



'Local Food' as a Contested Concept: Networks, Knowledges and Power in Food-based Strategies for Rural Development

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Abstract. This article reports on a contestation around the meaning of 'local food', between a group engaged in 'alternativizing' food exchanges building on a vision of cooperative knowledge-sharing and opportunity-sharing, and one engaged in 'reform' of the conventional system. The latter envisions the formation of individual entrepreneurs and a top-down provision of commercial and production knowledges, emphasizing 'innovation' in food products as the way to gain access to the global system. The contestation is ongoing in a single space, where the two visions of advancing the local food project coexist and are found within separate but overlapping networks. The paper suggests that the struggle between them is not only over strategies to improve economic returns to such producers, but also over the social forms and relations of production seen as appropriate for 'rural development' in the Irish context. The 'ambiguities' of the relations of power across space, while not affecting the market discourse of local food, work to disorganise and destabilise relations within the alternative network and to make the project of an alternative local food system vulnerable to transition into forms more compatible with capitalist development policy.

Introduction

This article reports on a contestation around the meaning of 'local food', which is ongoing in a single place, South County Tipperary in Ireland.¹ The contest is over whether 'local food' means reforming the food system so as to allow those increasingly marginalized by it, local farmers, to receive better returns on their food

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products, or radically alternativizing it by constructing a local food exchange system, viz a Farmers' Market. Within global capitalism, tensions between radicalism and reformism are of course a long time feature of left-wing politics; they are also extensively discussed, specifically in relation to food, in Reynolds et al.'s (2007) collection of papers on Fair Trade. In recent years, this argues, the Fair Trade movement has increasingly been positioning itself in mass markets and organizing business partnerships that involve large-scale traders, distributors and retailers – a strategy that 'is causing considerable concern and debate within the movement' (Murray and Reynolds, 2007, p. 9) and increasingly differentiates Fair Trade from the Alternative Trade Organizations that were important to its beginnings. The latter's assumption that the best way to promote global equality in food trade is to set up different channels of commodity exchange, and that the credibility and integrity claimed for these can be upheld through face-to-face relations of trust, are undermined by a move towards expanding exchange networks and the use of certification systems and of independent certification bodies using 'increasingly formalised rules, standards and product labelling procedures' (2007, p. 18), which come between producers and consumers. Barrientos et al. summarize the disagreement as between trying 'to advance an alternative to mainstream trade', and trying 'to advance Fair Trade *within* the mainstream of commercial retailing' (2007, 53, emphases in original). On the one side, the argument is that generating greater benefits for small producers in developing countries requires a move beyond selling only to 'politically correct' outlets and consumers, on the other that developing partnerships with large food retail corporations and large-scale food producers will compromise Fair Trade's roots in cooperative principles and support for small farmers.

The case I discuss here is local rather than global but reveals similar tensions and pressures. Whereas Reynolds et al. largely take a developmentalist approach to Fair Trade, tracing this as a process of contested change over *time*, my study is one of contested action in *space*, where two distinct visions of advancing 'the local food project' coexist and are found within separate but overlapping networks. I will suggest that the struggle between them is not only over strategies to improve economic returns to such producers, but also over the social forms and relations of production seen as appropriate for 'rural development' in the Irish context. The network engaged in 'alternativizing' food exchanges in Co. Tipperary builds on a vision of cooperative knowledge- and opportunity-sharing as the basis for development, while the network engaged in 'reform' of the conventional system envisions the formation of individual entrepreneurs and a top-down provision of commercial and production knowledges, emphasizing 'innovation' in food products as the way to gain access to the global system.

A recent paper on production–consumption food networks (Holloway et al., 2007) argues strongly against starting the analysis of any given 'food project' with dichotomizing categories of the sort used above – 'alternative' versus 'conventional', 'alternativizing' versus 'reformist'. In their view, the focus should be on finding ways to analyse the diversity and heterogeneity of such projects, which tend to be obscured when they are labelled into one or other category in advance: 'Rather than categorising heterogeneous modes of food provisioning as alternative, we explore how particular food projects can be understood as arranged across a series of inter-related analytical fields in ways which make their operation possible' (2007, p. 3). They suggest that 'there should be other ways of thinking about food networks which retain a sense of the diversity and particularity of different food networks, but which also

allow us to say something useful about them in terms of relations of power and struggles over how food production and consumption should be arranged in society' (2007, p. 5). Holloway et al. provide a methodological framework for capturing the diversity in arrangements exhibited by individual food projects, focusing on the site of production, methods of production, supply chains and arenas of exchange, producer-consumer interactions, motivations for participation, and the construction of identities for the different actors and groups involved. This does prove useful in showing how a large number of projects that might be loosely grouped together as 'alternative' are actually arranged in fairly distinctive ways. Whether it leads to a useful analysis of 'power and struggles' might be questioned, and I return to this in the last part of this article.

