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Rapporteur's comments on four sessions about 'Food Matters'
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Introduction

I wanted to start by very briefly sketching a little bit about my background in the area of 'Food Matters'. I have to admit that I am not a geographer but, rather, someone whose background interconnects with geography through political economy, town planning, urban design and my doctoral area of urban sociology – in fact I wrote my doctoral thesis on the resurgence of hybrid food markets in London with a focus on what I situated as burgeoning food quarters (documented in Parham, 2012).

However, that wasn't the start of things for me in relation to studying food and place. I have been writing about food and cities since 1990 and have watched food go from a marginal to a very broadly shared research preoccupation across a number of disciplines. My current book, *Food and Urbanism* (Bloomsbury, 2015), explores some of these many cross-disciplinary currents at scales from the table to the productive region, at the interstices of social science and urban design. I argue that food is fundamental to place shaping historically, in contemporary practice and in helping us deal with an uncertain future given climate change.

In my current food and place work I am particularly interested in how we might retrofit existing developed space to reflect sustainable, inclusive and convivial food requirements and have a chapter on proposals for such urbanism interventions in a shrinking new town context in the forthcoming *Future directions for the European shrinking city* (Routledge 2016).

Turning to the food stream it has been a rich mix of material over the course of a very packed day, and, as rapporteurs always say, I can't really hope to do justice to it all (let alone the variety of food papers presented in other streams). What I have tried to do instead is draw out some themes that emerged and review those briefly here. I noted in presenting these remarks on the day that Rebecca Whittle and I seemed to have nicely dovetailed – which we did without any conferring so that was fortuitous. Apologies are due to any paper authors I have not mentioned in these remarks. In general I have noted names of individuals who presented papers rather than listing the whole author team for each (so please see Session hyperlinks below for details of paper co-authors).

1. Place

In the first session, *Food Matters - Thinking through Food Justice and Sovereignty: current debates and future trajectories*, there were a number of really excellent papers, yet it was interesting that while food sovereignty and justice discussions acted as a way into thinking about space and place these elements were also perhaps somewhat underexplored. Despite hearing about 'food in the city', 'the urban', 'placemaking', 'food deserts', 'obesogenic environments', spaces understood 'physically and politically', the 'right to public space and the city', 'local space', 'fat maps', and actions 'on the ground' we seemed to revert to a kind of process based comfort zone when interrogating that spatiality. It was only in discussions of allotments, guerilla gardening (Session 4) and to an extent community gardens (including papers from Wendy Miller, Michael Hardman, Helen Coulson and Rebecca St Clair in Sessions 3 and 4) that I recognised significant specificity about what the spaces themselves might mean for the analysis.

Having said that, in the same session Moya Kneafsey offered a very useful summary of some of the more dominant food and space interconnections present in the literature about food

justice; noting the circularity of these two elements in shaping each other while also reminding us about the dynamic 'becoming' nature of place. Moya identified the way that the local in place terms is a way of marking boundaries and thus also offers an introduction to discussing scale and scalar relations as framing elements for considering justice and sovereignty (despite the posited local trap issue). As Chiara Tornaghi also noted about place; while the urban can be 'deeply food disabling' there are possibilities for places to learn from each other in addressing this situation.

Place was also very present in Imogen Bellwood-Howard's presentation in Session 2 (*Geographical perspectives on food in the Anthropocene - Food systems & (re)distribution networks*) where Imogen spoke about informal, mostly female, food cultivators in urban northern Ghana, explored within a resilience paradigm. As Imogen pointed out, these urban farmers have developed a highly resilient process (although I was somewhat worried about the chemical inputs) and have been really adept at dealing with a squeeze on land and in finding space for planting. This clever, informal use of leftover, transitional and marginal spaces, predominantly by women farmers is something that has been noted in the literature as an extremely important food security and resilience strategy (Freeman, 1991; Mougeot, 1994, 2005; Pottier, 1999; Redwood, 2009) and in place terms is in part a peri-urban issue I will return to.

A final thought on place was how specific places could offer particular lessons for others and was raised by Giacomo Pettenati's question in Session 2 about whether there is 'an Italian way' in relation to analysing territorial aspects of food and space? Certainly we saw from Giacomo's presentation later in the day that the focus on the interplay between the rural and the urban offers valuable insights into exploring food justice and sustainability possibilities within a bioregional context that may be more generalisable in certain respects.

2. Scale and temporality

A number of speakers approached the issue of scale in relation to food and did so from a variety of analytical directions. Of course, as we know, scale is a rich concept geographically (and in related disciplines including sociology and urbanism: for instance see a reviewing discussion in Parham, 2015: 1-3). In Session 1 Paul Milbourne started things off in terms of interrogating scale with a fascinating look at food, justice and geography. Scale was explored theoretically in terms of politicising food and everyday practices locally. Without in any way seeking to minimise its impact Paul noted the irony that austerity might open up new spaces and scales for action, both physically and politically.

