Food as a new old commons: A paradigm shift for human flourishing

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Summary

The industrial food system, which has become dominant, is increasingly failing to fulfil its basic functions: producing food in a sustainable manner, feeding people adequately and avoiding hunger. As hunger remains steadily high and obesity numbers do not cease to grow in a world that is overconsuming natural resources far beyond the planetary boundaries, producing food unsustainably and wasting one third of it, there is a need to bring unconventional perspectives into the debate on possible solutions for a transition towards a fair and sustainable food system. The dominant paradigms that have sustained human development and economic growth during the twentieth century (productivism, consumerism, individualism, survival of the fittest, the tragedy of the commons and endless growth) do not provide viable solutions to the multiple crises and the current challenges. Considering food as a commons can be an alternative paradigm worth exploring. The food commons, anchored to an adequate valuation of the multiple dimensions of food to humans, can provide a discourse of convergence that embraces contemporary (e.g. urban innovations) and customary (e.g. indigenous practices) food activities. At the same time, the food commons represents the aspirational vision that coalesce the different collective actions for food into a networked web that inexorably grows to challenge and render obsolete the industrial food system.

Introduction



If food is a vital resource for every human being and much of it is produced by nature, why cannot food be treated as a commons to be guaranteed to every person every day?
Photograph: Finabocci Blue, Flickr Creative Commons

'The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as in escaping from old ones'
John Maynard Keynes, British economist

What is the common bond between Caleb Harper, a bright MIT scientist and director of the cutting-edge Open Agriculture Initiative (1), and Daniel Pascual, leader of a peasant and indigenous movement (Comité de Unidad Campesina) that fights against the privatisation of local seeds and agricultural mono-cropping in Guatemala (2)? The answer is food, more precisely open-knowledge commons-based food systems. The future and the past of food production and consumption is exemplified by what happens between Boston and Huehuetenango. More on that. How come a cool, creative and Italian Future Food Institute (3) actually shares transformational narratives back and forth with Fijian indigenous sugarcane growers (4)? Because both consider food as a multi-dimensional good essential for human survival that has to be governed, produced and distributed by every member of the community, either a local village or the whole planet. We all eat and therefore we all should have a say in food democracy.

In this paper I present the idea of "food as a commons" being a useful paradigm for food systems that are fair-to-the-people and sustainable-to-the-planet, and I contrast it with other paradigms that are trying to become hegemonic in the transition of the global food system. This customary but at the same time innovative narrative opposes the food-as-a-commodity narrative by valuing the

multiple dimensions of food (such as being a human right and a cultural determinant) and not just its price in the market. This approach emphasizes the importance of food to every human, gives relevance to collective, cooperative, fair and sustainable aspects of food production and consumption and, I argue, can provide a common ground for the convergence of contemporary alternative food initiatives --mostly emerging in urban areas and led by consumers-- and customary commons-based sustainable practices that have been resisting industrial modernization --mostly rooted in rural and indigenous communities. The food commons, new and old, highlight the many ways people collaborate to get healthier food, higher autonomy, stronger communities and, fundamentally, a happier life.

The 'low-cost' food system is broken

Food production is the greatest driver of Earth transformation (cultivable land expansion, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, freshwater use, exhaustion of phosphorus and nitrogen cycles) (5-6). And this driver requires a drastic overhaul (see Box 1), as many food and nutrition experts and media agents have been expressing since the 2008 food crisis broke out (7-8). This malfunctioning 'low-cost' food system is characterised by (a) extremely low food prices that do not reflect either food's multiple values to humans or production costs and environmental externalities, (b) overemphasis on production of hyper-caloric, unhealthy and ultra-processed food, (c) food that is heavily advertised, easy to brand and addictive, (d) heavily subsidised by citizen's taxes through governments, (e) wasted by tonnes in illogical and inefficient food chains and (e) unacceptably destructive of limited natural resources, contributing to climate change and biodiversity reduction. In this system that mostly values the economic dimensions of food, many eat inadequately (the hungry and malnourished of the Global South) to enable others to eat unhealthily and cheaply (the over-weighted of the North). Furthermore food production has become a major force in pushing the environment beyond its planetary boundaries. Increasing water and food needs due to population growth, climate change vagrancies, consumption shifts towards meat-based diets and increased production of biofuel will only exacerbate the already critical challenges to our global food system.