While I agree that we need to recognize heterogeneity in examining food networks and projects, I am not convinced that we can dispense with the notion of 'alternativity'. It is still useful to distinguish those food projects that rest on oppositional attitudes to the capitalist food economy from those that attempt to join that economy on more favourable terms. The arrangements that most interest Holloway et al. are the ways in which producer-consumer relations are organized, and they freely admit that they have taken 'limited account of the important roles played by government agencies and other organisations' (2007, p. 7). Yet it may be – and the case study reported below does, I believe, suggest this – that it is precisely in relation to state and other development agencies that the 'alternative-conventional' distinction is most useful.

I first outline briefly the economic and social context in which my case study is located, and then elaborate the current situation through a focus on two specific dimensions of it: networks, and knowledges. This provides the basis for a discussion of power resources and mechanisms in this rural site, and their impacts on an alternative food project.

Context – A 'Food Desert'?

County Tipperary, in the southern centre of Ireland, is historically renowned for its good land and agricultural productivity. In the flat lands at its core, farms are larger than the Irish or European average and the soil is deep and rich; there is some grain production, some well-known horse studs, and in the past, some apple orchards for the cider industry, but farming is predominantly specialized in beef production and dairying. Around the county boundaries the terrain becomes mountainous, and here the soil is thinner, wetter and more acid, farm sizes are smaller, and particularly with the ending of the sugar beet industry, farmers are turning to coniferous afforestation and off-farm work. Our research was carried out in the southern part of County Tipperary, which possesses both sets of characteristics. The county has been a significant node in national and international agrifood systems for centuries and is characterized by the presence of many small and larger market towns, although the proportion of the population living in rural areas is still higher than the national average.

Historical processes, both local and global, have transformed this once rich farming area into a peripheral site within the global food industry. In the colonial period, beef and butter production were already organized as export industries. In the past century, three institutions have continued and intensified this structure: the dairy cooperatives, the large-scale beef processors, and Teagasc, the semi-state Agriculture

and Food Authority, which operates extension services for farmers, advises on and implements national and EU policy, and conducts R&D for commodity production and marketing.

The cooperative movement found an early base among County Tipperary dairy farmers. Today nearly all milk producers still sell their milk to a dairy cooperative, but the cooperatives have amalgamated, centralized and transformed themselves into corporate actors with global reach. They operate under a policy regime that increasingly favours traders over producers (McMichael, 2004). The many small independent co-ops still found in the county in the 1960s had amalgamated, by the 1980s, into one large organization, Golden Vale co-op, which today is part of the multinational food company Glanbia that produces a range of milk-based products and is a global importer and exporter of fractionated milk elements to use in consumer-ready foods.

Meat production largely remained outside the cooperative movement, and meat processing (slaughtering, de-boning, packaging) and distribution remained in private ownership. The dominant actor in the South Tipperary meat industry is Anglo-Irish Meats Ltd., a large commercial company owned in Ireland but with plants both there and in Britain. Ninety per cent of Irish beef is exported, primarily to Britain and other EU countries, and there is also a live cattle trade, controlled by a small number of big traders.

South Tipperary commodity farmers are thus tied into a food processing and exporting system in which they hold little power, over either their own production practices or the prices they receive. Tight integration of farmers into the food chain has been a goal of state agricultural policy since the 1980s and has been encouraged by Teagasc through its research, advisory and training personnel. Global changes in 'the temperate grain-livestock complex' (Weis, 2007) have restructured the farming landscape. Over the past two decades, even farmers with good soil and relatively large and modernized farms have struggled to secure a livelihood, while smaller, poorer farmers have abandoned the occupation of farming in substantial numbers.

Food distribution and consumption practices mirror these changes. Fairs and markets largely disappeared from local towns after the establishment of specialized cattle marts by the national farmers' organization (IFA) in the 1970s. More recently, corner shops in towns and villages have been declining, displaced by large Irish, British and German-owned retail chains and by the trend of siting 'mini-supermarkets' (usually part of an international retail chain such as Spar) at petrol stations along motorways. MacDonalds and other fast food chains have made inroads into the local towns. A rich food producing region is being transformed into what might be called a type of 'food desert' (Fonte, 2008) where consumption is spatially disconnected from production, diets are shaped by global retail and consumer-ready food corporations, and food exchanges have become routinized and depersonalized within mass retail outlets.

