

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A qualitative research into ideology and the creation of alternative food systems by citizens in Arnhem (the Netherlands), in relation to alternative thoughts, needs, wants and the contemporary dynamic of power



'Urban gardens nurture not only plants and animals but people and their cultures as well.'

Thomas Lyson 2014.

Master Thesis

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All drawing in this thesis are made by Muriël Simonis.



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Master Thesis, Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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Abstract

The alternative food systems in this research are created by engaged citizens and local entrepreneurs. These systems are based on values like solidarity and sustainability. The participants reject mere efficiency and profit oriented goals, which are often the base for the current capitalist supermarket food system. The entrepreneurs of the alternative food systems see efficiency and profit not as goals, but as tools to help them in creating a 'better world'. The alternative food systems create a common goal which attracts engaged participants, as well as providing some ethical convenience for consumers. As these alternative systems leave the margins of society and gain more participants from different socio-economic backgrounds, they abandon the connotation of 'tree huggers', as one of the informants mentioned. It is this wider base of believers or participants, these 'non-tree huggers' that seems to be essential for the continuation of the alternative system. This fundamental network is the basis for existence by creating goodwill, negotiating possibilities and a basic shared ideology. It is this dynamic and structure—the ground for these alternative food systems—which makes them intrinsically different from the current, mainstream, food system.

Abstract

Preface

In this personal note of engagement, I want to explain my own position and perspective in relation to the researched field in this thesis: alternative food systems. I have been increasingly engaged with food and its systems over the years, because of its essential place in most cultures. I regard it as important how we relate to food, as individuals and as a society. One of the reasons that I am interested in ideology and food is the way I view my academic position as a constructionist. Rosenberg (2015) explains the constructionist position as “showing how rules in people’s heads constitute human affairs and the institutions through which they proceed, the anthropologist and sociologist reveal the conventional “constructed” nature of society and thereby show that it can be changed, revised, reformed, or overthrown. This is a far from banal outcome” (Rosenberg 2015, 134).

My motivation of understanding the practical side of how people create certain rules for themselves, how we ‘construct’ our society, is the basic motivation for this research. This ambition to understand and analyze how we conduct ourselves in groups and society has been with me for as long as I can remember. As a child I could not always see the logic of group behavior and always wondered why ‘we do what we do’. This logic did not seem to reveal itself as I got older. Now, as a sustainable citizen and an engaged anthropologist, the contemporary urgency and personal desire of creating a more sustainable society has added to my engagement with understanding and help shaping the world as a better place.

Hopefully you will enjoy reading this thesis and will it provide you with new insights in food, its systems, and possibly your own perspective.

With warm regards,
Muriël Simonis.

Preface

Acknowledgements

In the period of fieldwork, I have participated in the community of Puurland and Kweekland and I had many interesting experiences forming connections with others. I want to thank all the people that helped me in understanding what this community means for them, as this community has become precious to me.

In this section I want to thank people that were essential to this thesis and to me: Steven Koster, for having me at his side, showing me the field of alternative food systems and his extensive network in Arnhem and beyond; my dear friend Maranke for helping and entangling the academic knot; my fellow students for having engaged conversations, support, and lots of love for each other; my teachers for inspiring and trying to showing us the full scope of things; and Walter Faaij for being critical, supportive, engaged, and an inspiration for what anthropologist can become after graduation.

I would also like to thank my parents, Astrid and Danny, for always loving, believing and caring for me in good times and in bad times; my parents in law, Ria and Henk, for helping, supporting and having a shoulder in need; my partner and love, Roy, for being there and always believing in me; and my lovely, cheeky kids, Lea and Daantje, in giving me joy and the pure realization of what I value in life.

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Introduction

In this introduction I will sketch the theoretical field and the field of the alternative food systems I encountered, and give a short introduction of the project's theoretical and social contexts. I will elaborate on my choice and the relevance of research in this complex and blossoming field of food. My respondents and their enterprises are introduced. I will also explain my methodology and the structure of this thesis.

Food context

Food is everywhere, but what is 'good food'? Is it 'tasty', or are there more aspects of 'good' which are relevant. Is food 'good', when it is good to everyone and everything? Is food 'good' when it is fair food, environmentally-friendly food, solidary food, and/or shared food? The search for this goodness is one that engaged citizens in this research are undertaking. They have created alternative food systems that, in their eyes, are better than the dominant food system. These enterprises and entrepreneurs are the focus of this research, but what about the broader context of global food production?

Food is on the menu of a large collection of authorities. Every self-respecting newspaper has recipes and columns about food; on commercial networks the cooking programs are abundant; and the public television network is even broadcasting special food evenings, twice a week—it is all over the media (NPO s.d.). There are numerous festivals related to food, or totally focused on food, and a recent phenomenon in the Netherlands is the increasingly popular food trucks (Food Truck Festival TREK s.d.). Aside from the prominent position of food in popular culture, food and its systems is also a hot topic in the domain of politics and big corporations. The Dutch central government and several sectors in the food industry have articulated the ambition to create a significantly more sustainable food system in the Netherlands by the year 2020; by then, the entire system of food production and distribution should have made a significant transition towards sustainability. Additionally, food waste will have to have been reduced significantly (Rijksoverheid 2014).

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As the field of food seems to be a field of great flux, with many different players that each have their own constellation of wishes, goals, and gains, this specific 'tale' and research is set in a changing landscape where past logics and norms are replaced with new ones.