How broken?

The primary purpose of any given food system is to feed people adequately, and this is precisely the most evident failure of the current system, as recently reported by the UN institutions that monitor Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 on eradicating hunger by 2030 (9). Instead of progressing, the food security situation is deteriorating, with hunger and obesity growing relentlessly. Almost all countries in the world experience public health problems with at least one of the three common forms of malnutrition (stunting, anaemia or overweight). Obesity and non-communicable diseases are growing rapidly in most countries, already achieving pandemic proportions. Actually, although the number of people living in poverty is declining, the number of

hungry people is steadily rising since 1990, with the first decade of this century (2000-2010) performing worse than the previous one (1990-2000) (10). It seems the so-called SDG "pull effect" to foster political will, allocate higher funds and set up measurable indicators was not so pulling to convince countries in the Global South and donors in the Global North to actually eradicate hunger.

Oddly enough, hunger and obesity were rising while poverty was reportedly decreasing in the same period. There was an impressive reduction of extreme poverty by 70 per cent between 1990 and 2015 whereas the reduction in chronic malnutrition for the same period was only 40 per cent. How is it possible that such good performance on money-measured extreme poverty did not parallel a similar reduction in hunger? One of the root causes of that paradox is the private nature of food as a commodity that prevents those income gains from translating into nutritional improvements. As long as we keep on considering food to be a private good whose access is exclusively determined by purchasing power and market driven forces, we will never achieve food and nutrition security for all. We cannot achieve the common good (a collective goal rooted in cooperative values) by means of monetised markets where individual for-profit demand and supply reign. Exclusive for-profit motivations will never achieve the commonwealth. This paradigm is actually naïve and delusional.



We actually produce enough food for all but we waste one third of total production and another third goes to non-human-feeding purposes while 815 million people stay hungry. More production is not the solution. We need to produce and consume differently.
Photograph: JBloom, Flickr Creative Commons

Box 1: Whose system is broken, corporate's or peasants'?

Just a clarification: when I say the food system is broken, I refer to the industrial food system dominated by transnational corporations that control all aspects of food, shrinking the commercial agro-biodiversity, driving prices down at farm gates and convincing consumers to buy profitable but unhealthy ultra-processed foods (11). In this system, food is purely a commodity that can be traded for profit to feed cars, speculated with and waste, without considering it to be a fundamental need for every human. Farming tends to be reduced to a mere conversion of commodities that might originate from anywhere into other commodities to be sold at any location (12), sometimes the further away, the more profitable. Estimates on who is feeding the world state that between 30-45 per cent of the total food supply is produced by the industrial food system, whereas between 55-70 per cent is produced by the peasants' web, as it is so nicely called by the Canadian NGO ETC Group (13-14). Thus, it is basically small-scale family farmers who are feeding the world with non-mechanised agro-ecological systems, cultivating food that is mostly consumed within national boundaries (85 per cent of total food produced). Conversely, industrial agriculture is largely feeding the growing population of confined animal feedlots and automobiles (15). Paradoxically, due to the system configuration and the private nature of food, the members of this web who feed most of the world consist of between 50-70 per cent of hungry people (16). The industrial system with its hegemonic leverage competes with the thriving, resilient and diverse peasants' food webs to feed the world.