Irish people generally do not spend much on food (the average, at around 8% of household expenditure, is one of the lowest in the EU). Convenience and a need for 'fuel' (Miele, 2001) have dominated Irish consumer perceptions of food. However, in recent years as the economy has boomed, food is becoming 'fashion' (*ibid.*), especially among more affluent consumers. Food journalists, television programmes ('celebrity chefs'), and competition among supermarket chains have helped to create an interest in 'good food', whose meanings range from the 'exotic' to the 'healthy/safe' to the 'alternative'. Primarily centred on the larger cities (Dublin, Cork,

Galway), this is beginning to influence consumption throughout the country; a Slow Food Convivium has recently been established in South Tipperary, Farmers' Markets are proliferating in the area, and the organic movement, which has had a presence since the early 1980s, is also increasingly recognized and institutionalized.

'Local Food' – Contested Versions

Very little remains in this part of Ireland of what might be described as 'traditional' food, either in what is grown, how it is processed, or in the cuisine of the area. Nevertheless, the concept of 'local food' has become a focal point for local rural development efforts in the past five years. Two main groups of actors are involved. One, a loose network of actors connected with a particular Farmer's Market, understand what they are doing as an attempt to relocalize the food distribution system, embracing both local producers and local consumers, in an area that has been incorporated into a global food system for a long period of time. This is expected to increase livelihood opportunities in local agriculture and food processing, and provide a local social space for civil society from which further developments may come. The 'local food' idea is also being picked up by some key development institutions dealing with rural Ireland, such as Teagasc, Bord Bia (the National Food Promotion Board) and LEADER; the main carrier of the institutional understandings of the concept in South Tipperary is a local LEADER Action Group. But in this case, 'local food' is understood as foodstuffs 'traditional' to the locality, or capable of being represented as such, which can use their local branding to reach into and colonize global niche or 'quality food' markets. Overlapping networks and relationships between the two groups of actors help to conceal the presence of a struggle for discursive ownership of the 'local food project' and, behind that, of conflicting visions of 'rural development'.

The project to relocalize the food system is associated with a Farmers Market established in a small town in South Tipperary (referred to here as C-) about 18 miles from the county seat, Clonmel. It was set up in 2001, the first to be established in the county. Farmers Markets are a good illustration of Holloway et al.'s claim that there is heterogeneity and difference in food projects often grouped together under a single classification. Moore (2006) distinguishes three different types of Farmers Markets in Ireland. The 'Pioneers' were the first to be set up, usually in areas (such as West Cork) that have had a strong 'alternative' food culture since the 1970s. They are generally run by a committee of the stallholders, who establish more or less formal rules about what can be sold, who can sell, and from what distance (usually around 30 miles) products can be brought for sale; these rules attempt to establish both 'localness' of products and producers, and some degree of 'natural embeddedness' of the product (the producer must have a direct connection with the production process, either as grower or as craft food processor). The pioneering markets often faced hostility in establishing themselves: local authorities, responding to pressure from town food businesses, tried to close them down under legislation forbidding 'casual trading', and health and safety authorities sought to regulate the sale of home-produced foods such as raw milk cheeses, cooked meats or smoked fish. Next to be established were the 'Privately Run Farmers' Markets', mainly in the east of the country and particularly around Dublin. They are run by 'benevolent dictators' (Moore, 2006) – individual entrepreneurs with a passion for food who determine the organization of

trading and what products can be sold. In these markets, all fresh fruit and vegetables (although not other produce) must be certified organic, but need not be 'local', and stallholders are often traders rather than producers: they can import much of what they sell, and sell at a number of different markets around the country. These markets expand the selling of food as a cultural object (Jordan, 2007) and a signifier of taste and social status; they attract customers through their promise to provide 'exotic', 'craft' and 'heritage' foods. Finally, Moore distinguishes the 'participatory' type of Farmers Market; generally the most recently established, these have an organizational structure similar to that of the Pioneers but have worked with rather than been confronted by local authorities and rural development groups such as LEADER in setting themselves up. Under the guidance of those 'outside' institutions, Moore suggests, the committees in charge of Participatory Markets usually try to ensure that the participating farmers are low-income farmers, and rules about both 'local' and 'natural' embeddedness are quite closely policed.