The Paris climate summit in December 2015, and the agreement it forged between 196 countries throughout the world, is important in relation to this research (Davenport 2015), as the current food system is said to be one of the biggest polluters of our environment. Shrybman (2000) has investigated the relation between agriculture and trade, and the impact on climate change. He concluded that the current food system with the industrial agriculture and global export is a substantial, if not the largest, contributor to global warming (Shrybman 2000, 1). As stated in the New York Times: "While scientists once warned that climate change was a problem for future generations, recent scientific reports have concluded that it has started to wreak havoc now, from flooding in Miami to droughts and water shortages in China" (Davenport 2015). The agreed commitment of the climate summit to try to stay under the climate warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius, and the imperative to stay under 2 degrees Celsius, might have certain implications for the future food system. It suggests that emergency measures have to be taken, and not half-heartedly, if this commitment is to be honored. However, both scenarios, either by honoring the commitment or discarding it, will bring us to uncharted territory.

In correlation to the stage of world politics, the academic world is researching climate change and its relation to different fields, one of which is food. Aside from the possible relation between food and the weather, other topics are diverse: (feeding) the growing world population, health and food, and many more. The main debate in the academic world that is related and important to this research is the current issue of the direction of the food system. This is especially grounded in the field of agriculture and food. Generally speaking, there are two opposing camps in the scientific dispute: the industrialized technological fixed food production camp on the one hand; and the self-organized, small scale organic farming camp on the other.

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Of course, there are many grey areas in between these ‘extremes’. What is curious is that this debate also includes the involvement of the general public—many books, TED talks, documentaries and other departures from the ‘ivory tower’ of academia—in order to establish how we should proceed or change the food system.

Accountability

The scientists described above try to create public understanding about the food system and the necessity of evolving towards a different, more sustainable system. Similarly, I believe that an understanding of the ways in which systems are constructed is the first step towards change. As was mentioned in the preface, I am passionate about food and I view food production as an important force in shaping society. This basic necessity of nourishment is one of the pillars of our society, and thus understanding the ‘reality’ of some of the processes involved is empowering. Aside from my personal efforts to be sustainable, I want to understand and contribute to a broader understanding of food systems and the changes that are currently taking place therein.

One of the questions that occurred to me during the fieldwork is whether or not these alternative food systems are forms of food activism. The components of rebelling against the current capitalist system, trying to be more solidary, having more control over the food system, and having a more sustainable food system, are all facets that are related to the concept of food activism (Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014, 6, 7). Nevertheless, I have chosen not to focus on the theme of food activism. This is mainly because the term ‘activism’ has a connotation of political aggression that I would like to avoid. And in any case, none have the people that I spoke with ever mentioned the word ‘activism’ or typified their practices as ‘activist’. Their goal is to become the new norm, not stay marginal or activist.

In preparation for the field work I wrote a research proposal. In this first construction of the field, a significant portion of the theoretical framework, as well as questions and expectations, were developed. A portion of this groundwork has been used and adapted in this thesis.

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Before proceeding, it is important to address the issue of language. The fieldwork has been executed in the Netherlands, and thus most of the spoken, written and other data is in Dutch. All translations of this data into English are my own.

Alternative food systems and respondents

My main respondent is Steven Koster, founder of the enterprises Puurland and Kweekland. The location and foundation Kweekland is where the regional online groceries service is being sorted, packed and wrapped. Puurland delivers regional, organic and sustainable food products, either in the form of a recipe or in separate edible products. Koster started three years ago with reevaluating his life, life's choices and his values. After this he turned a new leaf, and started Kweekland and Puurland. Kweekland is a city garden managed by a foundation, which is worked on by people with a love of nature. Often they cannot or will not participate in the fast-paced contemporary labor market. This location is the frame for many other enterprises, like the intricate garden boutique of Koster's partner. Kweekland is also the location where Puurland is materialized, a delivery service for regional products. Although this is the main food system of my research, as Koster has many projects and activities, my scope initially became bigger than just Kweekland and Puurland.

However, in the end I decided not to incorporate multiple subjects into the study, instead focusing mainly on the construction of Puurland and Kweekland. This resulted from several considerations. First, these enterprises are actively engaging with a growing group participants, and have the motive to become a 'real' alternative to the supermarkets. Additionally, Kweekland and Puurland are in the middle of many new initiatives, and are in constant interaction with other initiatives.

Besides these considerations the other planned main respondents are more individualistic in shaping their venture. Plowman is an *Einzelgänger*: he does not feel the need to participate in other alternative food systems to achieve his goals, but operates on his own terms. The realization of his alternative food system is currently in the stage of a concept, not yet engaged and active.

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As my research is focused on the interaction and forming of alternative food systems, the position of Plowman's system will be less prominent. Another important contrast that I observed between Plowman and Koster is the capabilities of and interest in networks between the two (I will elaborate on this in chapter 2). Although this point are interesting, they do not clarify how ideologies and core values shape Plowman's enterprise and choices. Meadow is engaged in several projects mainly in non-profit, which do function and engage with others, but are relative small and not necessarily growing. Besides these, she has developed a platform to inform people of existing possibilities for city gardening. The problem here is that although this engages with people, I am not able to participate in this interaction, as this would compromise her anonymity.

The focus on working together in communities centered around these new systems makes participant observation the main method of gathering data. During the time that I carried out my studies at Kweekland and Puurland, under the wing of Steven Koster, I was able to participate in various meetings, events and gatherings. By doing so I have been able to talk to different stakeholders¹ in the alternative food chain and in the city-farmer community, from 'regular' agricultural farmers, city dwellers, and provincial civil servants, to marginalized citizens (such as those with poor job prospects).

My other respondents have more isolated individual projects which are interesting in reflection and comparison with the more extensive, enterprise of Koster. To give these two respondents a certain anonymity, they will be referred to by the aliases 'Meadow' and 'Plowman'. Both respondents expressed their preference for anonymity, and as an anthropologist I have the responsibility to honor this wish

¹ Stakeholders are those who can significantly influence, or are important to the project, are those ultimately affected and the intermediaries.

On the website of: Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth. 2014. "The ASA." Ethical dilemmas in professional practice in anthropology. Accessed 19 07, 2016. <http://www.theasa.org/networks/apply/ethics/analysis/stakeholder.shtml>.

