



EDITORIAL - NEW PARADIGMS IN THE FOOD SYSTEMS AND WELL-BEING SUSTAINABILITY

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It is widely agreed that sustainability encompasses ecological, economic, and social concerns and considers intra- and intergenerational justice. Yet this existing characterization primarily focuses on minimizing environmental impacts and ensuring a socially just allocation of resources within and between different generations. The related question, of how sustainable wellbeing can be produced more efficiently, is often ignored. It is not our intention to dismiss the importance of the “traditional” notion of sustainability; instead, if we open up this perspective to a more holistic view of well-being it leads to a more positive concept of sustainable well-being, both in the macro approach (system of country/territory) and in the micro (sector). Today, the question of food represents one of the world’s ‘grand sustainable well-being challenges’. We have entered a new period of instability that has prompted the realisation of the growing interdependence of pressures relating to the operation and governance of food systems and shifting boundaries of responsibility between the state, private and civic sectors. There is a growing recognition, among scholars at least, of the need to re-examine the interconnections and linkages between, food security, sustainability, sovereignty and justice in the food systems. At the same time the need to address, among others, the consequences of climate change, emerging limits to agricultural productivity, and consequences of growing demand and population growth, makes the sustainability challenge of food all the more urgent. This current historical conjuncture presents an important scholarly challenge for researchers on food issues. Clearly, the vibrant interdisciplinary field has expanded and diversified over the past two decades. Not only with the integration of the critical political economy of the global agrifood system, but also with the growing ‘alternative’ politics and social practices and global fair trade. Now, we argue, is the time to transcend many of these traditional binaries to create a wider and more flexible intellectual space within which to re-link the question of food to broader societal, economic, technological and political processes in order to achieve a sustainable wellbeing societal model. To address the contemporary food question under the lenses of “sustainable wellbeing” we need to recognise that we are delving into wider social and multi-scalar complexities. The food question is then an essential and significant ingredient in the creation and building of an ensemble of progressive multiple modernities that will be necessary to sustain a wellbeing societal model over coming decades. The contributions of this Revue



attempt to create a social ‘lens’ around which some of the key aspects of a new paradigm of “wellbeing food sustainability” can be viewed. We attempt to map out some of the contemporary key cardinal elements for a more critical, flexible, engaging and intellectually inclusive sustainable wellbeing paradigm. It is about opening up the intellectual, policy, and practice space to think critically through new sets of sustainability ‘conditions’ (see Revue Nr. 2, 2014). These ‘conditions’ need examining critically for their ‘transformational status’ and ability to move beyond the current and dominant conditions of unsustainability. The themes covered in this Revue are not meant to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, they begin to identify together some of the key dimensions of the new sustainable wellbeing paradigm. Central to this is a new commitment to integrating: i) individual and collective culture of sustainability, ii) technical-scientific solutions and iii) appropriate rules, as holistic and mutually dependent concerns. Hence, the challenge now is not only to ‘solve’ problems separately, but to combine them as a new transformatory force. The new sustainable wellbeing paradigm can no longer afford to compartmentalise or spatially separate these three pillars. It has to find ways of integrating and progressing them at the same time and in the same places. While it is commonplace to see social inclusion as part of the ‘third pillar’ of sustainable development, it is less understood how the goals of sustainable wellbeing can be achieved when many parts of the globe are witnessing widening social and spatial inequalities. It is evident that the suffering that accompanies inequality and poverty is exceptionally a cut when experienced in hunger and malnutrition. It goes without saying that reducing income and wealth disparities is a key prerequisite for achieving real gains in both food security and sustainable development. Tackling food poverty and vulnerability is a critical aspect of inequality production and reproduction, even in Europe which have had historically high levels of social transfers and safety nets for the poor. It is thus empirically and conceptually important to link broader aspects of income disparities with the food question. States occupy a central and critical role in ensuring the right to food and should discharge these obligations in a transparent, accountable, and nondiscriminatory manner that ensures the participation of those most affected. Holding these domestic actors accountable is of fundamental importance not least because it’s a means of enabling societies to achieve a more equitable distribution of resources between the country’s wealthy elite and majority poor. Equally important, and far less considered, is the need to hold global actors accountable for the impact of their policies and practices on the right to food. The right to food is often being undermined on an unprecedented scale and across borders by a variety of global actors, none of whom are held to account for the impact of their individual or collective actions. Hence, a rights-based



approach – and its attendant emphasis on the principles of transparency, participation, inclusion, and accountability – is critical to effectively tackling today’s hunger problems. Clearly, as this brief discussion demonstrates, we cannot separate food developments from a broader societal and governance context. The proposed new conception, as we begin to see in the contributions in this Revue, transcend many of the traditional conceptual binaries that are still dominant in the literature: urban-rural, nature-society, conventional alternative, intensive-extensive, agency-structure, macro-micro. We are convinced that we need new holistic, evolutionary and multi-level conceptualisations that begin to capture both what is and what might be as we begin to attempt to integrate sustainability and wellbeing in the food realm. Narrowly focused analysis does not fit very well with many complex problems of today’s highly uncertain and interdependent societies. In particular, it is not able to capture the important interactions, spillovers, feedback loops, and the emergent and non-linear processes among their various actors. The transition towards a more sustainable wellbeing societal model will not be easy. Various kinds of rigidities and inertia lie in the road to a sustainable wellbeing society. Thus, a successful transformation to sustainable wellbeing will not only require a vision of the future societal model but also the ability to overcome such adjustment rigidities.