The Farmers' Market at C-

The market discussed here falls into Moore's third type, but is perhaps unusually autonomous. It came into existence before the LEADER LAG became interested in 'local food' or in Farmers' Markets, and was established by a local civil society grouping that called itself the C- Development Association. The Development Association wanted the market to sell a fairly wide spectrum of consumption staples, particularly products 'indigenous to the area'. To minimize conflict, they brought local shopkeepers into the Association at an early stage of planning. They found a suitable site, in the car-park of an old grain store that had been converted into a craft shop, persuaded the county council to provide water, electricity, and a waste collection service to it, and advertised for stallholders. Once the market was set up, the Association left it to be run by the stallholders themselves as a committee, with limited oversight by the county council that charges each stallholder 150 euros a year for their stall. Stallholders' own accounts of how the market is organized, however, indicate a strong element of informal self-regulation. Decisions about what to sell, or with whom to go into or out of partnership, are made by individual stallholders themselves, following their own understandings of what the market is about (to sell 'local' food, 'quality' food, to support the livelihoods of local producers, to restore personal relations between producers and consumers, to contribute to local 'development'). Nevertheless, they do act collectively on occasion; in one instance a local company that is a large distributor of organic meats wanted to take a stall in the market and the committee refused:

We felt that [company name] was importing an awful lot of stuff from Germany and places like that and we did feel it was commercializing the market a little too much and we would rather give local suppliers the possibility of marketing their produce (Stallholder interview).

The C- market is quite small; starting in 2001 with six stallholders, by 2005/2006 there were 11, selling bread and confectionaries, apple juice, vegetables, meat and poultry. All sell their own produce – none is only a 'middleman'. Most cannot get a full livelihood out of selling at the market, but it offers a better, more convenient and more interesting return on production than selling to commodity processors or to retail shops. They rely on other sources of income – a pension from previous employ-

ment, cattle or other commodity farming, off-farm work, farm support payments and REPS (agri-environmental) payments, small LEADER grants – to survive. Nevertheless they regard the market as a success: this is measured in terms of the volume of customers coming through and the sociability of the atmosphere.

Now there was something there I just wanted to say to you about the market itself. What I found during the summer was that people were coming there and stopping and talking in little groups, and that's something that's totally missing when you go to supermarkets or anything like that.... Nobody is in a hurry out there, they are all chatting away, you know that's something in a rural area that you need, and it's there that development begins, I think (Stallholder interview).

Stallholders aim to supply basic items of household consumption, such as meat, bread and vegetables. Apart from one pate stall, they do not engage in selling the 'exotics' found in the Dublin markets. While both meat stallholders are certified organic, the vegetables are organically grown but not certified; their 'quality' rests on the personal knowledge and 'relations of regard' (Sage, 2003) between seller and consumer. Stallholders enjoy introducing their customers to new food experiences and exchanging cooking and cuisine tips with them; part of their objective is to encourage locals to develop a wider diet, based mainly on foods once eaten in the area and since forgotten. A vegetable stallholder described how,

When I introduced spinach first it wasn't really known in C-, would you believe, and one woman came up and she said 'What's that?' 'That's spinach', I said. 'Oh, that's the stuff that keeps flies out of the kitchen, isn't it?'. Needless to say she bought none of it! I was trying out a few crops to see how they would go, I put in a lot of spinach and I got very worried because nearly 3 or 4 markets and nobody bought any, and then suddenly it took off and people began to buy, and then came back looking for more.

Most of the customers appear to be Irish people from the town and its rural hinterland, covering distances of 10 to 20 miles and including quite elderly rural people with limited incomes. Among the customers we interviewed, the committee's philosophy of direct selling of household staples seemed to be understood and reciprocated. Over half were 'regular' buyers (weekly or fortnightly) while the rest were either first timer locals or non-residents returning to visit relations; very few were tourists. Most said they came because food from the market had the same sort of taste as their own home-grown produce in the past or that they remembered from childhood, and because of a strong dislike of supermarket shopping as 'claustrophobic', aggressive, and untrustworthy. Nevertheless most only bought a small part of their weekly shop at the market.

The LEADER Local Action Group

The second group of actors who have embraced the concept of 'local food' as a vehicle for local development is a LEADER Local Action Group (LAG). This LAG has been in existence since the start of the EU LEADER Programmes in the early 1990s, but it was not until 2004 that it began to recognize food as 'an area that had to be developed, particularly with Tipperary's strong food heritage... Tipperary would have a rich local food heritage with apples, seeds and grain' (LAG Development Offi-

cer interview). A Micro-food Strategy Group was set up to develop the idea; chaired by an academic from University College Cork's Department of Food Business and Development, it included about 12 'local stakeholders' drawn from the private sector (representatives from an organic meats distributor, a specialty food retailer, a national supermarket chain, a prestigious local restaurant, among others) and public agri-food sectors (representatives from Teagasc, the agricultural cooperatives, the County Enterprise Board). It set out three strategies for promoting small food production in the area: development of outlets and capacity; provision of support and services; and provision of education and awareness for consumers as well as producers. Initially thinking about setting up 'some kind of branded initiative', by the time of our study they were concentrating on encouraging farmers into direct selling of produce and establishing new Farmers' Markets as outlets.

