



Local Agro-Food Systems in America and Europe. Territorial anchorage and local governance of identity-based foods

A Local Agro-Food System (LAFS)¹ is a form of production of local identity-based foods explicitly grounded in specific territorial dynamics of agriculture, food and consumption networks. A LAFS was first conceptualised by Muchnik and Sautier (1998)² as a concentration of locally networked firms and institutions³ specialised in producing and marketing identity-based food products and which perform collective regulatory tasks, such as identification of the specific quality, adoption and dissemination of techniques, knowledge and know-how, etc. The aim of LAFS therefore involves generating territorial dynamics, based on collective action, as a way of valorising local food identity and adding value to local resources, such as agriculture landscapes and ecosystems, local knowledge, local social networks, food traditions and cultures, and native vegetable varieties and animal breeds, among others.

LAFS have existed around the world and throughout history, but they underwent a certain decline during the second half of the XXth century with the rise of more industrialised and globalised agribusinesses. Faced with the ability of large retailing and agro-industrial firms to predominate on oligopolistic markets of agricultural commodities and of mass food products, LAFS scholars propose a turnaround in strategies and politics of rural spaces, with the aim of reviving and fostering the local food productions historically anchored in the territory. However, in the last two decades, in the face of mounting environmental, agricultural, food and social imbalances on a territorial scale, experts are taking a fresh look at the identity-based food production.

The LAFS not only constitutes an object of study but also a conceptual approach for analysing agriculture, fishing and food local specific resources. The literature on LAFS is devoted to investigating the diverse geographies of the relationships between territory and identity-based food products. The contemporary conceptualisation of LAFS emerged in the second half of the nineties in France and became a locus of scholarship. This approach inherits studies from the Franco-Mediterranean research on the *terroir* —a territory bringing about the typicity of a foodstuff— that have investigated the economic and territorial effects originated by the development of geographical indication (GI) labels. Although research on LAFS has progressed intensely in the Mediterranean European countries since the final decades of the XXth century, a more recent wealth of research on LAFS studies has emerged since the beginning of the XXIth century not only in Latin America but also, to a lesser extent, in other European

countries and in North America, paralleling the recent introduction in many countries worldwide of product labelling systems on GIs.⁴

From this viewpoint, territories comprise socially constructed spaces replete with cultural identifications and subject to local forms of social regulation. *Terroir* stands for a combination of heritage factors —agricultural, environmental, historical, cultural, technical, juridical, regulatory, social, and economic— that contributes to originating a locally specific food product. Accordingly, a trans-disciplinary orientation constitutes a research prerequisite in LAFS studies, in order to provide insights into relationships between food, agriculture, and the natural, cultural and socio-economic environment: their concepts and methodologies are influenced by complementary scientific approaches coming from the human, social and natural sciences.

This special issue includes a collection of articles providing a sample of the great environmental, cultural, historical, socio-economic and sectoral diversity of the LAFS existing in America and Europe. The selection of papers seeks to contribute to the research on the role of territorial anchorage factors and of local governance processes in the survival and sustainability of LAFS. Cases included in this issue represent a variety of agro-ecosystems in different geographical areas in America and Europe, such as agro-forest systems with extensive cattle farming, historical saltworks, mountain grasslands and pastures, artisanal aquaculture areas, and permanent woody crops. A wide range of collective organisation and governance schemes is also exposed in this collection, such as those based on GIs, on producers' organisations and cooperatives, on public-private partnerships, and on concentric diversification strategies combining food production, tourism and other amenities.

Each of the essays of this special issue combines, in varying degrees, two main conceptual approaches that predominate in the literature on LAFS. The first focus addresses the causal analysis of the factors that anchor food products to a territory and which, in turn, imprint on the typicity of the identity-based foods. The contributions included herein attempt to answer the following research questions: what specific qualities of the territory and what varied natural and human anchorage factors determine the typicity of identity-based foods and their differential attributes —sensory, symbolic, environmental, etc.?

The second focus concerns the effects of collective regulatory action, inherent to the LAFS, on rural and territorial development. The creation of a cooperative net-

work —among local farms, firms and institutions— aiming to codify, patrimonialise and valorise the food identity, becomes a social construct implying a variety of local governance schemes. The following research questions arise: what mechanisms of local food-chain coordination, what frameworks of cooperative management or what kind of regulatory codification of quality policies and practices define successful models for the territorial governance of LAFS?

The introductory paper, written by *Sanz-Cañada and Muchnik*, aims to provide a critical review with respect to the literature on LAFS in America and Europe over the last two decades. In this contribution, both the notions of *origin* and *proximity* in LAFS are interpreted and embedded in the above mentioned conceptual approaches in territorial anchorage and in local governance.

