Mountains and Food: Current Trends and Challenges in Europe's Mountain Regions

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1. The Context of this Special Issue

1   This special issue originates in the (re)emergence of the food question in urban contexts in North America and Europe over the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000; Steel, 2009; Morgan, 2009; Perrin and Soulard, 2014; Brand, 2015; among others). Previously neglected as a planning issue, food has been put firmly back on the territorial agenda by urban movements and the issues raised by urbanisation (including sustainable development, urban nature, urban farming and alternative food systems). In his editorial for *International Planning Studies* reporting on the first European discussions of this topic at the inaugural conference of the AESOP network's Sustainable Food Planning Group in Almere, Morgan (2009) uses the term "urban food planning" to describe the emergence of a community of researchers and practitioners in this field. Their aims include, among others, rethinking the place of food systems in the mechanisms of producing and organising spaces, in particular urban spaces or those linked to urbanisation. This involves looking at these spaces from the perspective of a component central to their functioning that seemed to be self-evident and no longer in question as a territorial issue at the turn of the twenty-first century (Brand, 2015).

2   Until recently, the rural and mountain territories of the Global North had been left out of these analyses seeking to draw connections between changes in food systems and territorial systems, which initially strongly focused on urban territories (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010; Rocha and Lessa, 2009; Morgan, 2014). The literature on food and mountain territories in the Global South is more extensive, but has tended to focus on food insecurity in relation to mountain populations in geographical contexts such as

the Andes and the Himalayas (Romeo et al., 2015; see also the focus issue of the journal *Mountain Research and Development* edited by Mathez-Stiefel et al., 2018). Yet the need to consider and manage the food question, in all its multiple dimensions, is equally pressing in mountain territories in the Global North. It is on this geographical context, and more specifically Europe's mountain regions (here the French, Swiss and Italian Alps, the Massif Central and the Pyrenees) that this special issue seeks to report: first, by documenting the specific nature of these highly anthropised spaces, their particular strengths and weaknesses with regard to food, and recognising the challenge of reconnecting the planning and food systems in these territories; and second, by putting the spotlight on innovative practices, initiatives and policies by which local responses to contemporary food issues are being developed. One of the key questions driving this special issue is to understand the form taken by the immense challenges of the food transition in mountain territories.

3   When territorial handling of the food question first emerged as an area of inquiry, rural and mountain regions were primarily perceived as spaces of food production supplying urban spaces. For example, in the analysis by Moschitz (2018) of the food policies developed by Swiss cities, which have strong links to mountain territories, the latter are considered almost exclusively as spaces for food production and ecosystem services, and not as places characterised by their own specific food systems. This reductive view is partly down to the huge transformations that mountain agrifood systems have undergone in recent decades. Unfavourable conditions from the point of view of economic competition have resulted in a gradual reduction in agricultural production for local consumption and have seen many mountain valleys gradually specialising in agrifood production for external or tourist markets (Flury et al., 2013), or becoming areas where farming is so fragile, from a social and economic point of view, that some researchers have questioned its very ability to survive (López-i-Gelats, 2013). As Perlik (2019) highlights, the primary role that mountain regions have taken on in the contemporary liberal-productivist system—that of providing products and services for external markets—makes them dependent on towns and cities due to the power inequalities that characterise these economic exchanges, and the system of governance in which they are embedded. Some have even posited the existence of a "food neo-colonialism" of the city towards the mountains (Varotto, 2020), consisting of flows, practices, policies and a debate in which mountains are seen as a space producing food for the city, leaving very little room for the specific features and complexity of mountain food systems, or the food security and food sovereignty of the people living in these regions (Perlik, 2019). It is clear, therefore, that consumption by local inhabitants is still all too often overlooked in discussions of and actions targeting these territories. Mountain valleys specialising in dairy and cheese monocultures are, for example, ultimately characterised more by a "*terroir*-led food system planning" (Ilieva, 2012, p. 64) that boils down to a strategy of promoting high-quality farm products for the national or even global agrifood market, aimed more at tourists than at local inhabitants. Policies targeting mountain food systems often reproduce a view of upland areas as spaces of specialised high value-added agricultural production. As such, geared towards exports and tourism, they tend to focus on the *terroir* or on promoting the unique nature of the relationship between a food product and the territory—whether or not this is a reality—rather than on building located chains that reduce—where possible and useful—the distance between the sites of production and consumption, or guarantee access to high-quality food.