LEADER defines its main role in promoting rural development as *networking*. In the local food promotion case, this meant first, bringing together a lot of different agencies who 'all have a finger in the food pie', and 'facilitating' them to work together; and second, linking up 'interested producers' with these different bodies, by holding open days and seminars and through direct contacts. LEADER can also help producers with grants or mentoring, or if they cannot provide these, they pass the person on to other sources such as the County Enterprise Boards. They have also made some direct input into local food promotion, holding food fairs, producing a guide to local foods for tourists, and organizing competitions around food in local schools.

The LAG's food strategy builds on the idea that food has recently become 'very popular' in Ireland; with the increased media interest in food as entertainment and the sophistication of consumer tastes, 'people are looking at eating out experiences and home entertaining, they are not going to put up with the traditional bacon and cabbage if they are home entertaining, they are going to have something more exotic, and they will want to have some local talking point – cheese, for example' (Development Officer interview). 'Local food' is assimilated into a fashionable diet that also includes imported products. In this changing consumption context, LEADER's strategy is to 'try to differentiate Tipperary foods' by giving them a clear designation of origin:

The local people realize there is good food in Tipperary but for any tourist coming through... they generally eat the same stuff no matter where they eat, you don't realize you are in a different part of the country, you go in and order your bacon and cabbage but they are not saying this is Limerick or South Tipperary bacon, or cabbage grown in Clonmel, you are not giving them that local feel (Development Officer interview).

Interest in this form of local food promotion is shared by Bord Bia, the national food marketing agency, which began to mention 'local food' in its 2003 Annual Report. Bord Bia cooperated with the county council, the Tipperary Heritage Society and other local groups in establishing a 'heritage food fair' in C – in September 2006, to reflect its status as a 'heritage town'. Valorization of 'local' food appears to require that it can be recast as 'heritage', or 'reinvented tradition'.

How does supporting Farmers' Markets come into this strategy? The LEADER Development Officer is keenly aware of the changing funding regime for European agriculture, and works closely with Teagasc, through its 'Options Programme' for the Single Farm Payment regime, to find opportunities in this for local food produc-

ers. Expanding direct selling of farm produce is seen as a significant 'option'. If farmers realize that they can't remain in commodity farming cost effectively, the Development Officer says, they should look at direct selling to 'add value' to their product:

An ideal way to work is to try your product through a very cost effective basis going through a Farmers' Market, you get a very immediate feedback, and obviously if it looks quite good and there is a bit of demand for it you could look at distribution beyond the Farmers' Market, maybe deliver locally to shops or get into one of the distribution companies who are doing artisan food products... We would view the Farmers' Markets as an ideal kind of a test ground or incubation area for a basic product to get out, and how to modify the product (ibid)

Direct selling is linked to innovation in food production. In deciding to grant-fund producers, for example, their practice is to

focus on the innovative aspect, if there is already 50 organic egg producers in the country we are not going near number 51... Generally projects at the beginning are not funded, say at a national level, and say then after a while they become accepted and taken up by the department as part of a mainstream programme, so obviously the trailblazers if you want to call them that, might come knocking at our door (Development Officer interview).

'Local food' and its role in promoting local development, then, is understood very differently by these two groups of actors. For the LAG, promoting 'local food' means revalorizing, or inventing, items from a 'traditional' cuisine whose geographical indication is used to promote them in global markets; local markets such as a Farmers Market provide a useful, cheap testing ground on which to try out the innovation and see how well it does. For the C- Farmers' Market group, 'local food' means a project for relocating food exchanges, as part of a larger effort to revitalize local economic and social life. How these two 'local food' projects overlap and contest each other in the same space is the subject of the next section.

Networks and Knowledges

The C- Farmers' Market is a starting point for understanding some dynamic features of contestation around rural development in South Tipperary. Key dynamics of power relations and potential future developments are the relationships in which different actors are involved, and the discourses and knowledges that circulate around them.

Network Relationships

Given the presence of two competing versions of 'local food' as a strategy for development, one oriented towards an individualist style of interventionism that we might call 'picking winners' and the other to a more collectivist, cooperative or egalitarian style of development, it was not unexpected to find that these circulate within and are supported by two relatively distinct social networks.

