, 2008). Standards are a relative new technical policy device; it has the capacity to mediate rather than to intervene. It does assembly social relations, knowledge and textual practices in order to carry out the organizational legitimacy of food, associating trust with commercial profit. However, the social results are never fully controllable by policy-makers and standards are in certain situations abducted and redefined by local interests. Clearly, there are policy problems arising from the implementation of standards. Individual producers, retailers and consumers in their practices show us constant organizational repositioning vis-à-vis each other, in a variety of food networks and markets.

The issue of multiple food realities and arenas, where different lifeworlds, discourses and practices intersect, show us the existence of more than one source of power. This dynamic eventually may generate strong counter-tendencies leading to the fragility of food standards to achieve a sense of order. In fact, the implementation of food standards may generate a series of social and knowledge interfaces in which fragmentation, the central process, is perpetuated by the encounter that takes place between different peoples' actions. Here it is possible to claim that actors addressing fragmentation, from relatively small-scale interpersonal networks, to negotiate and coordinate socio-political arrangements emerging between consumers, agencies and local groups, to the struggles and alliances that develop within transnational networks and global commodity regimes, tend to reconstruct social ties and empower the potentiality of 'alternative' food initiatives.

This characterization of standards provides only traces of similitude with other food perspectives, such as food chain and food system approaches. The interfaces we are interested in identifying are those created by market-led transformations and food circuits oriented towards the absorption and redirection of public discontent and individual worries into selective food networks embodying voluntary associations and visible links between producers, retailers and consumers. These are governed or managed not by the normative concept of standards, but by shifting food configurations of sociability and also by the new sources and expressions of power in food distribution.

In contradistinction with the notion of the 'whole global market', as the relevant unit to study the importance of quality standards and the ordering of food circulation, we contend that the contemporary proliferation of food circuits and the fragmentation of markets situate the notion of arena as an important unit of analysis. This is possibly an indication of the end of a pluralistic food regime and a monolithic market. Quality standards are rarely questioned, so they tend to reinforce normative and hierarchical policies. Nation states and agencies vary in the degree to which quality standards are implemented, from simple to complex and from global to particularistic food productive occurrences.[4] Food policies are closely related to these productive occurrences, so that policies on quality standards will increase in complexity along with international competition and degrees of economic protectionism. However, this is not a simple power-dominant relation at the international level, since multinational corporations and alliances between international global organizations and national governments and private business interests produce further variation amongst the quality standard policies and their situational implementation (Robinson, 2009).

The fragmentation of food circuits and markets exists because the mainstream market cannot hierarchically accommodate everyone's lifestyles and values. As such, these fragmented markets and circuits are a manifestation of the fact that it is more difficult today to control the proliferation of differentiated forms of food production, retailing and consumption. Hence, we need to move analytically beyond the 'governmentality' of food chains (Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi et al., 2005).

This implies a focus on the organization and transformation of power and authority relations. Here we should be careful not to overlook cases where there are overlapping, conflicting or ambiguous modes and/or arenas of governance and empowerment, or where there are competing and apparently incompatible forms struggling to organize food production, retailing and consumption. Are counter-domination and alternative views in food studies gaining visibility? At this point, we

face the challenge to describe and analyse the possible next dominant and counter-dominant agenda of food-study research. Then, in the following section, we will briefly address the global food policy context and some developments taking place at local level politics, involving participatory and civil-decentralized forms of food governance and empowerment.

Domination and Counter-domination: Food Research Agendas

It is at this point that we must concentrate on the bundle of elements, practices and relations that constitutes modes of domination and counter-domination to the continuation of the modernization of the agricultural and food project.

Alternative views to agricultural and food centres that control research and policy have a social life and trajectory of their own. However, these centres still have technology, economic resources and institutional authority to unfold new possibilities and reforms for global, national and regional agricultural policies, especially under the growing urgency of the environmental agenda. This places considerable pressure on the capacity and ability of these centres to deliver a range of solutions and to politically actualize the relevance and dominance of the modernization project for agriculture and the food sector.

