

Transformation as a Process of Politics and Governance

PhD 03b: Governance

Food Sovereignty as Food System Transformation: Shifting the Scale of Governance (Working Title)

Rationale

The concept of food sovereignty (La Vía Campesina 1996) has been proposed as a way to deliver food security at local scales while also protecting the environment via non-industrial farming methods. It allows communities to define their own locally appropriate food and agriculture systems. Therefore, food sovereignty means different things in different locations; its unifying concept is that of local power over food production and consumption, placing food security at the centre of democratic processes. Food sovereignty has been pursued through local initiatives, grassroots movements, and recently through a number of national strategies for food security (e.g. in Bolivia, Mali, Senegal). It is thus proposed as a foundation for food system transformation in a number of developing world countries.

If food sovereignty is to deliver food security it must change the scale of governance. This shift in scale occurs in at least four ways: 1) from implementing national approaches, to designing national strategies that facilitate local approaches; 2) from sectoral policies (e.g. agriculture, biodiversity, water), to place-based, topic-driven governance; 3) to include broader interests and stakeholders, outside of formal policy actors; and 4) to balance powerful economic interests with local interests and priorities. The PhD project will explore how existing governance processes create spaces for, or adapt to, these rescaling challenges.

Background / State of Research

To date, food sovereignty research has focused on the outcomes of local case study projects. For example, Iles and Montenegro (2013) examine the biodiversity and food security impacts from Peru's potato park. There is little known research on the fit of individual, isolated examples into broader governance system. Regardless of the potential benefits of food sovereignty, we need to understand how to govern its implementation on a national level if it is to be a foundation of food system transformation. In order to meet this need, this PhD project will draw on concepts from a governance of place approach. The social and physical contexts that shape the place-construct of that location can be explored and traced into such institutional contexts in order to understand the governance of place; that is, how actors and their interests interact with each other, and with the physical context in order to shape on-the-ground management and outcomes. Drawing on foundations of political ecology and political economy, governance of place recognizes that multiple actors with multiple interests coalesce around a given place and topic, and these actors represent multiple levels of governance, with variable power, and variable influence from international, national and sub-national policies and discourse.

Approach and Research Design

It is expected that this PhD will draw on case study research that embeds an example (one or two) of project-level food sovereignty within the broader governance system. A conceptual and analytical framework will be developed, drawing on literature from multi-level governance and governance change research. This framework will be applied to one or two case studies. Methods will be tailored to context; the research will need to engage with a broad range of respondents, including

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members of communities within food sovereignty projects, and high-level policy makers. It is therefore anticipated that the researcher will draw on participant observation and methods from participatory rural appraisal for community-level data collection, and elite interview or stakeholder workshops for respondents from the policy system. It is also likely that the researcher will also need to perform policy analysis on policy documentation. Analysis will be via discourse and content analysis.

Expected Results

The results are expected to demonstrate the challenges and opportunities for delivering such rescaling as an example of transformation, within the preexisting governance system. The results from this research will therefore contribute to our understanding of how individual examples of sustainability practice can be harnessed for larger scale system transformation. Practical outcomes from the research will contribute to food security strategies in the case study locations, and globally, and can be of interest to the broader food sovereignty movement.

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