Sellers at the C– Farmers’ Market exhibit a high degree of ‘local embeddedness’ (Winter, 2003) and mutual cooperation in their relations with each other and with other small producers and food artisans in the area. People move in and out of partnerships on stalls, and stallholders take trips together to visit other Farmers’ Markets to see what they can learn to develop their own market. As the first to establish in Tipperary, they are also approached for advice by groups thinking of setting up another Farmers’ Market in the county, and although this may ultimately cut into their own sales they have been willing to share their own experience and knowledge. They occasionally sell the produce of other local foodworkers on their own stalls; this tends to be without charge or is repaid through some sort of barter system (Tovey, 2006). A vegetable stallholder gets free manure for his crops from a local farmer who takes it from stud farms in the area and stacks it for rotting down on his farm; in return he sells some of the farmer’s vegetables for him at the market. The stallholder who produces apple juice from his own orchard also processes apples for other small producers who do not have their own juicing plant; he knows five or six other small apple growers in the region and if they are distributing juice over any distance they often share the costs of lorry transport between them. He also runs a Farm Shop, which is his primary mode of direct selling and which brings him into contact with other small producers in the region whose products he sells there. Thus actors affiliated to the C– Market have between them wide-ranging contacts with other artisan food producers in the region, strengthened through an ethos of ‘neighbourliness’.

While primarily focused on ‘the local’, this network does stretch across larger social spaces. Involvement in the organic movement brings some into contact with other food producers and food activists on a national and sometimes international level. One of the stallholders worked for years in the meat processing industry and with the Department of Agriculture before taking over the family farm, and retains contacts from those years. And nearly all the C– market stallholders have some contacts with LEADER, collectively or individually.

LEADER also operates through building cooperative relationships, but this is understood as ‘networking’ rather than ‘neighbourliness’ – that is, networks are created to function for some instrumental aim rather than as webs of sociability. Networking brings potentially successful local food innovators into contact with a range of state and other authorities who can help them to develop their enterprise, and draws in expertise from regional and national level food industries, particularly at the processing and retail end of the food chain, which is used to assess the potential viability of projects submitted to the LAG for support. LEADER’s extended networks encourage an orientation that values local direct selling more for what it can eventually contribute to the national economy, through exports to niche markets, than to local economies and local livelihoods.

An example of the sort of project that gets support through this networking is a relatively new venture in farmhouse sheep cheese, flagged to us by the LEADER Development Officer as a project that ‘ticks all their boxes’. The cheese has recently received EU recognition as an Irish local specialty product; named after a Tipperary medieval religious monument that is a national tourist attraction, it is sold through personal contacts with up-market food retail outlets and a few of the ‘higher-quality’ supermarket chains, through hotels and restaurants, and through wholesalers in the UK, Australia, US and Japan who sell it on to similar outlets in those countries. In interview, its producers recounted how cheese-making was a feature of life in local monasteries and after these were closed down in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,

the knowledge of cheesemaking passed to local producers 'who produced new cheeses but all based on the traditional product'. The producers of this cheese have few contacts with other artisan food producers in the area. The cheese may be found at some of the 'Privately-Run' Farmers' Markets around Dublin but it is not sold at the C- or other local markets. Their significant networks appear to be the national and regional networks of experts facilitated by LEADER and, in particular, a network of 'good food promoters' stretching across both Ireland and the UK, which links together food journalists, restaurateurs, media chefs, Slow Food Consortium members, specialty food shop owners and a few select food producers. Within this network it is the aesthetics of food that dominates judgements of food quality; 'localness' is primarily a reinvention of 'heritage' to market difference.

But the LEADER LAG is also, given its constitution, 'locally embedded' to a degree. At least two members of the C- Stallholders Committee have close contacts with LEADER networks, having served on their Micro-Food Strategy Group in 2004 or acting as 'experts' in various consultations organized by them; several of the stallholders have taken LEADER-sponsored courses or have submitted projects to LEADER for support. The boundaries between the networks are more fuzzy and permeable than the description above indicates; crossover between them becomes evident when we look at the knowledges and knowledge discourses used by local food actors in the two network nodes.

Knowledge Dynamics

LEADER's developmental strategy is to provide knowledge to those who want to innovate with food products and to get involved in direct selling of food. Their approach prioritises 'information shortage' as the main problem facing those starting up new food processing businesses: this includes information about scientific management of food safety, but particularly 'practical hands-on expertise' in introducing new foods into markets. LEADER tries to bring new food producers into contact with successful entrepreneurs in the food industry who possess this practical business experience. The relevant food knowledges for LEADER, then, are *technical* (hygiene and safety) and *commercial* knowledges.