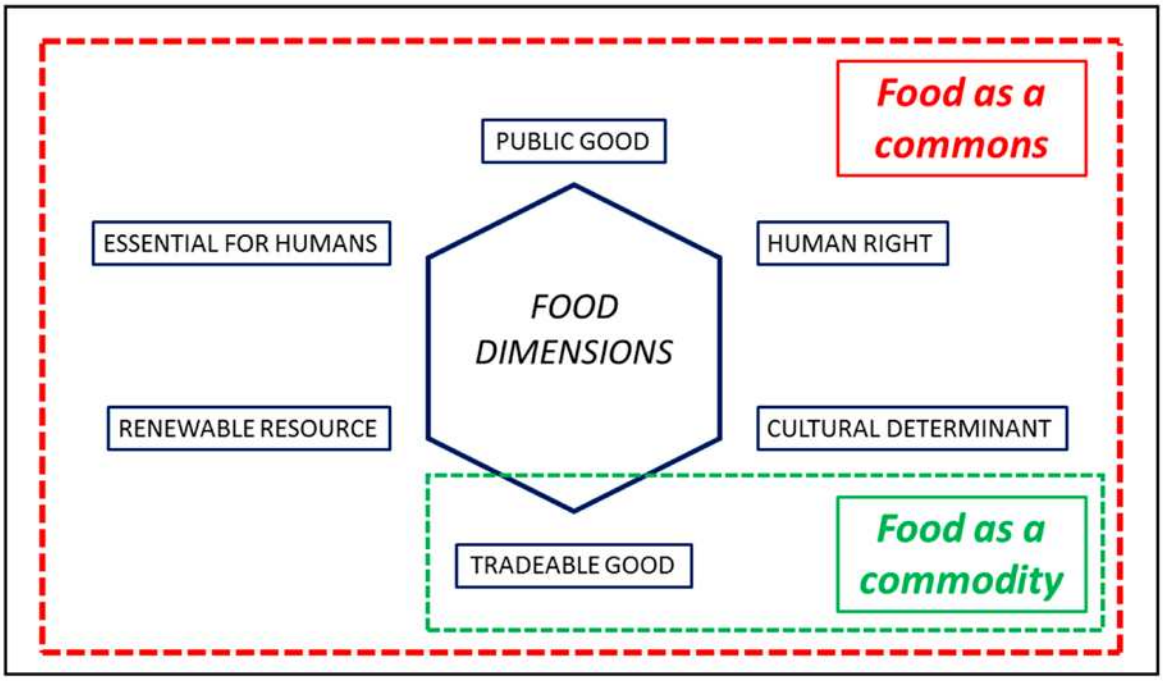


The industrial corporate system produces less than 40 per cent of total food, largely feeding livestock and cars whereas family farmers are the main food providers to the world.
Photographs: Left - Patty´s Flickr Creative Commons,
Right - Ukhviid Flickr Creative Commons

Commoditised food crowds out other important dimensions

Food is a multidimensional vital resource for humans, being primarily an absolute satisfier of subsistence (caloric energy and body-building components are needed in all cultures and all periods), but also a pillar of every national culture; a fundamental human right that should be guaranteed to every citizen; and a natural resource involving multiple and complex systems with varied proprietary rights, uses and entitlements.

Figure 1. The multiple dimensions that render food a commons



Source: Vivero-Pol (2017) (34).

The industrial food system is sustained by the absolute commodification of food, neglecting other non-monetary dimensions that are central to human's survival, self-identity and community life. The private nature of food is defined by economists by applying two features: excludability and rivalry. Excludability means it is possible to prevent people who have not paid for the good from having access to it. Rivalry implies the same good cannot be consumed by two different consumers. This commodity approach to food conflates value and price (understanding the former in terms of the latter). Under capitalism, the value in use (a biological necessity) is highly dissociated from its value in exchange (price in the market) (17), with price having primacy. Food as a pure commodity can be speculated on by investors, modified genetically and patented by corporations, or diverted from human consumption just to maximise profit. Nutritional quality is overshadowed by a focus on higher returns to investment (standardisation of forms, mechanisation of production, waste along the chain), because profit maximisation seems to rule the world, sidelining moral grounds and politics.

Market rules not only put prices on foodstuffs, they also corrupt the original meaning of food in doing so (18) and therefore commodification explains the roots of the failure of the global food system (19). Nevertheless, major analyses on flaws in the global food system and the very existence of hunger do not even question the nature of food as a private good and, despite previous efforts by the UN system (20), neither food and nutrition security is considered a global public good or food a commons.