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(DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 215). Steven Koster is named in full, as he himself wants to be transparent and prefers to be named.

Meadow has several projects which are engaged with food and especially food production. She created a platform on city farming, and has established a small vegetable garden project, referred to in this thesis as 'Veggie fraternity'. Plowman is trained in permaculture and is trying to initiate a food forest in, or in the vicinity of, the city of Arnhem.

Participating in the field and methodology

The field of alternative food systems is highly familiar to me; I found this to be an advantage as a researcher, since I already had personal connections with some of the respondents. That I speak the same language as the respondents was also advantageous. Analyzing language and non-verbal communication that is similar to my own native speech and practices makes it possibly easier to understand nuances or underlying meanings (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 11).

Being already engaged in the field of food has certain advantages, I was easily integrated and accepted in the community that I was researching. As the anthropologist Walter Williams (1996) explains, "researchers who can appeal to group membership obtain other data than those who are on the outside" (Robben 2012, 88). A lot of the participants positioned themselves by verbally denouncing all foods and food systems which do not create added value. Although this can hardly be the case with all food that is consumed at the moment, their focus is: change the world for the better, and be angry at all the bad stuff around you!

When I was asked what exactly I was doing on location (in Kweekland or any other fieldwork-related place) the inquirer was often surprised and their interest was spiked by my answer. As there are always a couple of students, or interns, at Kweekland (although so far only applied sciences students), people were not put off by my presence. Although most were interested, many were also in doubt as to what the discipline of anthropology stands for. I noticed that I tend to trivialize the academic aspects and try to simplify the research I am doing, mainly to avoid

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distancing myself from the group as a researcher. It is hard to get involved in the everydayness of things and still be critical of the familiarity of the daily feelings and dealings (Crapanzano 2012, 557,558)

During the course of my fieldwork I realized I had problems with conducting interviews, as I had the feeling this would change my position within the group. Because of this unwanted power relation, I refrained of being an interviewer and rather continued being a participant, although an observing one (Robben and Sluka 2012, 18; Robben 2012, 89). Although I had reservations about formal interviews, the group is fairly diverse and I never had the feeling that I was treated as an outsider.

During my period in the field it was easy to adopt the thoughts and ideas that I encountered, mainly because I too believed in many aspects of the same ideology. It seemed that everybody had similar thoughts on how the world should function. The feeling of being submerged in acceptance and solidarity with like-minded people is one that kept recurring; in particular, the notion that many of the groups and communities involved in Kweekland share, that we should make an effort to create a better world, is one I firmly believe in myself. I even felt irritation when I would meet people who were skeptical, or to whom I had to explain how this could work. It could be said that I really became an engaged participant in the ideology and the community of these alternative food systems.

I have adopted the framework of ideology, instead of the more 'modern' theoretical frames of discourse analysis, because it addresses what people believe and how this shapes their choices and surroundings, rather than the practices in which this ultimately results. Of course, in this sense discourse is still addressed, as I observe ideology in practice; but the focal point here will be the 'why' instead of the 'how'. By focusing on ideology one can detect individual motives and see how they relate to a bigger belief system. Furthermore, a focus on ideology grants me the opportunity to find underlying motives that may not even be apparent to the person expressing them.

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While Foucault's discourse on normativity and power relations is highly relevant, this thesis instead focuses more on the belief systems at work, which therefore renders the ideological framework a more logical one. Thus, while Foucault's notion certainly deserves further examination, I was sadly unable to give them the required attention and space due to the limited scope of the thesis. A Foucauldian analysis of food systems, then, is something for further research.

The main method that I used to 'discover' a phenomenon is by direct observation; to explain circumstances I will engage in participant observation (Bernard 2006, 5). Ideology and motivation are important themes in my research: the method of research, namely direct and participant observation, is relevant as ideology is not easily analyzed and cannot be distilled by simply filling in a question form. The interaction between practice and internal values is essential for the shaping of ideology, and so is of interest for this research.

Ethnography is largely based on anecdotal evidence. I encountered the story I will use to explain the findings, while in the field (Bernard 2006, 22). By translating my findings into the form of a narrative, I want to explain what the behavior, dreams, and ideas of the informants mean to them, and what this might say about how our society 'works' from their perspective, and the socio-cultural meanings they imply. This way the thoughts and actions of the respondent are less abstract as anecdotes give context to their ideas and provide crucial clues of how the subjects perceive the world (Blommaert and Dong 2011, 52).

By positioning myself as a participant, I effectively became a member of the community. (I will elaborate on this experience in sub-chapter 2.3.) I recorded my observations by keeping my notebook with me at all times. However, in practice, I seldom made notes while participating. Often they were not much more than some scribbled points, which I later wrote into a comprehensive report. After a period, the particulars of the event would have been lost, so it was essential to transcribe quickly, or at least reread the notes and elaborate on them (Blommaert and Dong 2011, 36-37).

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Another source of information regarding this research was by collecting materials in the field, materials like photos, flyers and other such things—in other words ‘rubbish’ (Blommaert and Dong 2011, 58-59). These things helped me to reconstruct and get a broader understanding of the field. According to the anthropologist Russell Bernard (2006), in any science you should achieve three things: “(1) describe a phenomenon of interest; (2) explain what causes it; and (3) predict what it causes” (Bernard 2006, 39). In this thesis the focus will be on the first two steps that Bernard describes, the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of these alternative food systems. In the field I spoke with many different people, which I always informed about my research and asked if they would agree to talk to me, this way I received informed consent and permission to use the data that they provided in this thesis (American Anthropological Association. 2012; Tracy 2013, 104; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). By researching multiple sources of data from the field (‘rubbish’), as well as several theoretical frameworks and researchers, I determined what ‘really’ happens in the field of alternative food systems. This method of gathering data is called ‘triangulating’ (Tracy 2013, 40).

