The XXVI European Society for Rural Sociology Congress

Places of Possibility? Rural Societies in a Neoliberal World

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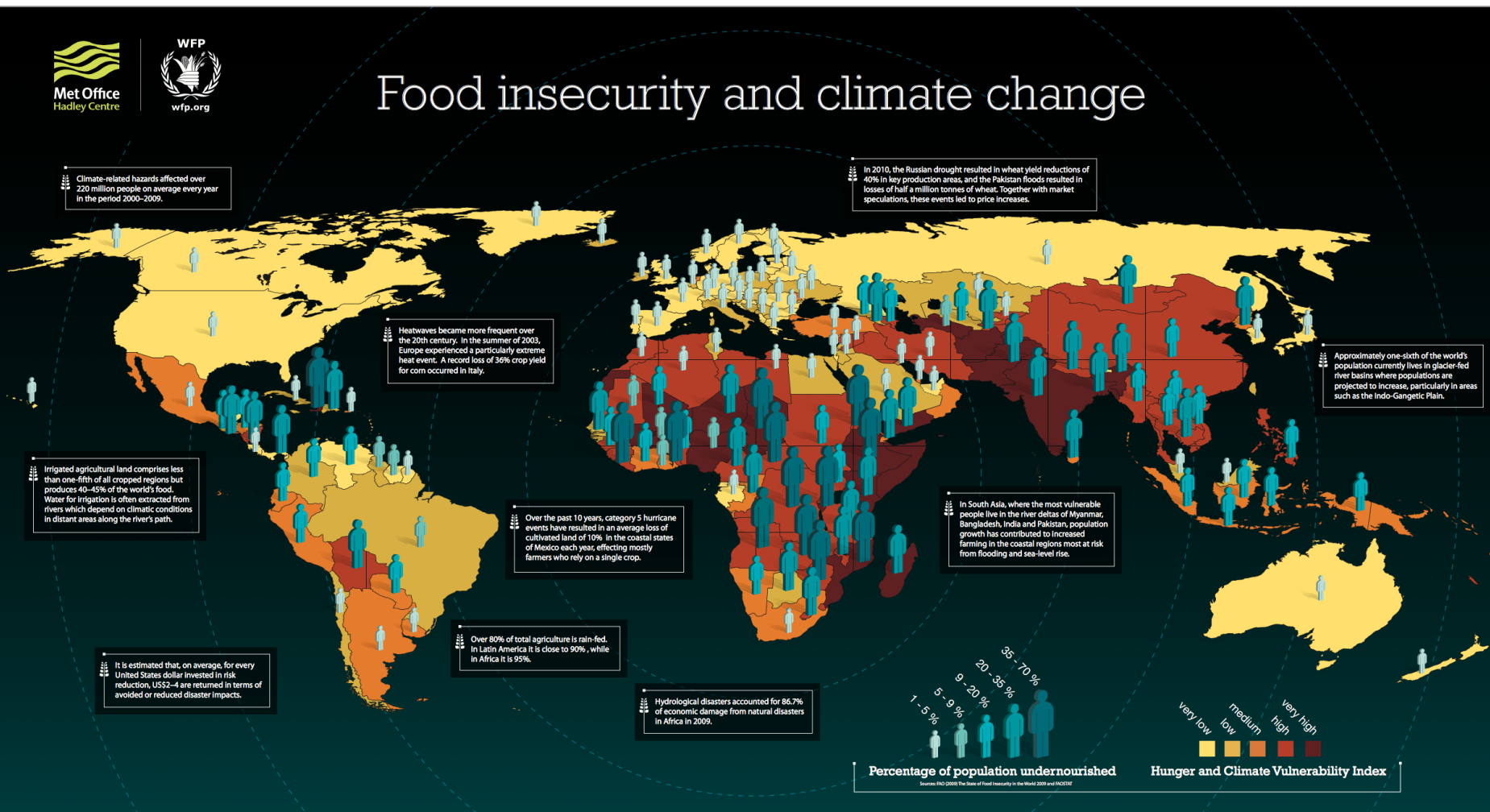
Food security: a civic food networks' perspective

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THE CHANGED CONTEXT

Food insecurity and climate change

After 2008, a more complex framing

- Food security intersects and interlocks with the unfolding crises of the early 21° century, which determines a systemic (social and ecological) vulnerability of the system:

  - Climate change and environmental stresses
  - Energy crisis
  - Population increase and urbanization
  - New technologies
  - Nutrition transition
  - Safety risks ('normal' or intentional accidents)

  (Lang&Barling 2012 / Marsdem 2013/ MacDonald 2010 /Mooney and Hunt 2009 /)

Alternatives prognosis of the crisis

- The dominant policy thinking still retains possible adaptive strategies based on neo-productivism in the version of sustainable intensification (produce more on less)

- An emerging discourse points to the need for a radical reconfiguration of the system grounded on new social and ecological relations

LFMs' and CFNs' contribution

- Omissions in the analysis of what is wrong
  - The global North, food deserts and the unsustainable diet
  - Scale and place
- Prefiguration of where to go
  - Spatialised food system
  - Civic values
- Transition analysis: how to get there
  - Strategies of transition
  - Agency: a new social alliance
  - Governance

1.The striking omissions:
a) the global North

- Also in the most conventional meaning of under- and mal-nutrition FS is relevant topic for the wealthy countries, especially after the 2008 crisis :
    - According to USDA, in the USA in 2008 some 50 million people are food insecure (North et al. 2010 in Kneafsey et al. 2013)
    - In the UK only 51 % of low income income households regularly 'had enough of the kinds of food they wanted to eat (LIDNS survey, in Kneafsey et al. 2013)
    - In Italy more than 4 million (about 6% of population) in absolute poverty (ISTAT). According to the Caritas 2014 Report that percentage is 8% and among them at least 1/3 has restrictions on food

1.The striking omissions:
a) the global North

- World hunger and malnutrition is interlinked to over-nutrition (obesity) and waste, both in the global North and South

- The interlocking of sustainability crisis and food commodification leads to limited access and affordability of sustainable, healthy food both in the global North and South→ Food deserts and unsustainable diet

b) Scale and place

- Big numbers dominate the discourse of food security. Feeding 9 billions, doubling productivity, increasing food production by 70%. Place is absent.

- LFMs put distance at the core of systemic vulnerabilities of the dominant food regime
  - Geographical distance: long distances travelled by food in GVCs
  - Social distance: placeless production centred around commodification of food

2.Where to go

- The local level is where food security is best grounded

- The transformative power of localness predicated on an 'ethics of proximity', i.e. the re-connection of food to the territory:

  - Geographical proximity (environmental sustainability)

  - Social proximity (social embeddedness)

  - Cultural and ecological proximity (the construction of 'place', place embeddedness)

Limited heuristic value of localness

- Is proximity always desirable? (Hinrichs, 2015)
  - The 'local trap': how do we differentiate progressive vs. defensive localism?
  - How to reconcile localism with a 'sense of the planet' (or a 'global sense of place)?

Local food + civic agriculture = Civic food networks

- Civic food networks (Renting, Schermer, Rossi 2012). The network of actors adhering to the vision of a localized food system and endorsing civic values like :

  → food as right and common good
  → democratization of food systems
  → civic environmentalism and the ecological citizen
  → agro-ecology

3. How to get there: Strategies of transformation

- Changes in production and consumption practices through:

    - Interstitial strategies of transformation (ignore the State) in innovative niches that aim to create new, enlarged spaces of post-capitalist economy (AMAPs, Solidarity Purchasing Groups, CSA, Farmers' Markets, etc.)
    - Symbiotic strategies (work with the State) in initiatives of food planning (Toronto Council, Pisa's Piano del Cibo, ….) or to implement local, public institution procurement systems (school, hospitals, etc.) to best consolidate that spaces
    - Ruptural strategies (smash the state)→ ???

Bottom-up social empowerment

- Aligning of actors which previously had little connections:
  - Non only peasants and small famers, but also citizen-consumers or the 'ecological citizens': *sustainable diets and citizen-consumers* as agents of change

- Reconnection of spaces once separated: rural – urban / city -countryside

Co-ordinating the many 'locals': a) Foodshed / bioregion

- Regionalising food security: combine discursive food security approaches with conceptualisations of the region and regionalisation (Hinrichs 2013):
  - Foodshed
  - Food hubs
  - Horizontal regional / national networks of networks
  - District of solidarity economy

b) A new system of multi-level food governance

- A new system of multi-level governance to overcome the 'rigidity trap' that locks CFNs into separate niches:
  - reflexive governance (Marsden, 2013) (sociology of science, post-normal science, mode 2 knowledge production)
  - empowered participatory governance (Fung & Wright 2003) (political science and deliberative democracy)