In Session 2 Hannah Pitt really dug down into ideas about scale in reporting on her work on 'scaling up and out' in relation to making normative what are currently mostly niche sustainable food chains and practices. In seeking to move beyond this niche position for Alternative Food Networks Hannah quoted Kevin Morgan's point about 'islands of good practice' and the need to expand outwards and over time to really have an impact on the mainstream food system. Hannah introduced an element of temporality into the analysis and one of the things that was really notable here was how specific Hannah was able to be on the stages of change; offering what was almost an instruction manual for making mainstream work on food through scaling it up and out over time.

The interplay of scale and temporality was clear too in Saher Hasnain's intriguing discussion in Session 3 (*Geographical perspectives on food in the Anthropocene - Food systems & food security*) of the difficult circumstances of everyday life in food terms in contemporary

Islamabad. Here, the interplay between spatial scale and traditional urban rhythms (daily, weekly, seasonally, feasting) in relation to food buying are being seriously disrupted by conflict, and Saher explored the implications for everyday life in a way that brought to mind the work of de Certeau (1984) albeit in a very different urban context.

Some issues of scale in the context of disrupted everyday lives were also apparent in Charlie Spring's look at food poverty and food banks in Session 2 where, paradoxically, scaling up might help permit capital to employ CSR based programmes instead of providing decent wages. To paraphrase Charlie, this could allow them to 'to replace rights with gifts and mask the structural nature of hunger'.

We heard about scale too from Giacomo Pettenati in Session 2's paper exploring Turin (city and metropolitan region) as a site or sites for developing Alternative Food Networks. Giacomo addressed what is fundamentally proposed as a wide scale reterritorialisation in food terms from what is already a more highly performing food system and spatial base that in many other places in Europe and elsewhere. As someone who works on the transforming and transformative nature of food markets and food quarters, the focus on Turin's rich set of widely used food markets and the convivial social relations embedded through them was particularly interesting.

A final quick point about scale was brought to mind by Erik Jönsson's absorbing (and rather horrifying) presentation in Session 3 about mass media presentations of *in vitro* meat and its potential for 'scaling up' in production terms. I cannot say I am surprised that there may be insuperable costs and consumer acceptability issues in this ambitious technocratic project whose assumptions and narratives Erik unpicked so effectively.

3. Neoliberalism

It was understandably hard to go past a discussion of the effects of neoliberalism on food in the context of the Anthropocene – and it popped up in a lot of places across the sessions. In Session 1 Megan Blake pointed out that while many of our food issues pre-dated neoliberal agendas these structures have clearly exacerbated various pre-existing trends. A number of papers explored ways to work round or even with neoliberal regimes politically, in specific place terms and interestingly to make use of, or perhaps reshape or reconfigure, tools used within an overarching neoliberal project – auditing being an example. One factor, of course, is that the state (at a national level) is not what it used to be – and as it is a less influential player we may need to look elsewhere for effective partners in pursuing food strategies for sustainability and justice.

In one of the most theoretically rich papers of the day, in Session 3 Mark Tilzey gave us an excellent overview and analysis of the state's relationship to capitalism and then on into food alterity. This acted to situate and frame much of the discussion of what Tilzey argued is "neoliberalism's variegated and 'poly lithic' character" in food terms. One strand of this was demonstrated in Erik Jönsson's paper, in the frighteningly close fit between neoliberal approaches and what I think could be called a technotopia in food terms. For me, it suggested that there is nothing more nostalgic about the future than a capitalist when it comes to modernist food 'solutions' within a technical paradigm. It is worth noting too Claire Hoolahan's work on developing tools which engineers can cope with to help reduce energy load along the food system, and I particularly liked the way Claire mounted a defense of reflexive, qualitative methods in a more 'hard' science context with its claims for objectivity.

It also occurred to me, in exploring the spatialised effect of the neoliberal in the context of the Anthropocene, that work on 'hybrid hospitality' (Bell, 2007) and 'convivial ecologies' (Bell and Binnie, 2005) might be conceptually helpful. Bell (2007) argues that a kind of mixed economy may be occurring in some specific places (situated as places with food quarter-like characteristics) which exhibit a blend of commodified and uncommodified forms of exchange in relation to food. These perhaps could be thought of as places shaped by neoliberalism, but able to reconfigure and transcend these commodified relations of production to be more truly convivial in some respects.

Conviviality's relationship with neoliberalism was in part also reflected in Helen Coulson's ethnographically based work presented in Session 4 (*Geographical perspectives on food in the Anthropocene – Urban agriculture and embodied practice*) on the everyday in a community garden setting. Helen pointed out that the embodied, mundane life on display demonstrates that 'community gardens simultaneously reinforce and contest neoliberal configurations and suggest that actions and relations based upon a politicised ethic of care can help enhance mutuality and wellbeing in the neoliberal city.'

4. Food waste and food poverty

Of course, neoliberal prescriptions are not the only ways being proposed to both define and address food problems. In a context of economically produced global food shortages which result from the workings of the modern food system it has been argued that better use of food waste could help resolve issues of hunger in a sustainable way. However, as Mags Adams pointed out (nicely puncturing what turned out to be a largely specious position) what is being described as 'waste' or 'surplus' is perfectly edible food that forms part of the mainstream food system. Such food is simply being characterised as waste at a point in which it is redistributed via food banks and other providers – once again getting capital and governments off the hook in structuring a food system capable of feeding everyone fairly, affordably and healthily. Instead, a functional food system in these terms is replaced by CSR style gifting which becomes part of what Mags described as 'the normal business model'. Thus, while food poverty may have increased in scale and visibility, waste and poverty are not two sides of the same coin.