Hypothesis

The phenomenon of interest here is the display of a variety of alternative food systems, initiated by engaged citizens. The hypothesis of this research is that at the root of these food systems there is a particular form of ideology. This hypothesis is based on the idea that the actors involved believe in a different model for how we should provide food, in place of the current mainstream system. It is the first two goals in science listed by Bernard (2006), cited above: it is the circumstances of interest and the explaining of the principle that are tested in this particular field. As I started this thesis with my research proposal, some of the theoretical parts in this thesis are from this initiation of the research. From the objective to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of alternative food systems initiated by engaged citizens, I arrived at the research questions below, which evolved slightly during my period in the field. These adjustments happened due to changes in my perspective as a result of interactions in the field (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 15).

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Research questions and structure

The three core chapters will each go deeper into questions of ideology and value, social relations, and power dynamics. I will elaborate on my central question below. This central question has been separated into three parts, each going deeper into a fragment of the research question corresponding with the core chapters of this thesis.

Research question: To what extent are alternative food systems in Arnhem based on ideology, how does this influence the structure and choices of the enterprise, and how is this related and negotiated with other share- and stakeholders?

In the first chapter, I will look closer at the ideological elements and functions that I came across in the alternative food systems I focused on. One's view of the world is always supposed to be logical and right, even though others might have a different outlook on life. Ideology is created through practice, and practice is made by ideology. Expectations of seeing this dynamic between ideology and practice are especially high in a practical and creating move as building an alternative system. As an alternative is always a deviation from the norm, it can be expected that there is a characteristic ideology associated with it. How is this perspective, belief, and ideology incorporated into the alternative food systems of my research? How this interaction between ideology and practice is structured in the alternative food systems is the theme that is explored in the first chapter.

In the second chapter the social side of the alternative food systems and the connection between ideology and solidarity is explored. Koster and Meadow have explicitly stated that solidarity is one of their core values. I will delve into the social side of these alternative food systems, and examine the potential social benefits of these projects.

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Another core value, sustainability, also has a social basis; this will be examined in the third chapter. The sustainability theme is complex, and has above all a solidarity principle in the form of the responsibilities that we have towards others and future generations. This part of sustainability is linked to the dynamic of power. The theme of power is the subject of the last chapter of this thesis. The forces I encountered in the field are tremendously intricate: there are different scales, different positions, stakeholders, and an enormous tangle of power relations and dynamics. Although I planned to focus on the negotiation and power dynamic between the alternative food system and the city council, I have widened my examination to include other power relations. I have made this choice because it is exemplary of the complex forces that are at play currently in the field of food and its systems. That is why the last chapter will be about the negotiation between several different stakeholders and the alternative food systems.

This thesis will conclude with a discussion of the findings and analyses, followed by a discussion. The discussion will reflect on the research and on some of its possible implications, including some possible options for further research.

Introduction

1. Best recipe

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best recipe



1. Best recipe

1. Best recipe

The alternative food systems that I studied often do not function in the same ways as the current mainstream food system functions. The alternative food systems are small enterprises which try to focus on other facets of food and its systems. They are marginal, and have the purpose of providing food for most of their participants besides the current dominant supermarket system. None of the alternatives provides all the food intake of its consumers. These alternatives rebel against certain concepts, which they consider part of contemporary supermarket systems. Supermarkets are seen as working extremely well at providing cheap food in abundance, with the goal to gain large profits. This system is thought to maintain its dominant position in the food system, by being efficient in distribution, producing bulk and adding value by processing basic ingredients. In turn (most participants believe) this costs citizens, society and the world dearly in incalculable damages.

The alternative systems I have encountered have a vastly different model of operating. Their basic values are not focused on profit and efficiency but on sustainability and solidarity. If profit is not the main payoff for the people participating in these alternative food systems, what are the benefits to the participants of these systems? What binds and engages them? One of the repeatedly encountered answers is 'working for the greater good'. The participants feel good when engaging in these alternative systems, because of the belief that they actively help to change the world for the better. It is this ideology which seems to be the main value and is an often mentioned subject in the several alternative food systems I encountered during my field work. In this chapter, I will elaborate on the ideological elements and functions I encountered in the enterprises I studied.

1.1. Shared thoughts

By sharing certain beliefs, participants make clear they belong to the same group. It shapes community: there is a feeling of togetherness in having the same values, and thinking the same about certain subjects, like food and its systems. It gives strength to be among other 'believers'.

1. Best recipe

I noticed several trends in the field in the forming of ideology through the interaction of ideology and practice (Žižek 1995, 1-6). Although the exact ideas are fluid, the 'end goal' seems to be a more solidary and sustainable world. This seems to be the origin of a new set of ideas of how the world should work, these ideas are distanced from the dominant ideology. This is in turn a basis for the choices that the entrepreneurs, Koster and Meadow, make on day to day basis. The ideas are formed and shaped by experiences, and a progressive accumulation of insights. New information is being fed into the knowledge system of the informants, and their actions comes forth out of this mix. In this manner ideology is mostly shaped and made by everyday life (Freeden 2003, 1).

Let us take, for example, the choice of being a regional food supplier as a basis for a more sustainable food system. Koster found out that regional products that come from a heated glasshouse are less sustainable than similar products from afar, which are produced by natural resources like the sun. To sustain his ideals of distributing regional products he needed to make the necessary adjustments to include the seasonal aspect of his distribution system. Thus, products should not only be regional, but also naturally grown. This results in more seasonal products, and meals, instead of just eating whatever and whenever we like. In practice, this also results in a creative process of developing attractive recipes on the basis of regional and naturally produced products. This process of transition is one of interaction between internal motives and practice. The goal of becoming more sustainable is one of searching for answers and examples to follow. This also means taking the best-informed routes, and acting flexibly when being 'fed' new information.