4   In addition to this, the eating habits of those living in mountain territories are often discussed from a historical, folkloric perspective that overlooks the challenges they currently face securing sustainable, healthy and ethical food. The "foodscapes" of these rural and mountain territories (Vonthron et al., 2020) and the food-related representations, expectations and practices of their inhabitants need to be explored in light of their own particular characteristics (Delfosse, 2019; Vandenbroucke and Delfosse, 2019) and their vulnerability to the impact of wider phenomena such as climate change and urbanisation. These territories face specific problems, including scattered housing, limited transport options, dwindling shops and services, the impact of focusing on tourism on local food supply, and their consequences for the accessibility of food (Cholat and Daconto, 2017; Delfosse, 2019; Massal et al., 2019; Pettenati, 2020); the abandonment of crops in the most remote areas and its negative impact on soil health and the landscape (Mann, 2013); biodiversity management and its implications for local food chains; the commodification of "traditional products" and competition between diversified local consumption and the export of labeled products outside the territory; and the (re-)invention of local identities through the heritagisation of food products (Delfosse, 2011; Grasseni, 2017).

5   More broadly, the issues involved in the food transition also apply to mountain areas: how are new ways of producing, processing, distributing, supplying, and eating food being invented in these regions? How do these new practices and representations contribute to questions of sustainability, spatial justice, public health and social inclusion, among others? While modern planning processes have contributed to alienating the rural from the urban, in the sense that the "operational landscapes" of the rural or natural environment enabled urban growth (Brenner, 2013), we explore how the food spatialities of mountain territories may be reconfiguring urban-rural relations today. In recent years, the academic and public debates have focused on urban food systems and the policies by which they should be managed. Yet numerous unresolved questions remain: are there specific mountain or valley food systems that differ from other territorial food systems? What are their characteristics? How do they connect to the food flows, networks and processes that have been shaped by urbanisation and industrialisation on a larger scale? At a time of transactional and reciprocal relationships between territories (Vanier, 2005, 2015; Brand, 2017, 2018; Talandier, 2019) we also need to look at what is happening from the point of view of rural and mountain spaces.

6   This special issue therefore aims to illustrate current trends in this area by studying current practices, representations, initiatives and policies relating to the food question in mountain territories, and to examine these in the light of a number of issues. These include:

    1. The specific features of cultures and populations in mountain territories. What role does the heritage-related aspects of food practices and representations play in relation to these questions? Based on the premise that mountain regions represent not only a geomorphological condition, but above all a social, cultural and political construction (Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2010), what is the impact of the social construction of the mountain-specific character of food products via regional sales and marketing strategies? How are food practices adjusting to the arrival of new populations in these regions? What innovations are emerging as a result? What new expectations are being articulated? How are particular aspects of food knowledge (for example in relation to seeds, gathering, hunting and recipes) being passed on or rediscovered?

2. The interaction between agrifood industry issues (more focused on productive agricultural activities) and food issues (more focused on consumption by local inhabitants, but also tourists) in these territories. How, for example, are food issues incorporated into Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) rural development policies? In certain spaces, how does the specialist agrifood sector coexist with the emerging demands of local inhabitants for a diverse range of high-quality food products?

3. The ecological challenges of preserving biodiversity in these territories and developing agroecological practices. These prompt examination of the potential links between the development of agroecological practices in industry, biodiversity management, and climate change adaptation strategies on the one hand, and food-related challenges, expectations and practices on the other. What impact do these latter have on the development of agroecological practices and biodiversity management? Are there potential connections? Are food-related issues driving the development of agricultural diversification or circular systems at the farm or regional level?

4. The challenges of territorial food inequality and vulnerability. Are the inhabitants of these regions more vulnerable to problems with access or social-spatial exclusion in relation to food? Or are mountain territories and populations more resilient in this regard? What community and territorial trends can be observed in these regions, and how do they come together to act on these issues?

5. Experiments that sketch out new territorialities and reveal reciprocal relationships between territories based on food-related practices and representations in these regions. These call for analyses of the interterritorial dimension of territorial food projects (TAPs) and other territorial food policy schemes. The aim here is to examine the way in which food-related practices and representations in these spaces prompt a fresh look at urban-rural and mountain-valley links in the dynamics of territorial transition.

6. The impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which prompts examination of the role these spaces played, the impact of the crisis on rural and mountain food systems, and the adaptation strategies developed locally by authorities and communities.

2. An Overview of the Articles in this Special Issue

7 The articles in this collection partly address these issues, analysing but also interrogating the questions outlined above. Drawing on case studies from the Alps, the Pyrenees and the Massif Central, they reveal three key elements of the current trends and challenges faced by mountain regions with regard to the food question.