Food has always been endowed with multiple dimensions, not easy to be monetised and commoditised. It would be aberrant to many to set a price for Holy Bread in the market and yet coffee, a cultural pillar of Ethiopian hospitality, is a highly appreciated commodity.
Photographs: Left – SOAS Alumni Office, Flickr Creative Commons
Right - Lawrence OP, Flickr Creative Commons

Clash of narratives to steer food transitions

As the unsustainability and unfairness of the industrial food system are rather evident to many stakeholders, there is a broad consensus on the need for substantial change (21-24). However, such consensus does not extend to the final goal (the narrative: where do we want to go) or the transition path (the process: how are we going there). Perhaps the global food system in its complexity requires several non-dominant narratives of transition (25).

For the case presented in this article, the consideration of food as a private good that has lately evolved into a pure commodity is the dominant scientific and political paradigm. And dominant narratives tend to close down alternative choices affecting the directions of change within a system. Thus, instead of exploring several options to change the industrial food system, we are constrained by mono-cultures of the mind, as perfectly described by Vandana Shiva (26). Profit-driven globalisation is compelling us to think within the so-called "permitted worldviews" and accepted narrative frames. Markedly alternative or radical views will be easily discarded by the dominant mainstream, by being labelled utopian, naïve or, even worse in our times, communist (previously, a challenging political ideology and nowadays just a mere an insult). As recently stated by the latest report of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, real competition in food systems is between different agricultural models, not different countries (27).

The hegemonic productivist narrative

Increasing the food supply still dominates the international discourse, being the hegemonic strategy to tackle food security in the future. A rise in food production that would be facilitated by restricted technologies and patented knowledge, based on multinational agribusiness, top-down policies promoted as blueprints and universal panaceas, large monoculture landholdings in budget-poor-but-land-rich countries owned by corporations from budget-rich-but-land-poor countries, and having endless growth and market-driven competence as underlying justifications. Although with varying nuances, this paradigm has been correctly described by many researchers (28-29). This narrative is hegemonic within governments, spurred by international financing institutions and private philanthropic foundations, and reinforced by devolution of normative control from national governments to private corporations and lately "greenished" by the sustainable intensification proposal, merely lip service that mostly addresses the technological challenges and obscures the social and power imbalances.

The productivist paradigm is compounded of a diverse mix of scientific knowledge (e.g. rational choice, bounded reality), ideological positions (e.g. private enterprises are more efficient than the public domain), dominant values (i.e. consumer's absolute sovereignty, survival of the fittest), popular stories (e.g. individualist self-made man), false knowledge (e.g. GMOs will improve production and combat hunger), myths, overvalued facts, and the vested interest of the dominant elites of each period, in what Nassim Taleb calls "a narrative fallacy" (30). However delusional this narrative may be, as elegantly exposed by Kate Raworth in her "doughnuts economics" book (31), it is hegemonic these days, although its promoters and interested stakeholders feed no more than 40% of total population (as mentioned above).

The alternative non-hegemonic narratives

The former narrative is challenged by a myriad of customary and contemporary civic actions for food in developing and developed countries. Recent academic work on food transitions and social grassroots movements have presented different classifications of the stances adopted to challenge the dominant system, namely 'grassroots innovation' or 'normative contestation' (32), 'progressive' or 'radical' (33) and 'gradual reformer', 'counter-hegemonic transformer' or 'alter-hegemonic transformer' (34). However, neither the mainstream nor the alternatives consider food as a commons and just the 'radical' trend (epitomised by the food sovereignty movement promoted by the *Via Campesina*) claims community rights to water and seeds. This radical trend challenges the neoliberal food paradigm and rules of legitimacy, advocating for a deep, structural change, a redistribution of wealth and decision-making power, as well as entitlements and proprietary titles.

The food commons: where innovation meets tradition

The food commons paradigm rests on the idea of food not being a commodity but a commons, which means revalorising the different food dimensions that are relevant to human beings (its

value-in use) – food as a vital element for our survival, food as a natural resource, human rights and cultural determinant – and thus, of course, diminishing the tradable dimension (its value-in exchange) that has rendered it a mere commodity. This regime would inform an essentially democratic food system based on sustainable agricultural practices (agro-ecology) and open-source knowledge (creative commons licenses) through the assumption of relevant knowledge (cuisine recipes, agrarian practices, public research, etc.), material items (open seeds, fish stocks, etc.) and abstract entities (transboundary food safety regulations, public nutrition, etc.) as global commons (35).