Global environmental change and the energy crisis are examples of how the modernization project of agriculture and food may come to dominate again under an expert knowledge ideology. The experts' approach is to build into the application of existing science a solution for the majority of the emerging contemporary challenges. The modernization project is constructing an agenda that mainly focuses on the potential negative impacts of global environmental change and the looming energy crisis. Paradoxically, this is unifying the political animosity that existed between environmentalists, ecologists and the dominant representatives of the modernization of food and agriculture. The convergence of scientists and the actualization of modernization objects is occurring and given substance by the acceptance that we are 'witness' to an unprecedented change (crisis) in the nature of the physical world.

The objective of science is then to research the adaptation of plants, animals and the food system to changing temperature, nutrient and water conditions, to develop 'sustainable food systems'. The final aim is to scientifically construct a 'second nature' for food systems to become more reactive to food demands, resource efficiency, greenhouse-gas emissions, procurement and provisions to manage risk and vulnerability. This constructed second nature will reorient the unstable 'external world', which is constituted by unsustainable multifunctionalities and a global activity that makes us assimilate questionable food habits. There are a number of reasons for this crisis. However, food, fuel prices, consumer behaviour and the lack of state policy support to sustainable food production are some of the reasons explaining why the 'agricultural system' is not yet contributing to society's demands for climate and energy adaptation and why it requires urgent scientific intervention (see Fresco, 2009).

As we suggested earlier, the counter-dominant scientific view to the dominant agenda bears witness to social actors' food experiences, and their own coordinated actions provide us with an entry point to describe and analyse social contingencies, such as the skills, orientations, experiences, interests, resources and patterns of social interaction, which are vital characteristics of food producers, retailers and consumers.

The objective here is to couple local experiences of selective incorporation, including previous ideas, beliefs and images of agricultural and food changes with local conceptualizations and understandings of social organization and resource use. This is oriented to identify existing and possible sources of power.

This frame of conceptualization requires an assessment of the life experience of actors to recognize potential spaces of actions and the reach of policy and commodity dissonance to identify differential rooms for manoeuvre for particular groups of farmers and rural dwellers in specific rural sites. Thus in a counter-dominant agenda it is not the accumulation of facts that will generate the adaptation of plants, animals and the food system to changing climate and resource conditions, but the description and analysis of sources of power and the parallel ways of human practices in the use of resources and the production of food.

The aim is not to construct a 'second nature' for food production, market demands, resource efficiency and greenhouse-gas emissions, but a methodology capable of incorporating changing social relations and people's livelihoods. The point here is not just to manage risk and vulnerability, but rather to discover *in situ* the social field of those practices by which actors obtain and process the information reaching them. In this vein, the recognition of local cognitive maps guiding their practices is the most elementary social form to make sense of actors' environment. The objects and events that are regarded as significant by people in the organization of their actions and practices are important signpost connecting lifeworlds and knowledge processes. Knowledge is fragmentary, partial and provisional in nature. Thus, to study producers, retailers and consumers of food and how they operate with a multiplicity of understandings, beliefs and practices will probably provide a different view about climate change from the one expressed by scientists, policy-makers and field practitioners. This will establish the diversity of knowledge in the rural site.

Given the diversity of the rural and urban lifeworlds and the social interactional basis for producers, retailers, middlemen and consumers, it is important to know how local knowledge and practices are constructed, coordinated and revised by actors on the basis of existing forms of organization and modes of participation and competition, including mainstream and alternative global food markets (i.e. standards of quality, traceability and food safety). Thus, it is important to describe the ebb and flow of information, resources and commercial exchanges between different actors – for example, among food producers themselves, and between them and the various types of vertical integration, horizontal coordination and networks.

