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'We are what we (do not) eat': Linking food production and consumption

Greenies, foodies and farmers – alternative food politics in Irish civil society

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Alternative food initiatives

Allen et al (2003) list the core forms of alternative food initiatives, which include...

community supported agriculture (CSAs), producer cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, farmers' markets, urban gardens, community gardens, school gardens, food policy councils, community food security coalitions, community land trusts, direct marketing, alternative knowledge networks and sustainable agriculture organisations



Nature of debate – what alternatives aspire to...

Nature of debate

Conventional, global food systems	Alternative, bottom up response to this globalisation
Global, processed, homogenous, deskilling, acceptance, centralisation, efficiency, concentration, long food supply chains, dominant, capitalist, industrialized, specialization, domination of nature.	Local, fresh, diversity, skills, rights, sustainable, ethical, participatory, proximate, reconnect producers and consumers, short food supply chains, decentralised, independence, self-reliance, community, culture, harmony with nature .
Beus and Dunlap 1990, Lang 1999, Kloppenburg 1999, Grey 2000, Marsden et al 2000, Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002, Kirwan 2004, Tovey 2006	

Effective alternatives?

Space of resistance, but also subject to criticism - potential to battle and challenge the dominant system questioned:

- Supplements, not substitutes (Allen et al 1999).
- Research also now asking what is their value?
- Working spaces -the seeds of social change are sown (Allen et al 2003)
- 'gradation' effect – space for debate (Cox et al 2008)
- Also how to make more effective - pragmatic approach

Participatory democracy for effective alternatives

- Hassanein (2003) ‘food democracy’
- “actively participate in the food system, rather than remaining passive spectators on the sidelines...food democracy is about citizens having the power to determine agro-food policies and practices locally, regionally, nationally and globally” (79)
- Wilkins (2003) – ‘food citizens’
- “the practice of engaging in food related behaviours (defined narrowly and broadly) that support, rather than threaten, the development of a democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food system” (271).



Engagement and participation?

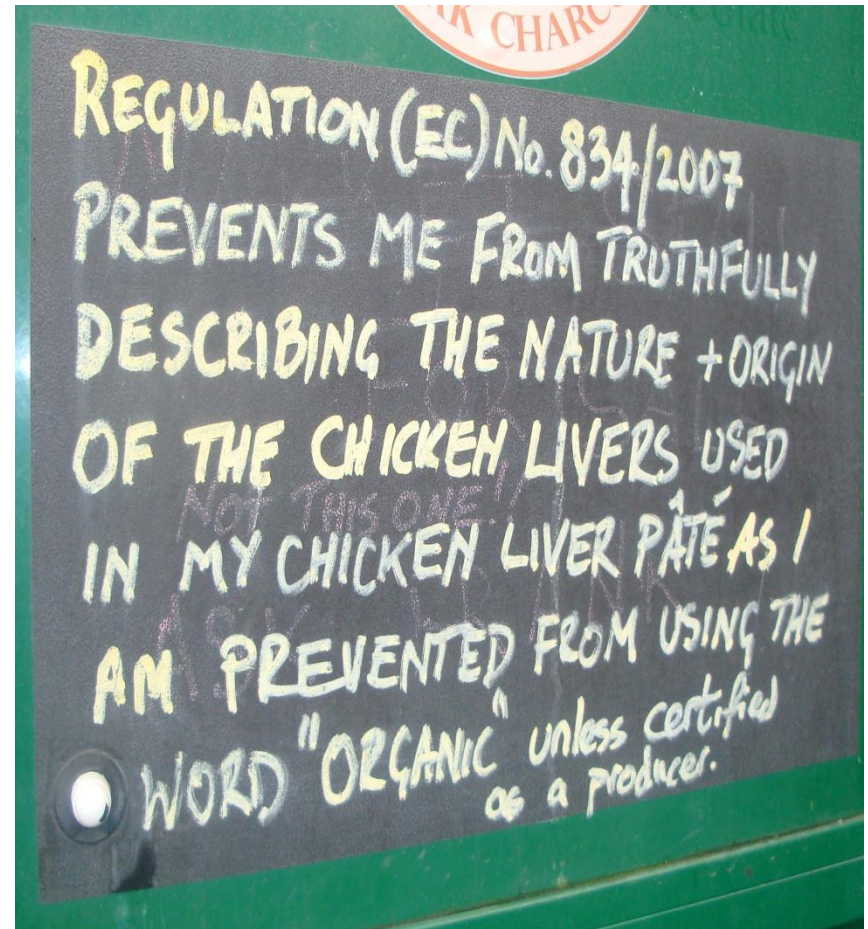
- CSA - members little interest in this and rarely volunteer (DeLind 1999, Cone & Myhre 2000).

Individualised food consumers...

