Agriculture (re-)territorialisation: Balancing the promotion of local products and international trade in Europe

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The European Union’s "Farm to Fork" strategy aims to support a transformation of our food systems, including production, transport, distribution and marketing. The objective is to have a positive or neutral environmental impact and to respond to the challenges generated by climate change. However, the strategy stays vague about the path to reach this objective and to reform our food systems’ functioning.

Before 2020 and the covid pandemic, the main driver for change was the interlinked biodiversity and climate crises. As highlighted by the IPCC and IPBES, we need a change of paradigm to face such threats as the unprecedented loss of biodiversity (IPBES 2019) and climate change (IPCC 2021). Before 2020, the link between obesity, undernutrition and climate change (Swinburn et al. 2019) also called for a change of paradigm within our food production system.

With the COVID-19 crisis, the possibility of having a break in the supply chain has emerged as a major concern (UN 2020). In 2021, the obstruction of the Suez canal by the Evergreen gave international trade a cold sweat. In 2022, the war in Ukraine has been causing dangerous tensions in food markets and food insecurity.

These events highlight the fragility of our global food systems. We need robust and resilient food systems that can function in times of health and/or geopolitical crises but also give an answer to the current challenges of climate change, declining biodiversity, soil depletion and the exhaustion or abandonment of farmers.

The question that we wish to address is central to envisage a change of paradigm: How to (re-)build European food policy to encourage local practices of production and consumption and structure these practices with European and international trade? How can citizen and professional initiatives overthrow the dominant regime and change public policies? In order to ensure a better ecological performance of our food systems as well as to ensure the food sovereignty of the EU states, it is essential to reflect on the re-territorialisation of production and consumption systems. There is a tension between the search for autonomy and the maintenance of trade systems, which are a pillar of the European Union.

The question is sensitive and cannot be addressed with simple answers. Our European territories are already intertwined. Every day, we consume products coming from different countries of the European Union or from further away. Farmers all over Europe get part of their income from consumers living sometimes thousands of kilometers away from their farm. This does not apply only to industrial farmers, as small producers can get a substantial part of their income from direct sales of their products thousands of kilometers away. This is the case, for example, of Sicilian citrus fruits that end up on the display of small market gardeners in Belgium through alternative trading and short supply chains.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the capacity of our societies to adapt to a major crisis. It is high time to take the measure of the fragility of our food systems in order to respond to ongoing major challenges, such as the ecological, climate, social, or economic crises that our societies are facing today. The pandemic has acted as a revealer, exacerbating existing inequalities and fragilities. Hence, the aftermath of COVID-19 requires us to think about the conjunction of the crises (i.e. the collapse of biodiversity, peak oil, climate change or geopolitical tensions) to implement urgent measures and increase the resilience of food systems in Europe.

Aims and scope of the special feature

In this special feature, we want to think about the complexity of the connections between local production and international trade from a multidisciplinary perspective.
Different topics could be addressed:

- Production lock-ins: What are the main difficulties for producers in the diversification of their production and of their supply chains? How can we allow the development of agricultural models with highly differentiated yields while avoiding putting them in competition? How can agricultural and cooperative innovations be made politically viable?

- Supply chain realities: Global or local supply chains are entangled in complex social realities. A fine description of supply chains can be a lever for a better understanding of the inertia and/or resilience of the system.

- Transition pathway: Between daily practices of producers and consumers and policy proposals, what are the paths of transition towards more sustainable food systems?

- Greening and competition: How can we promote the greening of production and the relocation of supply chains without making it more difficult for farms that are often dependent on globalized markets? How can we allow a greening of the production without increasing the competition between producers and their economic effects?

- Citizens as levers: What is the place of citizens and collectives in innovative supply chains?

- Territories and scales: What is the place of the “terroirs” and of the soil and climate characteristics in new patterns of exchanges? How can local, national, European and international territories thrive together in a sustainable and resilient food strategy? How can the local supply circuit be articulated with wider supply chains?

- CAP and resilience: How can the CAP be a transformative tool towards greater resilience? What role does the CAP attribute to farmers and alternative production and consumption circuits? How can the CAP guarantee a decent income for differentiated agricultures?

These features will be addressed from a multidisciplinary perspective, allowing for complementary insights from different disciplines. They may be explored from a theoretical, empirical or mixed point of view.

Submission and review process

Authors are encouraged to submit abstracts (300 words maximum) to the editors of the special feature. Upon acceptance, authors will be invited to submit full-length manuscripts to the editorial team.

After review by the editorial team, authors will be invited to submit revised full-length manuscripts through the journal’s electronic editorial management (EM) system, keeping in mind the publisher’s formatting guidelines and length requirements. Papers will then go through a blind peer review process. Prospective authors whose institutions do not cover Article Processing Fees (APF) should not consider this an obstacle and are invited to contact the guest editors to discuss options.

Authors’s guidelines: https://www.springer.com/journal/11625?detailsPage=press

Important dates and deadlines

September 15, 2022: submission of extended abstracts (maximum 300 words) to editorial team: nicolas.loodts@uclouvain.be.

October 1, 2022: Acceptance of the abstract.

December 1, 2023: submission of full papers to the editorial team: nicolas.loodts@uclouvain.be.

February 1, 2023: Comments on the full papers by the editorial team.

April 1, 2023: submission of revised papers through the EM system. For submission, please register with the EM system at http://www.editorialmanager.com/sust/mainpage.html and submit your article selecting the “(Re-) territorialisation agriculture: Balancing the promotion of local products and international trade in Europe” title. There is an author tutorial on the right side of the registration page. Please tag your submission with the tag “(Re-) territorialisation agriculture: Balancing the promotion of local products and international trade in Europe”.

January 1, 2024: Expected publication.

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