Adding value

The choice for a focus on food systems by my key informant Koster is based on the idea that food is essential, and so it is very important that it be sustainably produced. The respondents also believe in the idea that we can, and should, shape a food system together, culturally, and not just accept big corporate efficiency models that already are in place. By having a social, interactive, and informative structure, 'we' can, together, find the best ways to a more sustainable food system.

1. Best recipe

The right to shape common resources—in this case the food system—is theorized by Lefebvre as a democratic right, which he calls “the right to the city” (Lefebvre 2000, 147). David Harvey explains this Lefebvrian right thus:

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights (Harvey 2008, 23).

Both respondents want to inform themselves and others and want to create best practices of food systems by networking and socializing. They see the food system as an interactive, flexible system that is shaped together, definitely not a one-person-show, but rather a social network. By working interactively, they want to add value for the many, not just for the few.

The goal-oriented beliefs that are the basis for the entrepreneurs seem to be sustained by the fact that they do not (yet) profit from their enterprises. Koster has been building his alternative food system for three years, and it does not profit. Although he expresses that the company will have to become more profitable in the long run, this is not his main goal. This is similar to Meadow: she is not earning anything from most of her projects (which is why she has other work to earn a living). They both express the hope of earning their living with their projects in the long run, just so they can do more of it.

As philosopher Slavoj Žižek (1995) specifies, ideology is a set of ideas about how the world works, or should work. Ideologies are internalized convictions, which are not necessarily practiced accordingly in life. Still, it is this interaction between ‘real world’ pragmatics and the inner convictions that is shaping ideology.

1. Best recipe

Aside from this individual process of ideology, there is a cultural dominant ideology which also shapes the personal process (Žižek 1995, 1-6). Hegel (1956) defined three stages in ideology. The first is 'doctrine'; this is ideology 'in-itself', a set of ideas that one holds about the world. The second is 'belief'; this is the externalization of these ideas in a material way, as in institutions. The third is 'ritual'; this part of ideology is the performative side, it is the spontaneous creation and construction of ideology at work in 'social reality'. In this last step a circular movement takes place: the values interact with real life, and thus there is a performance of ideology in practice, and this practice is itself creating ideology and value (Žižek 1995, 7-10). This part of ideology creation is fascinating in relation to my fieldwork. One may wonder where the ideological belief starts, and where is it performed and thus created.

1.2. The right (to) thoughts

One of the strengths of ideology is that instead of a list of theoretical convictions, you can wrap it up in practical ideas, like actions, stories and anecdotes. This is a powerful tool for convincing others of your viewpoint. I have encountered three functions of sharing ideological thinking. A first is the sharing of beliefs and ideas of how the world should work, to build a community. A second is convincing others of the 'right' ideology. And third, the ridiculing and breaking down of the current dominant ideology, namely liberal-capitalism.² These all seem to have the goal of strengthening ideologies of sustainability. The byproduct is that this weakens the liberal-capitalist ideology, which often seems to be positioned as an opposing ideology: 'either you are with us, or you are against us.'

In the period of fieldwork, I came to realize how much the field of alternative food systems is growing. There are many different new platforms and lots of new initiatives by entrepreneurs, educational systems, foundations, city councils, and local and national governments.

² Liberal-capitalist: is the term often used by Žižek to refer to contemporary, capitalist dominated, neo-liberalism. I will also use this term to describe this particular ideology and practice in this thesis.

1. Best recipe

There is a seemingly endless list of stakeholders which all want or see the change coming, but in practice there is an ambivalence: what is the right move? What is the right way to create a (better) tomorrow? The struggle for the position of the dominant ideology is everywhere.

Both liberal-capitalist ideology and the 'newer' sustainability ideology have normative and naturalizing qualities. Which one is the way to a sustainable world? The class of ideology in the food system revolves around this question. Do we need to feed the world by specializing our food system, or should we live and eat more in-synch with nature of which we are a part and dependent on? Some of the liberal-capitalist ideas are being dismantled, which makes them prone to critique and (it is hoped) makes them lose their power. At least they can be singled out as being illogical norms. Ironically, this same could happen with the ideological ideas about sustainability, however logical they seem now, they could always end up seeming illogical in the future. Barthes (2002) calls this naturalizing move that occurs in ideology 'the myth'. The myth is at play here, especially when looking at the normative effect of ideology. A myth is an idea which seems to be natural or is thought of as 'common sensical'. The naturalized condition of a belief system makes following its patterns self-evident (Barthes 2002 [1957], 9-11). This process is also what Žižek refers to: there is no obvious line between ideology and 'reality', as ideology is already at work in everything we experience as real (Žižek 1995, 11). The ideological quality of being camouflaged by the seeming 'logic' of it is also a pattern that Marx (1867) draw attention to. Marx specifically focused on the capitalist practices of disguising ideology, and the biased advocates of this reasoning, who used it to gain power (Freeden 2003, 7). Chomsky argues that certain 'institutions' are used to propagate and self-determine the ideological movement, and are constructed to naturalize and justify the ideology (Chomsky 1980, 33-36).

The building of community, is seen in multiple ways in the alternative food systems, is a strong motive for the use of ideology. I will elaborate on the use of ideology for community building in Chapter 2. A motive which is not necessarily negative, as the ideology discourse above states.

1. Best recipe

The sociologist and social philosopher Karl Mannheim (1936) asserts that ideology was a reflection of all social environments, influencing the thought processes of humans. He saw it as “a co-operative process of group life,” and as there are many social groups in society, it is a multi-layered concept, which is also guided by presuppositions and irrational wisdom (Freeden 2003, 12-17).

Nevertheless, if the connection between naturalization and ideology is taken into account, this is always likened to positioning, distancing and creating borders. I will go deeper into the relation and positioning between these mentioned ideological ‘opponents’ in the next sub-chapter.