- DeLind (1999) observes: “we are dealing with individualised communities and not dealing with communitised individuals” and those who participate are doing so for themselves, as “highly individual or personalised resistance – a resistance primarily of consumers – not of citizens” (7-8).
- Others disagree:
- Seyfang (2006) – local organic food network – engages people with food issues.

Spaces of negotiation...

- Feenstra (2002) spaces (e.g. farmers' markets, community gardens) that allow community food to germinate
- Smithers et al (2008) suggest farmers' markets are a 'hybrid space' where various, diverse and divergent issues are negotiated, such as the issue of reselling.
- Identity is in negotiation (Dilley 2009)
- **Represents pre-participation preparatory work and construction of a 'public sphere' for food politics**



An expanding 'public sphere' in civil society?

- Habermas's – importance of of an expanded public sphere “when groups of agents come together to bring normative arrangements into question they form a public sphere” (Crossley 2002, p155)
- E.g. Tovey's (2001) analysis of the cooperative movement and Irish civil society, it argued movement leaders “open up a space outside of politics for debate and deliberation” (335).

WHAT KIND OF RESISTANCE DO IRELAND'S ALTERNATIVE FOOD ACTORS REPRESENT?

- Politics following the broad patterns described in the literature
- Also a space for negotiation of food politics - a diverse, divergent or fractured debate

Politics of food – types

- Broad types - engages with broad issues and a quest for alternatives to conventional food systems
 - Dynamic politics - local level - elements of both 'food consumer' and 'food citizen'
- dynamic category – one transitions towards the other

Broad food politics

A food politics in development – three types:

1. Farmers
2. Greenies
3. Foodies

- Also crossover between types

Create a **more holistic food system** – **environment, health, society, economy**

- Healthy bodies, healthy people:

“well just people wanting to stop eating crap, you know and because that is what most people are doing out of the supermarkets...all the supermarkets are responsible for that along with the sort of globalised food industry, you know we need to get back to what Michael Pollan says, you know eating food that is made up of less than 5 ingredients, rather than 50” (interview 21)

- economics of exchange...value and price differentiated:

“...anybody within the retail sector wanted to take you for everything, and have 300% mark up and make all the profit themselves, which I didn't think was fair because we were doing all the work...so that just didn't, economically and labour wise, I just didn't accept” (interview 45).

Farmers

- Kinder food production
- Desire for self reliance – loosen ties with dominant system and its negative effects:

“Monsanto have upped the price of seeds in the States by 42% this year and since they started the price has gone up by 213 or 214% and they are screwing the growers and eh the they have found out now that they are paying big money for the sprays and the herbicides as well and they are being caught, they are really only working for Monsanto” (interview 15).

Negotiation of wider issues of general food politics – farming methods, subsidy...

“the reason we never went organic, I did look into it was because the cost of em purchasing organic wheat is huge...I wouldn't be able to justify the price em in the fridge for people to be able to purchase...people are enticed into organics with the grants that are available, but it doesn't do anything for me because I would have to jack up the price of the meat which I don't think is fair”(interview 46).



Greenies



- Strong care for the earth ethic and self sufficiency:
 - “...from my own personal life experiences if you like I knew that when you bought connection to the soil, connect with nature, that it had an effect on how you cared about it, it has an effect on health, it had an effect on how kids saw food for instance, because they would come in and say mine don't eat vegetables, well you should come in and see what they are eating out of the garden” (interview 5).
- Promote sustainable lifestyles:
 - “The important thing for me is that the concept is in people's minds, food can be grown in a sustainable, local way by people for themselves” (interview 2).
- Negotiation of wider issues, e.g. corporate funding:
 - “you could consider that selling your soul to the devil...but the people...that I am doing the projects with, if there is a Nike logo on something, it's over their heads. If I have made Nike look a bit better, well, I personally think that this industrial growth system that we live in is on the decline” (interview 5).

Foodies

- Incubate, revive and preserve food culture
- Support farmers, producers, create food communities:

“it is very much a social situation farmers markets because if you look at anybody who has really got into it in any way it grows good strong communities” (interview 30).

Also see negotiation between categories – ‘greenies’ dispute ‘foodie’ approach:

“We aren’t at full production yet... I only occasionally have surplus and I have tried a farmers’ market, and I have to say I know farmers’ markets are really popular and its good in principle, but I am not very enamored by them, you know, because they are rarely farmers’ markets” (interview 5).