The aim here is to establish the extension and reach of actors' food and agricultural practices and to establish the features of material connection. The use of biotechnology, agrochemical inputs, agri-industrialization processes or, by contrast, agroecology practices, conservation of resources and landscape revaluation. Nested vulnerability created by the dominant modernization policies or counter-dominant orientations to enhance the potential and to increase the sustainable capacity of agri-food clusters are important source of information to orient transformations of knowledge – adaptation – to climate change and energy crisis. In other words, the change resides not only in the use of the category system of science per se, but in the process by which farmers and producers of food are interacting, negotiating and accommodating to each other's lifeworlds, leading to the reinforcement or transformation of existing practices dealing with plants, animals and food clusters to changing temperature, nutrient and water conditions. Conditions of sustainable food and adaptation are a

creative outcome of human interaction and should not be conceived just as a functional response to biological or economic system requirements.

Food Policy Alternatives

Exploring dominant and counter-dominant research agendas is important, but addressing food policy alternatives is equally important. The global circulation of standardized food is still an expression of the power and control of corporate agricultural, large-scale business enterprises. There is a need to debate the importance of OECD tariffs and the effect of barriers to Southern countries. For instance, sanitary and phytosanitary regulations and transport costs seem more important obstacles for African exports than tariffs. Would food agro-exports take off if these regulations and costs are not properly examined in interaction with each other? Global food policy is a crucial factor bearing on the social and economic distribution of sources of power in international trade geographies.

The contemporary emphasis on trade quality standards, the fragmentation of the market, and the proliferation of food circuits is fueled by the political contradictions and lack of agreements of the World Trade Organization over subsidy regimes and global rules. Paradoxically, it is the unpalatable normative focus of these global organizations that is indirectly contributing to demands of countries like China, Brazil and India to take a place at the policy-makers' table. They intend to drive the OECD countries from their privileged power positions. However, while we can observe expressions of an alternative source of power emerging in global politics, we may ask which agricultural and food modes of organization are being encouraged to whose benefits.

Alongside these geopolitical trends and transnational agricultural corporations, we have civic-consumer social movements and associations (organic, slow food and fair-trade) that are grouping their specific knowledges about environment, social justice and food to lead campaigns against the failure of the food and agricultural modernization policies. These movements represent a growing commitment to create 'alternatives' to the domination of international bodies, nation states and multinational corporations. The movements bring people together across countries and across issues of global justice, sustainable and environmental products and a more decentralized market; while some of them are lobbying for more favourable prices for organic producers, others want a political recognition of 'consumer power'.

However, food studies have paid little or no attention yet to the opening up of local-level politics (cf. Swartz, 1968), which is made explicit by a number of civil constituent units, such as fair-trade nations, towns and villages (Barnett et al., 2005; Malpass et al., 2007; Fisher, 2009). The rise of gastronomic regions and social economies made up of bundles of values and nets of historical narratives, environmental services and culture are innovative organizational alignments that would not have been possible without creative arrangements of government officials, producers, retailers and consumers. Indeed, it is said that the most visible effect of this today is the local revaluation of food (see Laguna, 2009).

The value representation of food, the struggle over the implementation of trade quality standards and practices by which consumers' food needs are satisfied is creating new food spaces; these places of encounter between contrasting bodies of knowledge and social actors' practices are shattering, with their actions, the repre-

sentation of the homogeneous market. It has imploded creating a landscape of a multitude of consumers with their respective cultures. These are counter-tendencies to hierarchical food coordination, which are leading to fragmented differences and political tensions, uncovering emerging patterns that are growing between the normative thrust of trade policy standards and people's actions and practices.