Reflexive governance

- The established retailers-led system of governance based on partnership between public and private needs to change

- Create new policy spaces for a new model of reflexive governance:

  - Cognitive procedures are designed to create feedback on multiple regulatory frameworks in order to influence actors' beliefs and norms…. Cognitive beliefs and norms complement political administrative hierarchy and economic incentives as mechanisms of coordinations (Feindt 2010: 1 in Marsden 2013)

Reflexive governance

- 1. more flexible actor arrangements from various levels and various epistemic backgrounds

- 2. who reflect on a wide plurality of referential contexts (e.g., alternative understandings and framing of the problems in socio-technical niches)

- 3.encourage actors to scrutinize and reconsider their underlying assumptions, institutional arrangements and practices (Hendricks et al. 2007), favouring second-order learning

- 4. promote the desired integration of cognitive and normative beliefs among the multiple approaches

Empowered participatory governance

- Relies upon the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make knowledgeable decisions through *reasoned deliberation*
- Empowered because it attempts to tie action to discussion and deliberation
- Local action units are not autonomous, but linked to each other and to different levels of the state in order to allocate resources, solve common and cross-border problems and diffuse innovations and learning (State centred, not voluntaristic).
- Institutional mechanisms are set that reduce and neutralize the power advantages of powerful actors, bringing about a rough equality of power between participants in the deliberative process

Institutional properties of EPG

- Decision and implementation power are devolved to local action units.

- Local action units are not autonomous, but rather recombinant and linked to each other and to different levels of the state in order to allocate resources, solve common and cross-border problems and diffuse innovations and learning (State centred, not voluntaristic).

- Institutional mechanisms that may reduce and neutralize the power advantages of powerful actors, bringing about a rough equality of power between participants in the deliberative process
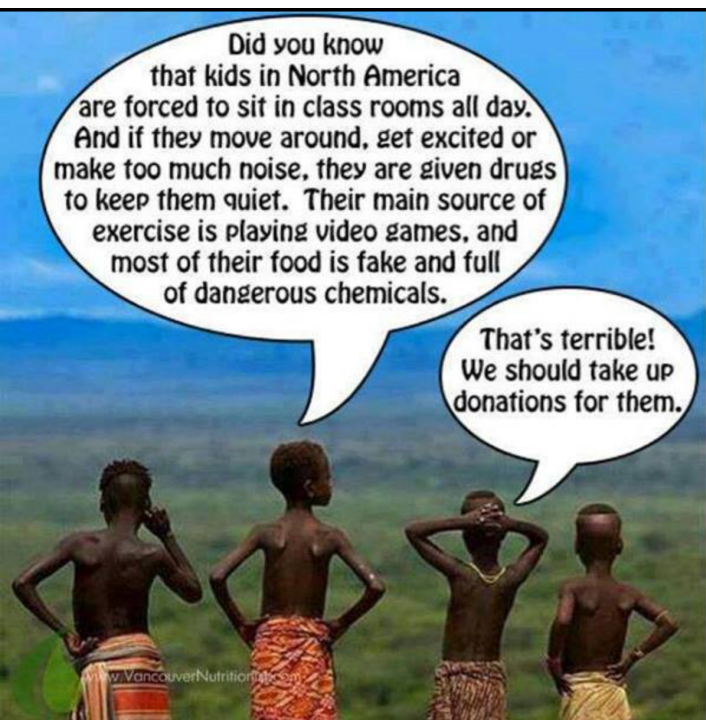
The centrality of collaborative countervailing power

- CCP may arise from:

  a) locally organized groups (civic environmentalism, GAS, CSA…);

  b) policies that implement participatory forms of governance (Food Councils, Piano del Cibo Pisa, etc.);

  c) local branch of national, traditional, adversarial organizations (unions, national environmental associations, etc.)

Summarizing CFNs' perspective on FS

- An epistemological framework applicable to the global North and South and taking into account scale and place

- FS based on local / regionalised food systems and civic values (food as right and a common good)

- Implementing interstitial / symbiotic strategies of co-experimentation, creation and consolidation of post-capitalist economies

- Overcoming fragmentation through mechanisms of deepening democracy: de-centralized, empowered, multi-scalar, reflexive and participatory forms of governance based on the countervailing power of a new social alliance: the peasants + ecological citizens

A new co-experimentation politics of food security and sustainability
Thanks!

Maria Fonte, AFN and Foo

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