Food commons refers to the management, production and distribution of food resources and it is based on shared customary and contemporary models of social organization, non-monetized allocation rules and sharing practices, principles of peer production based on commons (resources, knowledge and values), social economy and the importance of the commonwealth, happiness and well-being of our communities. Unlike the market, the food commons is about equity, collectiveness, embeddedness, caring, stewardship, autonomy and direct democracy from local to global. This invokes a radical paradigm shift from individual competitiveness as the engine of progress via endless growth towards collective cooperation as the driver of the common good. We need to develop a food system that first, provides for sustainable nutrition for all, and second provides meaning and not just utility to food production, trading and consumption.

Box 2. Contemporary Civic Food Actions

Beacon Hill Food Forest in Seattle (USA) *(36) In less than a hectare, the largest edible garden on public land in the U.S is a living example of the real sharing economy. Instead of dividing the land into small patches for private cultivation, volunteers cultivate the whole food forest together and share the fruits and vegetables with everyone. Urban foragers are welcome to reap what the community cultivates. They create and share abundance. Similar examples of cultivation in abandoned urban lots are promoted by other groups (e.g. Incredible Edible or Guerrilla Gardening).*

Food Buying Groups in Belgium *(37) Several types of local initiatives for food production and consumptions are mushrooming in Belgium, adopting different institutional forms such as community supported agriculture, food basket schemes, do-it-yourself vegetable gardens or shareholders' cooperatives. People join those collective actions to answer perceived personal and societal needs and challenges, such as healthy and meaningful food, local and sustainable production, reducing food waste, mitigating climate change and reinforcing local bonds of conviviality.*



Collective actions for food that revalue food as a commons are building a revolutionary food system.
Photographs: Left, Beacon Food Forest participants. Extracted from http://actrees.org Right, GASSINES, Food Buying Grous of Lessines, Belgium. Extracted from http://amisdelaterre.paysvertetcollines.over-blog.org

As the reader can see in the examples presented in boxes 2-4, the customary and contemporary alternatives to the dominant industrial food system influence each other, re-inventing neglected practices, re-claiming forgotten institutions and innovating new practices based on technological solutions and traditional but relevant values. The complex problems that affect the food system require a reconsideration of well-established ideas (food as a commodity), incorporating customary and contemporary non-scientific actors and non-scientific knowledge into the problem solving process (38).

Box 3. Customary Civic Food Actions

The examples below highlight the importance of the non-economic dimensions of coffee and cacao, two of the most traded food commodities, to different human societies. The consideration of food as a commons is rather common in customary food systems of both OECD countries and the Global South.

***Cafe sospeso (pending coffee) in Italy**. This tradition began in working-class cafés of Naples, where someone who had experienced good luck would order a 'sospeso', paying the price of two coffees but consuming only one. A poor person asking for a 'sospeso' would then be served a coffee for free. Although this customary tradition is almost gone in Naples, it is being re-invigorated in other places (Mexico, Spain) by contemporary food initiatives (39-40).*
***Cacao: God's gift in Guatemala**. In many Maya ethnic groups of Central America, cacao occupies a place of cultural relevance in daily and spiritual life, second only to maize. In the Ch'orti' Maya groups of Guatemala, cacao is connected to rain ceremonies and local environmental knowledge. The protection of cacao as a sacred tree may help re-construct the agricultural livelihoods of those hunger-stricken communities (41).*





Sharing labour and knowledge, agro-ecology, joy, cooperation, non-monetized relations and community life are all features of customary civic actions for food. Prices and money cannot exclusively determine our social relations and food conviviality.

Photographs: Left, Cafes pendientes in Mexico, Hector Forero, SDPnoticias.com
Right, Café sospeso in Bergamo, Italy. Extracted from www.bergamopost.it

In political terms, the food commons would be governed in a polycentric manner by food citizens (42) that develop food democracies (43) which value the different dimensions of food (34). That would entail a return from corporate-state control to a collective, polycentric and reflexive governance, a shift of power from a state-private duopoly in food production, transport and distribution to a tricentric governance system (44), where the third pillar would be the self-regulated, civic, collective actions for food that are either emerging all over the world (contemporary food movements) or were resisting the neoliberal waves of capture of natural resources they depend on (customary food movements, i.e. indigenous communities, subsistence small farmers, fisher folks).