Food as a Means of Territorial Transition

8 As particularly vulnerable spaces that have been hit hard by the adverse effects of agricultural productivism and decline due to the draw of urban centres, mountain spaces are particularly affected by the challenges of resilience and territorial transition. Two contributions shed light on the emerging role of food in regional development (Loudiyi and Houdart, 2019), and specifically on how it is being mobilised in territorial transition projects with the aim of restoring the "common sense" link between stakeholders present in the same territory. As an integrating object, food is gradually being mobilised to break down boundaries between regional sectors of activity and stakeholders. The article by **Gros-Balthazard,** based on a case study from the Valposchiavo valley in the Swiss canton of Grisons, outlines the construction trajectory of a territorial transition agritourism project based on promoting local

organic agricultural produce, which is a prominent feature of this territory. The transversality between stakeholders and sectors of activity that is introduced by, and essential to, the food question, is discussed as a vector of territorial transition in the article by **Tognon et al.**, which presents a case study from Trentino in northern Italy. They show how the dynamics of food territorialisation, via the redefinition of agrifood businesses and the ability of food to bring together a diverse range of sectors of activity and stakeholders, are key to putting this territory, which is characterised by numerous vulnerabilities, on a path to greater resilience. In line with work on food governance, both articles highlight the inclusion and engagement of local people as being central to the trajectories of territories undergoing regeneration and transition.

The Need to Consider the Ecological, Agroecological and Food Transitions as a Whole

9 Following on from the broader issues of resilience and transition for mountain territories, two contributions take an original approach to the links that are yet to developed between the ecological, agroecological and food transitions, despite initial work to synthesise the analyses that have been produced for each specific system (Wezel et al., 2016). Due to the fragility of their ecosystems, mountain regions are closely concerned by questions relating to biodiversity preservation and agroecological practices. They are thus the ideal territories for exploring these issues in relation to the territorialisation of food.

10 The article by **Morsel et al.** thus retraces the interplay of disconnection/reconnection between territory and food over time in the Montagne Limousine region of the Massif Central, linking this to the agroecological issues that have brought about changes in industry, in this case livestock farming. These authors take an innovative approach to the challenges of integrating agroecological production systems into local food systems. In particular, they show how the existing territorial food chains are poorly suited to the practices of farmers in agroecological agropastoral systems, and thus highlight the difficulties of linking food and environmental issues. In the Montagne Limousine region, the agroecological transition initiated by farmers has yet to be followed by the beginnings of a food transition.

11 In the article by **Créti et al.,** the authors observe the disconnect between food and environmental issues and argue for the need to join them up and consider them as a whole in order to envisage the future of mountain territories and, in particular, the future of the agropastoral activity that characterises them. Based on research in the Belledonne mountain range in the French Alps, the authors take an innovative look at a hitherto unconsidered link in the chains that connect the stakeholders and activities in this type of territory: the link between the management of wolves as a remarkable component of biodiversity, agropastoral activity as an economic activity subject to numerous requirements and constraints, and the food-related expectations and practices of the local inhabitants of this mountain range and its nearby urban valleys. The authors put forward the original idea that territorialisation of the management of the impact of wolves—notably on agropastoral activity—and of food in these territories would benefit from being considered through a new lens: the lens of care and the articulation of "what matters" by a wider group than simply those stakeholders

directly affected by the wolf question. Central to these debates is the future of agropastoral activity in mountain regions.

The Reconfiguration of Mountain Populations and Urban-Rural Relations

12   The articles by Morsel et al. and Créti et al. also raise questions about urban-rural relations. Morsel et al. show how livestock farmers in the agroecological agropastoral system of the Montagne Limousine region have had to open up to both nearby and more distant urban centres. This is due to weak local demand linked to the low population density that characterises this highland region, but also due to the lack of support from local butchers, who stick to traditional channels. These systems also create wealth and jobs, bringing people into an area that seemed doomed to rural decline. Créti et al. discuss how greater involvement could be sought from the consumer-inhabitants of nearby urban valleys in order to shed new light on the future of agropastoral activity in response to the wolf question. Three of the articles in this special issue emphasise more directly the way in which the food question interrogates urban-rural and mountain-valley links in territorial transition trends, and in relation to the future of mountain regions more broadly. They show that while urban dynamics may have weakened mountain economies and ecosystems in the past, in conjunction with agricultural productivism, observation of food practices shows the emergence of a new relationship. The urban dynamics of short food supply chains, "metromountain" policies (Pettenati, 2022) and population movements can now be mobilised in a fertile form of territorial reciprocity. These articles also show the impact of the complex changes taking place in contemporary mountain societies, which are continually being pulled between urbanisation and depopulation, between innovation and tradition, and between recognition of the increasing numbers of new mountain dwellers "by choice" and populist closure. The transition from a past based on a subsistence farming economy to a present in which a new sustainable economy is possible also relies on the "neo-rural" newcomers to the mountains, who are involved in many of the processes taking place in these territories.