Two contributions are devoted to analysing the historical anchorage of foods to agricultural-heritage landscapes. *Guzmán Álvarez* focuses, from an Agro-environmental History point of view, on the sustainable construction, throughout the centuries, of a large cultural landscape of a multifunctional nature involving forestry, agriculture and cattle-farming products: the agro-forest ecosystem of the *dehesa* in the south-west of Spain, where the native breed of Iberian pigs produce high-quality hams. *Renard and Thomé Ortiz* analyse, from a Socio-economic Anthropology perspective, the strategy of re-patrimonialisation of the pre-Hispanic Zapotlán saltworks in Mexico: failures in local governance have prevented their salt from being sufficiently valorised on the market, despite the existence of important historical and cultural factors of territorial anchorage —ancestral know-how, embeddedness in local gastronomy and culture, and the presence of ancient saltworks.

Cooperation and conflicts among local stakeholders appear in the LAFS literature as core elements, not only in the bio-cultural construction of a landscape but also in both the processes of patrimonialisation and of value creation of identity-based foods. Patrimonialisation comprises, in turn, both the phases of coding the quality linked to the origin and of the historical construction of the food identity.

In the patrimonialisation stages, shared knowledge of traditional techniques and symbolic capital both constitute valuable alternatives for aggregating local common immaterial capital to the LAFS. Furthermore, shared knowledge and symbolic capital can also become outstanding resources around which local communities organise themselves. *Saavedra Gallo and Macías Vázquez* investigate, based on an Economic Anthropology focus, the territorial governance and conflicts occurring between groups of stakeholders regarding the appropriation of symbolic values —ecologically pristine waters and traditional collection methods— for capturing local added value: the article addresses a LAFS based on cultivation of mussel seed in the Chilean Reloncaví Estuary. The definition of product specification rules for coding the differential quality can also constitute a source of conflicts and governance in relation to the local stakeholders: *Bé-*

rard, Casabianca, Montel, Agabriel and Bouche investigate, within the sociological scope of Actor-network theories, the setting up process of rules for the French Salers cheese PDO —with or without a traditional wooden vat for elaborating the cheese and whether or not it is produced on the farm.

Marescotti and Belletti employ an Agro-food Economics approach to define the relationships between the specificities of the coding of the food identity and the models of governance chosen for de-commodifying the production of coffee, by means of launching GIs in Latin America. The article reveals the opposition between two governance models for setting up GI labels, one regarding country GIs, such as Colombia or Guatemala, and the other concerning GIs covering smaller regional areas.

Two final contributions focus on the investigation of governance schemes oriented particularly towards the phase of value creation for identity-based foods —but also towards questions of anchorage and patrimonialisation—, in regions where processes of re-territorialisation of agro-food production have been initiated. *Torres-Salcido, Ramos-Chávez and Urreta-Fernández* explain, from a Rural Sociology perspective, the key causal elements of the establishment in the last few decades of a new prickly pear cactus area in Tlanepantla, Mexico, under the influence of the social networks of a LAFS which is strongly anchored to a neighbouring area: intra-community conflicts in the producers' organisation and a lack of socio-institutional coordination can jeopardize the consolidation of this LAFS.

Re-creation of partially abandoned local food identities, by means of collective action and public-private partnerships, is also another alternative for re-territorialisation of agro-food production in remote and deserted rural areas. In particular, *Rytkönen* exposes, based upon an Economic History approach, a successful rural development programme initiated in the eighties in the north of Sweden. The programme has consisted of enhancing a cooperative local network of concentric diversification alternatives —artisanal cheese units, food tourism initiatives, short chains, etc.—, built around a diversified neo-patrimonialisation strategy based on revisiting traditional goat farming.

Finally, spatial and temporal analyses of the interactions among territorial dynamics, local cultures, and the physical and natural environment, are of an unequivocally multivariable nature. Thus, in studies on LAFS, geographical analysis of identity-based foods has incorporated theories, concepts and methodologies from economic, social, cultural, historical, environmental, agricultural, and agro-industrial research. An important aim of this special issue is thus to contribute to the gradual and accumulative construction of a trans-disciplinary discourse in research on territorial analysis of identity-based foods. Establishing a common discourse is a necessary requirement for mutual understanding among the different disciplines investigating on foodstuffs and territory.

NOTES

1. SYAL is the acronym in French of “Systèmes Agro-alimentaires Localisés”, which is the original denomination in this language.
2. Muchnik, José and Sautier, Denis (1998). *Systèmes agroalimentaires localisés et construction de territoires*. ATP CI-RAD, Montpellier.
3. Farmers, local agro-industrial and marketing enterprises, services and gastronomic companies, municipalities, rural development groups, geographical indications, etc.
4. Scientific groups and networks: European Research Group SYAL, SIAL Network of the Americas and a number of

national scientific associations. International congresses: Montpellier, France, 2002; Toluca, Mexico, 2004; Baeza, Spain, 2006; Mar del Plata, Argentina, 2008; Parma, Italy, 2010; Florianopolis, Brazil, 2013; Stockholm, Sweden, 2016.

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