1.3. Sharing an enemy, creating community

In addition to the sharing of similar beliefs I have encountered many ideas, beliefs and anecdotes that, besides positively enforcing ideas, also make it possible to discard other ideas. This disassociation is usually linked with liberal-capitalist thinking and abstractions. This reinforces ideologies of sustainability and simultaneously breaks down the naturalized argument of the liberal-capitalist ideology. The liberal-capitalist ideology is thought of as destructive, extractive and illogical. As one of my informants said about his past logic, “It is ridiculous we could ever think this would work; it is illogical.”³ Furthermore, in this sub-chapter I will discuss the deconstruction of the liberal-capitalist ideology in the alternative food system community. Although ideology is an elusive concept, it is omnipresent. As mentioned in the last chapter, many great thinkers argue that ideology is shaping how we view the world and vice-versa.

Transparency

Below I will use two anecdotes about the frustration with the opacity of the current food system that Koster used to illustrate his ambitions and frustrations. This opacity is associated with not knowing what you eat, where it is from and who is benefiting (financially or otherwise) from this.

³ Informal conversation on April 14th 2016.

1. Best recipe

In the contemporary global North, it is almost impossible to know where one's food comes from. The disconnect from our current food systems illustrates how the global North has lost control over the systems that produce our food—we do not know where our food originated, who has cultivated it, who packaged it and where it is being packaged/processed, and what route it took to end on our plates (González 2014, 107). The following excerpt from an informal conversation with Koster will serve to illustrate this point:

I was at the prestige launch of the essay bundle that was initiated and presented by Martijn van Dam, the Dutch secretary of economic affairs. This bundle combines several views on the food debate from high profile stakeholders. Simone Hertzberger, the Senior Director Product Integrity Topics at Ahold Europe, wrote one of the ten essays. Her main argument was that consumer interest should be the main focus of economic affair. Besides, she presented a solution to this opacity of the food industry. One of the stakeholders' present was the director of the VION, a slaughterhouse. He reacted enthusiastically to this topic: the possibility of giving the consumer insight in the origin of the meat by means of the barcode. I was shocked, and I asked how he thought this would work out for his packaged meat products? As his minced meat would surely contain several pigs from different farmers, because they process about 9.000 pigs a day. The VION director reacted proudly and corrected Koster, by saying; that they process about 20.000 animals a day, as they are one of the biggest in Europe. He said something in the line of; this is irrelevant because all meat distributors will have the same problem of multiple animals in their products, as will your suppliers. I was amazed and said: "I know for a fact that my suppliers are not, and know exactly which, ONE animal is processed in which product." ⁴

⁴ Informal conversation on February 26th 2016.

1. Best recipe

In this anecdote (which I heard Koster tell several times) his disbelief with the current food system and ideology is evident. In the way he relays the story the illogicality and the mismatch of intention and reality is obvious. The producers and supermarkets see and desire to create transparency for their consumers, which is hard, if not impossible, in the current industry. Although the failure to control food systems for citizens in the global North seems apparent, there is the impression of emerging patterns of regaining control over food, fueled by engaged citizens and scientific research (González 2014, 121-124). By broadcasting his disbelief and his knowledge of alternative possibilities, Koster positions himself. Besides sustaining his own logic of the food system, he deconstructs the logic of Hertzberger and the VION director. Koster can only do so because of his advanced insight by his practical experience of alternatives in the food system. The system Koster rebels against is the current dominant food system with its multiple chains, by shortening this chain he wants to create transparency and responsibility of the food production and each link in the chain shares part of the profit. Koster tries to establish that by shortening the chain to three links, the farmer, the distributor and the consumer. See figure 1 for clarifications of the contemporary supermarket food chain.

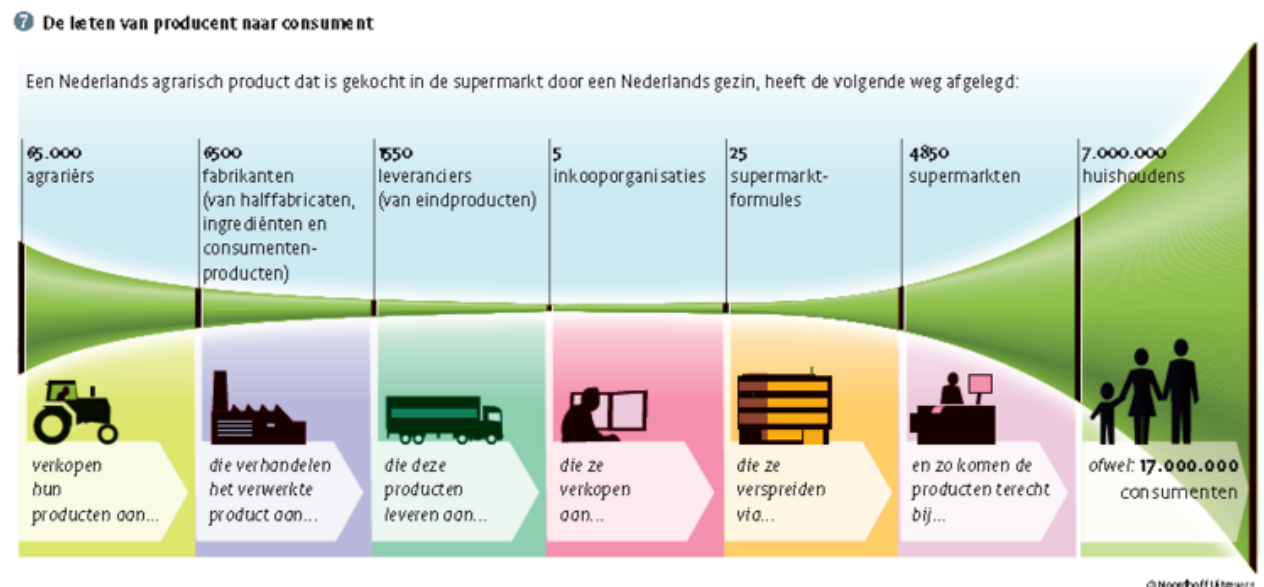


Figure 1 The dominant food chain, from producer to consumer. ⁵

⁵ Figure: Bosatlas: van het voedsel. 2014. Noordhoff Uitgevers.