Asked about the knowledges they need, on the other hand, artisan producers connected to the C- Market primarily talk about food *production* knowledges. Their trading and selling skills are seen as part of their larger repertoire of skills in social interaction, not needing to be codified or formally taught. But rebuilding local knowledge about how to grow or process artisan foods is understood as a significant part of a project to relocalize food exchanges, and in the absence of much inherited local tradition to draw on, knowledge is acquired in various ways. Some are informal, as knowledges are circulated through everyday social interaction with other small producers, and some are more formal. Many opportunities for knowledge building come through the organic movement. During the early years of establishing himself, a vegetable stallholder attended 'five or six' weekend courses at the National Organic Centre in County Leitrim, an independent institution run by organic movement enthusiasts. He also learns from older farmers in his area, having a sense that in taking up organic production methods he is returning to how farming was done in Ireland half a century ago; his production knowledges are shaped by 'traditional' practices as well as the more codified knowledges about organic farming in circula-

tion today. Similarly organic meat producers attend courses run by IOFGA (one of the three organic certification bodies in Ireland), go on organic farm visits, and meet and learn from other producers. Others rely more extensively on accredited 'expert' knowledges. The 'apple man', for example, has used his horticultural training to modernize his family's orchards, which have been replanted in a 'non-traditional' way and grow only varieties specialized for eating or juicing. His knowledge about how to produce apple juice was mainly got from the UK company that sold him the juicing equipment, and from 'a few books'.

One of the meat producers at the Market takes courses on marketing and selling and subscribes to international meat magazines: 'I would be looking at product developments and how to present your product'. He also takes a keen interest in craft knowledges, particularly about butchering, and two years ago he went to Scotland to learn another craft – 'how to smoke product and to be able to retail it... I take in cured bacon from other people and I smoke it for them, or [when he has pigs on the farm] I smoke and sell it myself'. But he also takes advice and knowledge informally, from the organic movement and from older cattle farmers:

I think if we share knowledge we learn a lot more together... We've produced beef on the hoof for generations at home on the farm, and we use our local butcher to slaughter our cattle, you have generations of families working in the abattoir, in the butcher's stall, in their family businesses, we're using old knowledge that's there in the beef and sheep industries.

The knowledge dynamics around 'local food' in this area emerged as rich and complex. It is not possible to say that the LEADER network disseminates 'expert' knowledges while the Farmers' Market network shares 'lay' or 'local' knowledges: rather, two 'knowledge cultures' (Morris, 2006) coexist in the area, both of which blend scientific, or formally codified, knowledges acquired in educational settings or from books with relatively uncoded knowledges learnt from experience, conversation and observation. However, one is a production-oriented knowledge culture that makes more use of informal, local or tacit knowledges, and the other a marketing-oriented knowledge culture that makes more use of codified and 'expert' knowledges. The artisan producers around the C- market participate more in the first, LEADER, the national food institutions, and local producers such as the sheeps milk cheese makers described earlier participate more in the second; but most actors in the artisan producer network move between the two with relative ease. The impact of the different knowledge cultures is shaped by the higher status of the marketing-oriented knowledges, which can be seen in some instances (for example, the meat producer quoted above) to interfere with and disorient the reproduction of the 'localized food' philosophy.

Power in Rural Development

'Alternative trade networks have loosely defined frontiers merging, on the one hand, into the general segmentation of markets based on "special quality" demands, and, on the other, becoming indistinguishable from the new "sub-politics" identified by Beck and others' (Wilkinson, 2005, p. 191). It is difficult to draw clear boundaries between networks around food and development in this local space; particular actors are more deeply involved in one set of social relationships than another, but few if any completely lack contact across the margins. This blurring of boundaries between

actor clusters is important for an understanding of how power works in the local space.

Much recent literature on 'alternative' food movements and projects argues against views of capitalism as hegemonic and as unchangingly capable of repressing, subverting or appropriating practices of resistance towards it. Raynolds and Wilkinson (2007, p. 42) discuss 'the cyclical process of corporate appropriation and social movement outflanking' currently reshaping Fair Trade, where social movement initiatives are appropriated into conventional circuits and alternative products transformed into new consumer foods, but emphasize that this process *is* cyclical and in turn stimulates new social movement initiatives. Massey (2000) similarly rejects the view that globalization and economic neoliberalism are inescapable processes that necessarily subsume alternative economic projects, with 'every attempt at radical otherness being so quickly commercialised and sold or used to sell' (2000, p. 281). Leyshon and Lee represent capitalism as fragile and open to challenge, evidenced by the proliferation of examples of 'performing the economy otherwise' (2003, p. 16). Holloway et al. (2007) question conventional views of power and spatiality, challenging representations of space as a fixed and static order of dominance and arguing for a 'more processural' understanding of space as an arena of resistances and oppositionalities, 'part of an entangled and continually remade web of relations' that are 'ambiguous' for the exercise of power or resistance to power (Holloway et al., 2007, p. 6). Recognizing the 'ambiguous' spaces between domination and resistance and treating power as relational means that 'there are always possibilities available for reimagining and restructuring those relationships towards different ways of doing things' (2007, p. 6). Power should be seen as 'a process, as productive (rather than simply repressive), central to all social relations and crucially, "not something to be overthrown, but rather to be used and transformed"' (Cresswell, 2000, p. 264) by actors opposing social power relations which oppress or restrict them' (2000, p. 5).