A Last but Not Least Point

We want to suggest that food studies need to focus on the organization and transformation of power and authority relations. An oscillation in food study perspectives is taking place again; this is a shift to explore specific social interfaces that highlight the recognition of multiple sources of authority and power in global food coordination and the circumstances of particular intervention scenarios. The implementation of environmental, sustainable organic food narratives and practices, for example, may instigate organizing food and agriculture locally to diminish carbon foot-prints, or it may imply the demise of previously active types of global solidarity economy commitments, such as the fair-trade mode of commercial cooperation based on nations, cities and villages and commercial exchanges among producers and consumers. In these situations, expressions of power and global food coordination may undergo a fundamental rethink. These issues are moving us conceptually beyond the simple detection of social food orders, the organized and normative nature of quality standards and trade policy regulations, leaving us with several important and recurring questions. Does a particular local-level food and agricultural policy process have the capacity to generate change in specific local contexts? What are the conditions under which this happen? Can we effectively address the many social and policy paradoxes that arise?

One way of addressing these issues is by exploring empirically, that is in the everyday life circumstances of actors, the encounter of images, interests and expectations underlying interactions between people and the scientific, expert and policy-maker communities. The focus would be on the practices deployed to establish socio-technical food systems and how these are situated within the broader institutional and power fields of the world of food. This assumes that there is no one single food system ordering markets and practices of production, retailing and consumption.

The concern for practices entails a detailed understanding of the material outcomes of such actions, such as the reconstruction of food boundaries categories for market and cultural purposes. To address these issues we need a perspective to work with. Thus, sources and expressions of power and authority should be explored as part of the ambivalent and ambiguous relations between producers and consumers; these relations enable differences in food interests and knowledge to be contained within different commercial strategies and market arrangements and in the practical resolution of production, transaction and consumption in everyday life (see Kleine, 2009). In short, standardized and normative values and markets dissolve in various ways, but similarly the social and political organization of food experience by actors, their political rights to food circulation and governance are construed through the political actions that cuts into and create the indeterminacy of ordering processes and practices.

Since we cannot sensibly take an imaginary global food system as our unit of analysis, we need to start with the basic constituents of social action – the social sit-

uations and arenas of markets – and compare them with the courses of action taken by multinationals, international agencies, governments, producers, retailers and consumers. This is a testing issue, because researchers of food development have to struggle with each situation and arena as a potential source and expression of power and, consequently, attempt to dominate the food market while predicting counter-domination responses, and eventually alternatives, even in those situations where actors' interests and practices remain distinct and their vision to food opposed. This constituted the background to the original concern of the RC40 Mini-Conference, which was to encourage the presentation of research on agri-food studies at the local level to stimulate a process of rethinking the economic strategies of food organizations, corporations, and the potential of a variety of circuits and markets. People's overlapping practices contribute to processes of food relocalization. These processes create struggles between people and policy-makers and bureaucrats. Such features reveal different sources and expressions of power, suggesting that we are currently experiencing a modification in existing relations of power.

Outline of the Contributions to this Special Issue

A focus on food power relocalization, the relations and struggles involved is present in the contributions of Hilary Tovey, Yoko Kanemasu and Roberta Sonnino. Tovey provides an innovative approach to the view from below provided by studies of alternative food networks. It highlights contestations around the meaning of local food and engages in a debate over the changing nature of the coordination of food exchanges and the possibility of reshaping the Irish rural environment. This is expressed through network politics. While economic return is part of the issue, the struggles are about the 'appropriateness' of social relations and relations of production for the Irish countryside and for rural development. Apparently, contestations are at work to disorganize and destabilize relations in the alternative network camp. Tovey's paper provides a political warning about competing visions around the meaning of local food. One is optimistic towards dominant food system fragmentation, alternative circuits alongside market reform and innovation of products – to gain access to mainstream commercial opportunities; however, it may obscure cooperative and solidarity relationships.

   These 'two ways of seeing' the 'alternativizing' process of food are 'laboured' locally through images of entrepreneurs, top-down provisions of commercial and production knowledges, 'innovation' in food products, cooperative knowledge and opportunity sharing. Under examination, the 'ambiguities' of the relations of power across space continue within the market discourse of local food. This creates a social field that is not so alternative and seems very akin to a modern Western perspective to see the world only in terms of divisions. The danger is that this alternative food movement might just disappear without trace into forms more compatible with capitalist development policy. But by the same token, researchers cannot properly determine the future of these movements unless these visions are presented and acted upon within the overall realm of practice.