1. Best recipe

Food educates

In addition to partaking in many stakeholder's meetings, Koster also values education in food and sustainability. In the period during which I was involved in Kweekland and Puurland there were several programs connected to schools and colleges. I will describe one of these occasions to give an example of the program and processes that took place there:

A group of students following a minor called 'Good Food' are sitting, slightly awkwardly, on the benches that are positioned in the heated glasshouse at Kweekland. Steven Koster starts telling them why he started his alternative regional food system: "one day I was in the supermarket and realized that the Braeburn apples I was about to buy were from New Zealand and had exactly the same or similar price as the apple come from the Betuwe, just a few kilometers down the road. This made me wonder how this is possible, after such a long trip, halfway around the world. I wondered about who is paying and who is benefitting, someone is paying the bill: if not financially, then probably in other ways."

After the introduction in the motives and workings of Kweekland and Puurland, the students take a tour of the grounds. This is increasingly interactive as Koster asks them if they have knowledge of certain shrubs, which gives them the opportunity to engage and show their knowledge. Some perform well, gaining the praise of others involved—you can see their excitement growing. Then, in the next stage of their workshop, Koster shows them cans and bags of soup and gives them the task of translating the ingredient list, and that they should decide what spikes their curiosity. After some time talking and checking their mobile phones they start explaining the things they thought were odd: leek soup with almost no leek in it, chicken soup with pork in it, sugar in multiple forms added, inexplicable ingredients, and so on and so forth. After this exercise they are amazed about the extent to which they had little to no knowledge about the food they eat, they are even outraged, saying that this is really ridiculous.

1. Best recipe

Subsequently they can start harvesting products to make their own soup in two groups, with the promise of a prize for the best one.

The youngsters start debating what kind of soup they can make with the veggies and herbs available. They consult their mobile phones again, while some of us (the teacher, Koster and I) were asked for tips and tricks. Two busily working teams chattering, chopping, laughing and stirring. Some of them express amazement about the simplicity of making soups, saying they will definitely do this more often. The result are two vastly different soups, which we share all together with some fresh bread and fruit juice. The vibe is warm and cheerful: compliments are crossing the laden table. The teacher, Koster and myself are the judges, but it really is a hard call; we decide collectively that we will call it even. The prize, some 'fair and sustainable' chocolate bars are also shared. After this the group is reluctant to leave. Statements are made this was great and that it should be part of the normal class program, not just an exception. One of the students told us that this was their first time making and sharing food, although they were studying a food related discipline.⁶

The introduction story about the apples reveals to the students another illogicality in the current food system (according to Koster). The opacity makes it hard to distil who profits, using 'common knowledge', from the profits in the mainstream food distribution system. This common knowledge is also a naturalized ideology. Koster adopts a more recent naturalized idea, that corporate food systems are skimming all the profits for themselves, the happy, rich, unknown few. This view reflects his dissatisfaction with the supply chain in Fig. 2.1, shown above. Within this ideology this seems to be a common knowledge. "While our neighboring food producer is being squeezed for a few bucks, the big anonymous corporations make all the money."⁷

⁶ Field notes of March 12th 2016.

⁷ Field notes of March 12th 2016.

1. Best recipe

This is a story that affects our moral compass, and sustains Koster's cause to be a regional distributor. In addition to the compelling talk, the students experience the bonding moments of food making and sharing, which is linked in many ways to the talk Koster gave.

New (food)ways?

Many of the people involved in the alternative food systems that I spoke with talk about a certain 'new' awareness of what is logical and right. They distanced themselves greatly from perceived capitalist ideas, such as egocentrism and profit as a main goal. Values like solidarity and sustainability seem to be the pillars of this 'new way', although these are found in many different varieties and argumentations. These ideas have a dual effect: besides allowing them to distance themselves from capitalist views, they also seem to, in a sense, cripple capitalism. The values are opposite and seem to ridicule the irrationality of the 'old' world views of the liberal-capitalist ideology. These formerly neutralized liberal-capitalist ideas seem to weaken in power, because of the breaking down of the logic by these 'new' ideas. Although it is the supermarkets and the corporations that embody 'evil', most participants still make use of their services, as most of their groceries still come from the supermarkets.

This neutralization is connected to Barthes's (2002 [1957]) concept of the myth—a semiotic construction, burdened with an ideology that is neutralized and presented as common sense, or as normal. These ideas are all made by language, and thus given its meaning. The one norm is replaced by another norm, with its own set of arguments, meaning-giving and logic (Barthes 2002 [1957], 7). Reevaluation, reflection and analysis seem to be key in the deconstruction of these myths (Barthes 2002 [1957], 210-211)—but this might (or probably will) create new myths on the way.

Self-reflection

Additionally, the power of storytelling is seen in the process of recruiting new 'believers', as a self-asserting and explanatory tool.

1. Best recipe

It is descriptive not only for others, but maybe also for the personal existential questions. One example of these is Koster's personal story about turning towards a changed world view:

I was an entrepreneur, having my own company, doing sales for retailers and owners of mainly Disney images, produced on bedcovers and the like. I was successful, working around the clock, and I had a good income. I was only seeing roads, airplanes, computer screens and hotel rooms, flying all over the world sometimes for weeks in a row. The tipping point came when I helped sail back the boat that my parents just traveled the world with for four years. Flying there, I was hurriedly trying to tie up the loose ends for my business, before I would disconnect. From the Portuguese Azores back to England is about ten days on open waters, you can imagine how that is being a forty-year-old, with your parents on a boat of twenty square meters. Then, the long range communication burned down, which made the situation even more stringent, we could not contact the home front. It was hard. The struggle made me look at how I raised my kids, what I show them and what I value in life.⁸

This and many other anecdotes are used by Koster to explain his ideas and the logic behind them: in sustaining his current worldview, he also criticizes his own former worldview.

