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Food sovereignty as an activator of territorial dynamization in small and medium-sized cities

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Food sovereignty as an activator of territorial dynamization in small and medium-sized cities

The food system is a network of actors involved in an activity that is essential to human life: food. In Spain, the structural changes that have taken place in recent decades have given rise to processes of delocalisation of production, an increase in processed products and the omnipresence of large international distribution chains. These facts have influenced eating habits and favoured the progressive loss of local gastronomy in favour of the consumption of foods with lower nutritional values. In this way, community health and the local commercial and productive fabric have lost relevance and have been relegated to the background.

This article focuses on the analysis of the food system in a small city such as Zamora. Thus, using quantitative and qualitative social research techniques (interviews with key actors and focus groups), we study citizens' perceptions about food in order to explore the bases for sustainable and local agro-ecological development that favours the strengthening of local producers, short marketing circuits and improvements in food.

Key words: Food sovereignty; small and medium-sized towns; short marketing circuits; local development; culinary culture.

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IDEAS CLAVE / HIGHLIGHTS

1. Alimentarse comprende un intrincado conjunto de acciones y decisiones individuales, pero también colectivas, que van más allá del acto de comer.

2. La cadena alimentaria se ha globalizado, concentrado y oligopolizado, lo que ha favorecido la degradación del medio ambiente a través del abuso de prácticas intensivas y de la internacionalización de los mercados.

3. La cultura alimentaria y gastronómica local en las ciudades intermedias y pequeñas puede encontrarse en declive y con ella la identidad colectiva y tradición culinaria que moldeaba un sistema alimentario sostenible y saludable.

4. Establecer modificaciones en los sistemas alimentarios de los hábitats urbano de tamaño intermedio y pequeño podría ser factible si se produce un apoyo en el acervo de conocimientos aportado por los y las mayores.

5. La configuración del sistema alimentario con un mayor peso de la escala local, no solo tendría efectos positivos en la salud y el medio ambiente, sino que podría actuar como motor económico, facilitando la fijación de la población en los municipios.

1. Feeding involves an intricate set of individual, but also collective, actions and decisions that go beyond the act of eating.

2. The food chain has become globalised, concentrated and oligopolised, leading to environmental degradation through the abuse of intensive practices and the internationalisation of markets.

3. Local food and gastronomic culture in intermediate and small towns may be in decline and with it the collective identity and culinary tradition that shaped a sustainable and healthy food system.

4. Establishing modifications in the food systems of small and medium-sized urban habitats could be feasible if there is support for the knowledge base provided by older people.

5. The configuration of the food system with a greater weight of the local level would not only have positive effects on health and the environment, but could also act as an economic engine, facilitating the fixation of the population in the municipalities.

1. Alimentar-se implica accions i decisions individuals i col·lectives que van més enllà de l'acte de menjar

2. La cadena alimentària s'ha globalitzat, concentrat i oligopolitzat, contribuint a la degradació del medi ambient a través de pràctiques intensives, a més de la internacionalització dels mercats.

3. La cultura alimentària i gastronòmica local a les ciutats intermèdies i petites es troba en situació de declivi, causant una perduda de la identitat col·lectiva i de la tradició culinària que modelava un sistema alimentari sostenible i saludable.

4. Establir modificacions als sistemes alimentaris dels habitatges urbans de talla mitjana i petita podria suposar una solució factible si és recolzat pels coneixements dels majors.

5. La configuració del sistema alimentari amb una càrrega major de l'escala local, no sols tindria efectes positius sobre la salut i el medi ambient, sinó que podria actuar com a motor econòmic, facilitant la fixació de la població als municipis.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT¹

The environmental emergency, as well as the negative externalities of importing non-essential food products, when they can be produced in our immediate surroundings, invite us to reflect on the need to promote local production and consumption. All of this would reduce the presence of intermediaries that reduce the profits of local producers and promote the productive and commercial fabric of small and medium-sized towns and cities.

The research we present focuses on showing the possibilities of breaking the dynamics shown in Zamora, a small city in north-western Spain. In order to do so, we carry out an analysis of the intertwining of the locality with the food system. We focus on understanding the consumption habits and practices and the gastronomic culture of its inhabitants and their relationship with local food production and distribution.

To this end, we have carried out a descriptive study in the indicated study area to analyse the possibilities for change in the food system by applying quantitative (face-to-face and online survey) and qualitative (interviews with key actors and focus groups) research techniques.

The review of academic literature has allowed us to confirm that the food chain has become globalised, concentrated and oligopolised, which has favoured environmental degradation through the abuse of intensive practices and the internationalisation of markets. Furthermore, our research has shown that local food and gastronomic culture in small and medium-sized cities may be in decline, and with it the collective identity and culinary tradition that shaped a sustainable and healthy food system. However, the socio-demographic structure of these cities, characterised by an ageing population, allows for the survival of habits linked to local consumption and awareness of the benefits of local produce. Finally, we must not forget the role of the socialising process that leads to hyper-consumption based on the immediacy and ease of access to products.

Consequently, establishing modifications in the food systems in this type of urban habitat could be feasible if there is support from the wealth of knowledge provided by the elderly. Moreover, establishing lines of action that favour policies and actions in this direction would mean validating a right and would act as agents of social and economic dynamisation of the territory. Thus, they would promote local production, protect native species, curb the deteriorated commercial fabric and improve community health. Similarly, these transformations in production and distribution models should be accompanied by changes in consumption habits focused on local supply.

In short, we have explored the cracks to replace a globalised food system dominated by multinational interests with one centred on the needs and opportunities offered by local communities. This not only has benefits for food security and social justice, but also contributes to environmental sustainability and the preservation of cultural and gastronomic diversity.

In short, the aim is to promote a sustainable system in which people have access to healthy and nutritious food produced in nearby environments. Moving in this direction would improve the profitability and economic and social conditions of producers and would halt the rural exodus, helping to alleviate one of the most pressing problems of the so-called "Empty Spain".

¹ Authors' exclusive translation

We therefore believe that works such as the one presented here are relevant for the development of plans that encourage and promote a sustainable production system, based on local production and consumption, which helps to develop a profitable productive fabric through the corresponding links between rural and urban environments. In addition to the above, we consider that a step in the direction proposed could be useful for other territories with similar characteristics to those of our area of study.