Not explicitly about waste, but connected to it through an examination of food poverty in terms of food justice, Ana Moragues-Faus's paper in Session 3 demonstrated how media narratives both frame and undermine food justice by blaming the individual (as obese or a food bank user, for example) or being defined as simply redistributive without any real focus on justice. It was very interesting to see unpicked how these frames act as distortions (if that is not too strong a word) of the real relations occurring in this area. Of course there is a conceptual connection here with ideas of mystification explored in political economy terms in Mark Tilzey's paper. Also interesting conceptually in this area was Stephanie Denning's work presented in Session 2 on 'affect' (after Spinoza) in the context of a faith based food bank. Affect was used to conceptualise and explore the less instrumental aspects of working with people in food poverty and this was one of a number of papers that seemed to me to touch on conviviality – a theme I will return to.

5. Urban and peri-urban food growing

Unsurprisingly, we had a strong focus on urban and peri-urban food growing, and as someone who has just written extensively about those scales of food and urbanism this area of discussion was particularly intriguing. In some cases we honed in on political ecology

issues like seed cultivation (as in Diana Salazar's Colombia set paper in Session 3). In others the focus was on the spatial, as in the previously mentioned paper on Ghana where attempts to formalise and regulate a currently fine grained, spatially responsive, 'from below' approach to resilient local food growing are acting as a threat to this urban productivity.

Wendy Miller's paper on peri-urban food systems usefully explored how allotments and wider community based growing arrangements could bridge, or even help overcome, a posited divide between urban and rural food production. I would also add that allotments may help challenge the so-called presumption of primacy for urban development that underpins peri-urban spatial planning and political economy (Bunker and Holloway, 2001). One thing that also struck me in listening to Wendy's paper is that with the shrinking of access to allotments (as explored in Crouch and Wiltshire, 2005) the focus on the importance of allotment provision is particularly timely. On the one hand, of course, allotments offer chances for communality, food trading, and development of food skills as well as access to fresh vegetables, herbs and fruit. On the other, as Crouch and Ward, (1994) and Crouch and Wilshire (2005) have shown, they can also represent an exclusionary process by which space is semi-privatised for the benefit of the holders (sometimes over generations). These social goods and spaces are not shared with those waiting on lists or where waiting lists have even been closed due to allotment shortages. (The currently mooted idea of reducing allotment size to widen access was mentioned in the discussion following this paper).

The peri-urban also made a fascinating appearance in the previously noted paper from Session 2 which focused on Turin's urban and regional landscape of food; especially the productive interplay between producers on the urban edge and urban exchange with consumers through the loci of robust food markets within urban space – and is thus another way it can be positively reframed as food space.

Additionally, both formal and informal techniques for urban food cultivation were well explored in Session 4 through papers which looked variously at the rise of guerrilla gardening and more formal urban agriculture in a garden suburb context. As Michael Hardman pointed out, what is a survival strategy in the global south is largely viewed as about greening and socialising in the north; while Rebecca St Clair dealt with the views of UA participants and project managers in the Lottery funded Real Food Wythenshawe project, drawing out a diversity of meanings and perspectives on this burgeoning sustainable food space and activity.

6. Some final thoughts

For me (and I would say this) I'd like to see the spatial, material, design-based aspects of each of these food areas more identified, teased out and unpacked. It was tantalising for me as an urbanist to find that, in a whole range of excellent presentations, place was there but often seemingly as a kind of setting rather than interrogated as a contributory factor or element with any agency in the discussion and analysis. Having said that I really admired the methodological diversity and ingenuity on offer across the stream's sessions. Clearly, food researchers with geographical perspectives are proving extremely adept at exploring food in the context of the Anthropocene, and making connections between food policy advocacy and empirically based research and analysis: something which I would argue is very necessary given the urgent issues faced in the food system.

It was also great to hear conviviality mentioned explicitly by one of our last speakers in Session 3, Veronica Barry, and this seemed particularly pertinent in relation to session 1 on food sovereignty where there was a fascinating discussion about race in relation to food justice. Julian Agyeman pointed out how often narratives of the local excised black experience of food space – and that made me reflect on the need for more work in making good these gaps and elisions. It also made me think about Paul Gilroy’s notion of cosmopolitan conviviality (Gilroy, 2004) which might be useful as a framing device for thinking about our food future in an inclusive, diverse way.

Finally, I want to say that it has been a really stimulating day and I am hoping to write up some of these thoughts and send them through to Mags and others. I hope I have been able to do some justice to the great deal of research vibrancy on show, and especially to reflect what seems a very clearly shared sense through these sessions that in a fundamental way food matters.

Hyperlinks

<http://conference.rgs.org/AC2015/113>
<http://conference.rgs.org/AC2015/138>
<http://conference.rgs.org/AC2015/165>
<http://conference.rgs.org/AC2015/190>

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