Dynamic food politics

- Food politics is negotiated between groups
- Groups also negotiate within wider society – highlighting broader politic sets:

A. Hopeful dreamers

B. Realists who continue to battle

C. Realists who opt out

The first two categories speak more to the creating food democracies; however the last veers towards the individualistic approach

Hopeful dreamers

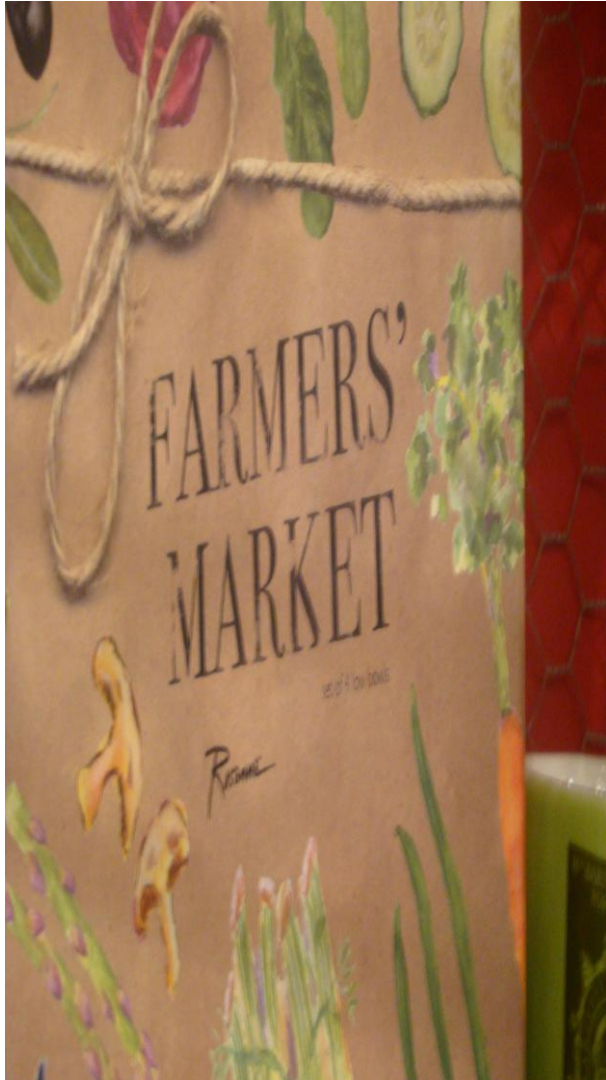
- Newly engaging and acting on food politics
- Full of hope their efforts will lead to change
- wish to create communitised individuals:

“The cry of someone at an individual basis, who is saying something is terribly wrong, may not have the same effect” (Interview 3).

- individualised communities resist:
- *“we buy some organic vegetables from him, so we are all kind of in bed with each other in, it is not a very big county, so we all know each other but he wouldn’t get involved in anything” (interview 37).*



Realists who continue to battle



- Work for change - encounter challenges.
- Not being supported or understood by institutions, politicians, or consumers, for example:

“Consumers are fairly well educated, I mean some of them are very hypocritical, like they’ll pull up in their big SUVs and ask about air miles” (interview 45).

“It’s a complete and utter, you know, it seems like it is all rosy in the garden, every feckin thing, they really need to get their heads around it” (interview 46).

- Lack of regulation to maintain standards allows for dilution of the values, free riders...

“they are trying to piggyback on the back of you know companies that are trying to produce a good product, an honest product” (interview 38).

Realists who opt out

- Carve an alternative space for themselves
- Shaping their own world as they would like to see the wider world.
- Realisation that the State does not understand or support them and the dominant system is too strong to challenge.

“...he has a good idea of helping small producers supply local (super) markets...it is a good idea, but, what I know will happen in practice is they will just beat down the prices...I’ve seen it happen before and I have no doubt it will happen again ...supermarkets are trying to win back market share that they are losing to the farmer markets... if they were somebody who was honest and that you could trust and you knew they were going to be fair with you, then no problem, but in this big bad world there is a lot of sharks out there and I don’t have time for it anymore” (interview 32).



Dynamic politics

Spaces of negotiation and transition of ideas is evident

Participant moves from hopeful dreamer: *“There was a much more general wanting to change values and I suppose my doing what I was doing was partly to put into practice my own ideas of changing values but also very much immodestly wanting to influence others...”*

to realist who continues to battle:

“...that was started in this field here, on a second attempt again, the first time nobody came...”

to realist who opts out:

“...it was nearly 10 years setting up...I think is typical of such situations it became a clash I suppose. ...it cured me of any desire to be involved in any organisation” (interview 16).

- Transition in time rather than space
- Broad types – foodies, farmers, greenies – at different points of engagement
- Effects potential for solidarity and advancement

Individualised consumer or community of citizens?

- Dobson (2003) – consumer and citizen separate
- Soper (2004) citizen – consumer are inextricably linked
- Move from being a food consumer to a food citizen - aspirations and dreams once to resist have now become about individual lifestyle as realists opt out.
- Resisting is seen to be futile and a compromise is reached to make the world better for the self.
- More important - see the dynamic go the other way - more food consumers are becoming food citizens
- Dynamics shown in food politics in Ireland - move from citizen to consumer...
- Change occurs slowly...The more hopeful dreamers call for engagement, the more spaces of food politics negotiation that exist, possibility of greater engagement may ensue.