Box 4. Food sharing initiatives (old and new)

Two successful examples from India and UK-Australia can epitomize the common rationale behind food sharing initiatives, a non-economic motivation that values the life-supporting dimension of food over its price.

The Dabbawalas of Mumbai *are a century-old lunchbox service that daily delivers over 200,000 home cooked meals directly to their customers wherever they are (home, markets, office). The operational structure even became a case-study at Harvard Business School. The "Share My Dabba" initiative is rather relevant for the food commons idea in that by putting a sticker on each uneaten dabbas lunch box, a customer agrees to share that food with hungry children on the streets (45).*

The Casserole Club in UK and Australia *is a contemporary urban innovation that helps people share extra portions of home-cooked food with others in their neighbourhood who are not*

always able or willing to cook. This initiative connects people, fosters convivial bonds in otherwise individualised households and promotes knowledge exchange, healthy eating and resource optimization (46).

The food commons are customary

'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes'
Marcel Proust, French writer

As I have already suggested above, food has not always been regarded as a pure commodity devoid of other important dimensions. It was cultivated for millennia in common and considered a mythological or sacred item. Food sharing is an integral part of hunter-gather social organisation (47-48). Many types of food are often endowed with sacred beliefs and their production and distribution are thus governed by non-market rules. Food-producing commons were ubiquitous in the world and historical records are full of commons-based food production systems ranging from the early Babylonian Empire, ancient India, the Roman Empire, Medieval Europe and early modern Japan (see 49 for a literature review). Food was assigned with diverse and certainly evolving meanings ranging from a ceremonial gifts offered to idle Temple priests to resources levied by kings and feudal lords, to a public tool used by Roman Emperors, Mayan dignitaries and the British Government to prevent disturbances and appease the revolting crowds. Food always carried many dimensions and it was never solely considered a tradable, priced good (50)

And this consideration is struggling to survive in our globalised world, as two billion people still depend on the commons (forest, fisheries, pasturelands, croplands and other natural goods) for their daily food (51), with over 2.6 billion living in and using forests and drylands, actively managed in commons or through common property arrangements (52). A great majority of small-scale traditional farmers still have mixed proprietary arrangements for food resources, with the 500 million sub-Saharan Africans that still rely on communal lands a major example (53).

Moreover, in the highly privatized and increasingly neoliberal Europe, despite centuries of encroachments, misappropriations and legal privatisations, more than 8.5 million ha of common lands have survived up to now (54), still covering 9 per cent of surface of France, 10 per cent in Switzerland, 3.3 per cent of United Kingdom and 4.2 per cent in Spain. Their utility to human societies has enabled them to survive up to the present day. However, the relevance of the socio-economic importance of the food-producing commons in Europe is hardly noticed by the mass media and hence neglected by public authorities and mainstream scientific research. Outside Europe, there are also documented examples of live and functional food-producing commons in current Fiji, Nigeria, and the world-famous examples of US lobster-fisheries or Mexico's Ejidos just to name a few. In various other countries such as Taiwan, India, Nepal and Jamaica, land ownership of ethnic minorities is also granted as common land.



The medieval Agrarian University of the village of Sacrofano (Rome province) still governs communal lands, producing meat, mushrooms and asparagus--a lively food commons that survived the enclosure movements across Europe.
Photograph:http://en.tesorintornoroma.it/Itinerari/La-Via-Flaminia/Sacrofano

Box 5. Commons-based food systems in Europe

In Spain, more than 6600 farming households depend entirely on communal lands for earning their living by producing food, and one quarter of the most forested region in Spain, Galicia, is still owned under communal regimes. Anyone can forage wild mushrooms and berries in the Scandinavian countries under the consuetudinary Everyman's Rights and there are thousands of surviving community-owned forests and pasturelands in Europe where livestock is raised in free-range, including Baldios in Portugal, Crofts in Scotland and Montes Vecinales en Mano Comun in Spain. Finally, in the medieval village of Sacrofano (Roma province, Italy), a particular and ancient University still serves local residents: the Agricultural University of Sacrofano (Università Agraria di Sacrofano) holds 330 ha of fields, pastures, forests and abandoned lands where the citizens residing in the municipality can exercise the so-called rights of civic use (customary rights to use common lands).