   Yoko Kanemasu and Roberta Sonnino's contribution stresses the ambiguous nature of the shift from conventional agri-industrial practices and processes to sustainable rural development initiatives. Both authors focus on the social experiences of rural actors, which are not coherent and explicit constructs conveniently coordi-

nated for the researchers' appraisal that there is a paradigm shift taking place. Instead, their contribution finds that local actors' notions of cooperative relations do not necessarily mean that individual producers abandon dealing and strategizing with conventional markets. The article suggests that producers' collective empowerment makes them able to combine different market circuits; alternative and conventional participation is repeating or mirroring agri-industrialist strategies. Moreover, these contested processes over allocation of power and resources and the mismatch between the models of academics and actors only make sense to researchers when we problematize and examine issues of power differentials in the different dimensions of rural development practices. In a description of these practices, the researchers should develop a critical approach to these local forms of reasoning that are rapidly expanding the ways for local producers to participate in a variety of fragmented food markets in Europe and in the rest of the world.

Viteri's contribution on wholesale markets in Buenos Aires adds to the issue of power relocalization by considering power as embedded in the nodes of global processes and the lengthening of neoliberal networks. This is manifest in a physical space where the complex modernization and consolidation of power relations take place. The case of the Buenos Aires wholesale market 'incubates' the distribution of power through the technical and administrative transformation of normative rules that affect the actions of and the process of legitimate incorporation of new actors, as well as the shape and coordination of the retail distribution chain. The pursuit of self-interested commercial gain by individually motivated food wholesalers and maximizing individuals leads to an increasing variability of distribution channels and to a multiplicity of local social actors' actions. In this case, coordination of food distribution is a complex and messy process where administrative hierarchy and control is overtly exercised to bring into line different kinds of social and political interests and motivations. However, how social actors experience global processes in this market space that distributes food is, according to Viteri, emphasized in a cross-cutting chain of everyday social, political and economic relationships constituting the networks and daily practices in which the social life of the market is achieved and the distribution of food takes place. Power distribution seems the form integrating local conceptions of social relations and conceptions food commoditization.

Sekine and Hisano's article contributes another important dimension to our understanding of power. In a different interpretation from the previous contributions, they stress the influence of transnational enterprises and how researchers need to understand persistent forms of monopolistic power through which global networks are coordinated. This leads them to support the notion that there is an overt, although indirect, exercise of control over rural sites by agribusiness corporations via different types of contract farming arrangements. This monopolistic power generates a situation in which there is one supplier of agricultural produce; in effect, food corporations neutralize the advantages of the competitive market in an efficient and risk-averting way. This can lead to the undesirable state of affairs whereby the monopolist's power in the market can exploit new alliances between agribusiness corporations investing in local stagnating rural economies. This is a strategy of legitimizing their involvement in order to capitalize on the growing niche market for quality products.

Sekine and Hisano ask whether Japan's national agriculture, which has been abandoned by the government, could be rescued by multinational agribusiness and what

are the potential social and economic impacts of this new form of 'rural social invest-ment'. The multinational strategy of social investment is to provide conditions for the more efficient provision of fresh vegetables offered in these stagnated rural areas by making sure they are produced at competitive prices and with higher guaranteed quality than is at present supplied by competitors' agri-food firms. However, the monopoly of power may generate social costs to the extent that local farmers' prac-tices of selective compliance, local distantiation or even exit are presented as practices that cannot be characterized as either dominance or resistance. At this point, we would argue that coordination rather than cooperation seems a more appropriate term to explain the evolution of contract growing schemes, types of governance pro-tocol, the implementation of rules and the institutional configuration linking people and technology.