13   The article by **Fournier et al.** thus uses the social biography of a lost cheese (Bleu d'Auzat) to reconstruct the detailed territorial trajectory of change of an entire Pyrenean valley, from an agricultural economy to industrialisation and its present attempt to identify new post-industrial trajectories based on tourism, ecological quality and promoting local resources. This article also interrogates the dynamics of the regional anchoring of food. It looks at the way in which food products can disappear from a territory, and shows how the challenges of climate change and the production and food transitions could result in the revival of these "forgotten" local food systems. Like Guiraud et al., these authors also demonstrate the role played by exogenous stakeholders, particularly from towns and cities, in the reterritorialisation of food.

14   Based on a study of the role of gardens, which have previously been more studied in urban contexts, the article by **Guiraud et al**. also shows how the population renewal brought about by neo-rural newcomers is contributing to the reconfiguration of food practices, in this case self-consumption, in rural highland areas in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region. The authors study how gardens are being redefined in these territories and highlight the strong interrelationships between rural and urban

territories in this process. They show, for example, that these gardens are a factor in drawing in people from urban areas, who bring with them certain expectations about self-consumption and collective life that are now incorporated into public schemes for reviving a food heritage in this rural highland area.

15   Based on a study of the livestock industries in the mountains surrounding the Grenoble metropolitan area, the article by **Grison et al.** traces the history of mutual influences between urban and rural mountain areas. In particular, it shows how these territorialising industries are currently developing a whole range of specific features that produce diverse kinds of interterritorial relations. Situated at the intersection between non-peri-urban mountain livestock farming and the more studied peri-urban market gardening, peri-urban mountain livestock farming has its own particular characteristics, and each mountain benefits from and is restricted by urban proximity in a slightly different way.

16   Finally, the two contributions in this issue of the "Transitions" section highlight citizen initiatives that bring together producers and consumers and renew urban-rural relations. Marco Immovilli presents the case of the network of actors in the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) CRESCO project in Val Varaita (Piedmont). Jade Ballot analyzes the new forms of food relations promoted by the Croc'Bauges grocery store and its cooperative SCIC BioBauges, in the Massif des Bauges (Savoie). Cooperation and the shared management of resources essential to the functioning of the community are two elements historically present in mountain societies, and which these initiatives highlight. The articles in this special issue also point to other aspects that represent opportunities for future research.

17   Questions of territorial food disparity and vulnerability remain in the background of these case studies. As with urban territories, rural mountain territories that actively engage with the food question appear to view it through an agrifood lens (Brand, 2015) that puts off the integration of issues specific to consumers, notably local inhabitants, to a later date. The article by Guiraud et al. does however clearly illustrate the social dimension of gardens that have been revived by community groups or backed by the authorities in relation to support schemes and activities for vulnerable groups. And, in a border context that brings with it competition over food prices, the article by Gros-Balthazard emphasises the need to go beyond the inclusion solely of consumer-tourists in discussions of and actions targeting the territorialisation of food, and to ensure greater consideration of consumer-inhabitants and their particular problems.

18   Two articles highlight the accelerating role played by the COVID-19 pandemic in confirming the importance of the food question in these territories and in the territorialisation of the food system. Tognon et al. show how the COVID "momentum" has accelerated and bolstered initiatives for the reterritorialisation of food, while Guiraud et al. emphasise that the pandemic has helped crystallise concerns about the food autonomy of territories, in the wake of which public policies are focusing more on gardening. It remains to be seen whether the trends set in motion by this crisis, which has helped to bring the food question to the fore, are here to stay.

19   Finally, landscape and land use issues remain highly relevant to the reterritorialisation of food (Perrin, 2020). In the case of the Pyrenean valley of Vicdessos, analysed in the article by Fournier et al., the revival of cheese production is strongly associated with the challenges of reopening up the land, while the external origin of the new producers undermines their access to land and thus the sustainability of their business,

particularly in the absence of established agricultural collectives. This leads the authors to conclude that the territorialisation of food also requires the implementation of a food land policy that includes producers based in valleys in agricultural decline. The article by Guiraud et al. also highlights the role played by land planning policies in preserving and making available land resources to support allotments and community and heritage garden projects. Finally, Grison et al. conclude by considering the issue of peri-urban land use for the sustainability of livestock industries in direct proximity to the city.

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