Grassroots innovations as revolutionary crowd

Local transitions to sustainable and fair systems are taking place today across the world. Food is being produced, consumed and distributed through a multiplicity of open structures and peer-to-peer practices aimed at sharing and co-producing food-related knowledge and goods. The different innovations taking place in multiple scenarios (contemporary urban settings as well as customary rural villages) are not yet forming a well-knitted alternative movement, but they are growing big and disruptive enough to present a strong alternative in the years to come, once they organise better as a connected polycentric web, recognise their different worldviews and emphasize their shared values and commonalities. Those different 'fields of struggle autonomously marching forward on parallel paths' will form the revolutionary crowd (55) to confront the hegemonic industrial food system and the accompanying productivist paradigm, vindicating the commons (56). The pursuit of the commonwealth, common good or Buen Vivir (57) in a sustainable and fair manner will

serve as catalyst for the active multitude to become a collective political entity in a type of collective organisation known as technopolitics (58) or reflexive governance. And this new political actor, many people acting in networked concert, will define contemporary discourse to de-construct a vital resource, food, from its absolute commodification status towards a consideration as a commons.

Box 6. What you can do to become a food commoner?

Some practical actions to promote food as a commons at household level include to (a) cultivate your own food at home, partially covering your needs; (b) share your food with others and enjoy eating together home-made meals, either with family members, neighbours or swapping meals via web-based applications; (c) eat healthily, by choosing organic ingredients, directly from producers or short-chain local systems; (d) avoid wasting food and learn how to re-cycle, up-cycle and preserve your foodstuffs; (e) establish a Universal Food Coverage system for your country, state or city, through advocacy and political engagement, whereby a minimum amount of food is guaranteed to every person every day; (f) be ready to pay fairer prices for better food directly to the producers and (g) defend food as a justiciable human right. And, above all, never accept the idea that food is just a commodity like any other.

A just proposal outside the 'permitted ideas'

'The road to utopia leads to dissidence and, in some cases, to rebellion'
Jules Verne

The commons are at the same time a very ancient and rather innovative framework to govern natural resources that are essential to human survival. In consequence, the food commons can be perceived both as an emancipatory alternative, a system carrying a moral purpose to combat oppression and create conditions for human flourishing (59) and a disruptive narrative that challenges the power relations in the industrial food system and deepens food democracy. No matter how little support it may get initially, since the mere fact of proposing alternatives outside the dominant mainstream may contribute to creating the conditions in which such support can be built.

The food commons resembles perfectly one of those progressive new ideas that Hirschmann (60) had in mind when analysing paradigm shifts in recent history and his teachings could serve as a cautionary tale. Hence, one should expect that food as a commons will be termed a futile policy belief (the futility argument), or claims that the visionary idea and its practical consequences of social transformation will be incapable of making a dent in the status quo. And we should expect that mainstream scientists and practitioners will claim that the cost of the proposed paradigm shift is unacceptable (the jeopardy argument) because it will endanger previous accomplishments (e.g. Universal Food Coverage will be unaffordable for national budgets or a waste of limited

resources). And, even worse, the perversity argument will be made, whereby any political action to guarantee a minimum amount of food to all every day would have unintended consequences (e.g. people will become lazy and stop working once food is guaranteed by the state), finally resulting in the exact opposite of what was intended. Food as a commons can be discredited as a policy narrative simply by calling it "utopian" or a "fantasy", a sort of distraction from the serious business of making practical improvements in the dominant system.

The food commons paradigm encompasses ancient and recent history, an emerging alternative praxis and a feasible aspirational vision for the future and therefore can provide a common space for customary food systems and contemporary collective innovations for food to converge. Considering food as a commons is not utopian, as history teaches us and present innovations confirm. It could be one of the best achievements we bequeath to future generations. Indeed, food is a powerful weapon for social transformation (61).

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