In an interesting and provocative twist to their argument, Sekine and Hisano use the shadow of political economy to pre-empt criticism to their notion of monopolistic power and to counter-attack the actor-oriented approach and its sociological empha-sis on the lifeworld of actors and social groups, challenging the notion of actors' agency to organize themselves and mobilize resources. They advocate a better exam-ination of the uneven distribution of economic and political power defining the availability of socio-economic and political mobilization of social actors in rural sites.

Such a view emphasizes the significance of organizational hierarchy rather than local actors' networks. Against the grain, these authors argue for a discussion of the control of the domestic market by multinationals and for a rethinking of what they call macro-level dynamic interactions. This perspective mentions that structuring fac-tors are not completely determining the action and consciousness of human actors. In this contribution the vision of monopolistic power of multinationals does not prob-lematize, as other articles in this special issue do, the contention that power coincides with bounded organizations and institutions.

Turning now to Rivera-Ferre's contribution, she focuses on making sense of imper-sonal, unseen and automatic consumption norms, guided by worldwide market forces. While it is possible to see connections with Sekine and Hisano's article, Rivera-Ferre helps us to comprehend the ongoing process of powerful actors convincing institutions such as governments and international organizations, as well as interna-tional agencies such as the World Bank and FAO, to provide resources and an appropriate legal environment to favour multinational power and the drive to increase meat and fish consumption globally. She argues that increasing levels of demand of meat and fish are a combination of the externalization of costs and over-supply, which have the effect of keeping prices low and consumer habits unchanged. Food firms are operating in an international financial context in which survival and growth is achieved via take-over and merger.

Strategies by multinational food companies promote this type of unsustainable consumption. These strategies are propelled by financial investment in contrast to investment in productive activities. Food multinationals rely on these strategies in their effort to reproduce themselves, since they cannot continue to achieve economic growth by organizing and justifying the (industrial) intensification of animal hus-bandry and aquaculture. Since these food firms depend on relationships with governmental and international institutional agencies, they accept grants and subsi-dies or they may have privileged access to government procurement contracts. The virtual nature of financial economic strategies generates a discontinuity with the bio-

logical and organic conditions of food, compromising the health of consumers and the carrying capacity of natural agro-ecosystems to fulfill meat and fish demands.

Clearly supply-driven consumption policy orientations can go on within various types of organizations, public and private, national and international. This dynamic reallocates power to the powerful through private and public alliances; this coordination disempowers local social actors and consumers while potentially generating health, environmental and social problems. The emphasis in Rivera-Ferre's contribution is on how economic factors are effectively mediated by a set of political and administrative institutions. Government and international institutions are implicated in supporting this virtual financial strategy reorganizing hierarchically the consumption of meat and fish through unsustainable production systems. Finally, this is concentrating power away from people's actions and wants.

This approach has a broader applicability in understanding and comparing governments, international communities (EU), multinationals and retailers' courses of action as a counterbalance to consumers' networks. It brings 'vertical coordination' under the financial capital drive to invest in food companies, while achieving efficient inter-unit reorganization and power concentration to control food markets.

In summary, this introduction orients the diverse contributions to this Special Issue towards a common premise. In different ways, each author emphasizes the importance of power reallocation in the sociology of agri-food studies. The importance of power is entangled with an analytical view of organizational processes of fragmentation and social coordination. Insights from each of the contributions thereby enrich our analytical capacity within agri-food studies.

Notes

1. This is not a comprehensive survey, but just few contributions to illustrate the vitality of the field of food studies.
2. Migros, the largest chain in Switzerland, accounts for 50% of organic sales in the country. Many other large retailers (Tesco, ASDA, Marks & Spencer, Carrefour, Aldi, Coop Italia and Esselunga, among others) are applying a GMO-free policy in accordance with consumer preference for more 'natural' products.
3. Text 'refers not to script alone, but any articulation of intelligibility, that is to say, of being' (see Schatzki, 2002, p. 61).
4. Here it is important to point out such production occurrence should not be equated with more encompassing and large-scale concepts of production regimes, since it gives significance to people's everyday experiences of such food production arrangements (Arce, 2009).

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