The case study presented here may suggest less sanguine conclusions about the operation of power within a local space and the strength of capitalism to subsume and divert 'alternative' food actors. Capitalism, to be sure, cannot prevent 'reimagining and restructuring' food relationships and economies, but it may still be able to undermine and disorganize the ongoing reproduction of alternatives, particularly perhaps when it is operating through apparently non-capitalist agencies such as a LEADER LAG. Interactions within a relatively small-scale rural area often appear unstructured by hierarchies of power; nevertheless, developmental resources are unequal in their local distribution, knowledges possess unequal symbolic capital, and network boundaries are blurred or disregarded by those for whom other ways of doing things have no legitimacy. Power acts through the uncertainty and deference of small rural producers, many of whom are fearful of what the future holds for their livelihoods and profession. As Guthman (2004) observes, in her study of the coexistence of large-scale agribusiness and a counter-cultural organic movement in California in the 1980s and 1990s, a movement for a radically alternative food system may be subverted by some of the counter-cultural actors themselves as they come to adopt conventional business ambitions. In the local space of south County Tipperary, the power of conventional economic thinking operates economically, by structuring the provision of development aids, but more important is how it operates discursively, supported by one-way processes of network co-optation.

Market-led expansion of 'local food' projects has impacts on the social forms and relations of production (Barrientos et al., 2007). In the case discussed here, the

'reformist' vision of local food as 'innovative', reconstructing local heritage to brand and differentiate itself in order to move into exchange networks that include international markets, international tourists, and some national upper class or fashionable retail outlets, encourages the individualization of local producers and competitive relations between them. It reproduces state perceptions of agriculture as an economic sector significant more for its contribution to export earnings than as a source of rural livelihoods. The 'alternative' vision of local food as local in both production and consumption regards the practices of food-based livelihoods as in themselves a contribution to local development as they create and reproduce local interaction, social relationships and civil society. Although most of the C- market stallholders cannot survive from market sales alone, their activities help to sustain in production a wider set of small farmers and artisan producers, and at least one of them also provides levels of direct employment in the locality from his Farm Shop and juicing enterprise that are much higher than those provided by the LEADER-backed food entrepreneurs we interviewed. Potential to provide local employment or to contribute to the maintenance of a local economic network appear low on the list of criteria used by the LEADER LAG to determine to which local food projects funding and other resources should be devoted.

As the holder of economic and discursive development resources, the LEADER network is more able to extend its boundaries and to 'co-opt' new members than the alternative network is. Although some alternative producers seem able to move between the two networks without compromising their own alternative goals, such as the apple juice producer who is part of LEADER's 'expert' advisory network yet who sells his own very successful product locally and has no interest in expanding into larger markets, many others add on the discourses picked up in LEADER contexts to their own alternative discourses, fracturing the knowledge culture and the understandings of an 'alternative' within the C- Market network. 'Relocalizing' food exchanges is associated with circulating more money in the local economy and supporting other local producers, but is also associated by some network members with attracting and retaining tourism. Opposition to branding and certification derives in part from a residual agrarian populist antipathy to 'big business', shared by both some 'movement organic' producers and some of the certified organic producers who prefer to sell at the Farmers Market than through wholesale or retail chains. But some of those who express such opposition also embrace the commercial and technical knowledges they are exposed to from their contacts with LEADER courses and networks, leading to industrial discourses of 'quality food' as hygienic, safe, traceable and differentiated. The coexistence of reformist and radical critiques of the capitalist food system within the same small local space exerts pressure on some alternative network actors to become less 'locally embedded'. The 'ambiguities' of the relations of power across space, while not affecting the capitalist market discourse of local food with its translocal networks of support, work to confuse and destabilize relations within the alternative network and to make the project of an alternative local food system vulnerable to transition into forms more compatible with capitalist development policy.

Note

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