This is similar to Meadow's use of stories, although hers are less elaborate. She tells about her youth on one of the Dutch islands, where she was brought up, about the omnipresence of nature, and our interdependence with it. She is frustrated and surprised that we are now destroying it all, although we need it so much: "Nature is so beautiful and now we ruining it all, including ourselves."⁹

⁸ Informal interview on April 14th 2016.

⁹ Field notes of March 3th 2016.

1. Best recipe

Another quote of Meadow, which sums up her motives and of many others that I spoke to in the last couple of months: “Just taking without giving won’t last. My motivation is to create a world in which I want to live.”¹⁰ In these little anecdotes, she sustains her worldview and ideology and at the same time distances herself from the extractive and destructive habits of capitalist ideology.

1.4. Conclusion

The triple function of ideology which I encountered in the field seemed to be geared towards the goal of sustaining a sustainable ideology: firstly, by shaping community, by sharing thoughts, or by creating a great sense of togetherness among like-minded people; secondly, by convincing others of the logic of the ‘right’ ideology; and thirdly, through the use of ideology to position oneself in the field of food, by means of a distancing from liberal-capitalist ideology which is thought of as destructive, extractive and illogical. This is achieved by breaking down the ‘natural’ argument of capitalist thinking; “It is ridiculous we could ever think this would work; it is illogical.”¹¹ Ideology seems to be an almost circular movement: by deconstructing and seeing the construction it seems essentially impossible to avoid making new ideological myths. Although it is good to be aware of the creation of ideology and its myths, this also is a shaper, motivator and community builder, and possibly intrinsic to human interaction, especially if we take Mannheim’s (1936) conclusion in account. As mentioned above, Mannheim sees the creation of ideology as an intrinsic feature of the social interaction of communities, resulting in a various layered image. I will go deeper into these social aspects of ideology and community and the social relations that I found in these alternative food systems in the next chapter.

¹⁰ Field notes of March 3th 2016.

¹¹ Informal interview on April 14th 2016.

1. Best recipe

2. Eating together

2.

eating together



2. Eating together

2. Eating together

In this Chapter I will go deeper into the social structure of the alternative food systems, the relation of the various participants to the initiator of the system, and the ties within the group and beyond. These alternative food systems have strong solidarity values, which results in the construction of Kweekland and Puurland. These constructions have a complex community, all with different motives and goals. The different stakeholders, all of whom play a part, make this an intricate and interesting aspect of the structure. All different layers seem to have one thing in common, namely that it is a reciprocal and symbiotic relationship. Aside from the different groups involved, my own feelings and experience are representative of the social effect: they give a certain insight into the personal feelings and interactions in the community.

The communicated motives for construction the alternative systems are to create value, on different levels than the merely economic. Koster, Meadow and Plowman initiated their projects with social and ecological sustainability as the main goal. Economic profit here is not a goal but a means to an end. In this chapter I will expand on the social aspect of the systems. In particular, I will elaborate on how ideology and values shape the structure of the alternative food systems and how this results in certain benefits to society.

2.1. Creating an alternative

The personal commitment of the initiators, in these cases Koster, Meadow and Plowman, is essential to the construction of these alternative food systems. Especially because these systems do not conform to existing models, their shape is mainly based on the wishes, possibilities and favors of the local community. The initiator of the alternative food system is the essential spider in the web. As the systems are still in the margins of the field of food production, the systems are fundamentally tied to the founder. The creation of social capital seems important to create a reciprocal network. Networking and '*gunnen*' ('granting favors to somebody you know') seem to be the reasons that the system of Koster works so well, after he invested time, energy and resources over the course of the last three years.

2. Eating together

As mentioned above, my respondents view themselves as social entrepreneurs: profit is not the basic building block for their projects, social benefit is. Nevertheless, money can (and must) be seen as a necessary tool to make it work. Koster's team consists of people who often have a marginal role in society, yet at Kweekland they are essential and highly valued. It is also a social network: they help and love each other. This creates a very warm environment for the people who have social struggles: here you feel like you belong. The respondents view sustainability on a bigger scale. We could speak of a transition towards a more sustainable future, although the route is not outlined. This reveals something about a transition ideology in this particular case. It is not a set of outlined ideas; rather, the motive is to become more sustainable overall, not just on an ecological level, but also on a social level.

Usually, when one changes one's basic views of what matters in life, this will not only affect one's work ethics but also one's home and social life. Although the pillars of solidarity and sustainability are not necessarily mentioned as core business, the enterprises I encountered have these high on the priority list. Food is, for them, a powerful tool, as everybody needs to eat. Therefore, it can be used to reach people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The systems created by Koster (Puurland and Kweekland), and Meadow's 'Veggie fraternity' are surviving purely due to volunteers and marginalized people. The survival system is dual, both the marginalized and the alternative food systems gain confidence and seem to be dependent on each other. Working with the possibilities that are 'available' in the current system, while trying to create a better system for the people that need it most in the eyes of these social entrepreneurs. This way it is possible to work with people that are not helped and supported by the systems of care in a way that Koster believes would be best, namely working in a community, and thereby creating a mutual dependency and the rewarding feeling of being essential and valued in a group. I will elaborate on this reliance that is conceived between the alternative food system and its participants in the paragraph: mutual dependence.

2. Eating together

Because of all his hard work and insights Koster has difficulty letting others take responsibilities in Kweekland and Puurland. Maybe his charismatic personality is also the glue that makes his projects stick together. Koster wants to expand and create more places for marginalized workers, aside from wanting to expand his regional distribution system. At its current state, Puurland would probably not survive without its own 'father'. Maybe once the system is more 'grown up' it will be able to stand on its own two feet. Although growth is not a main goal, making it financially sustainable is. It is this long-term perspective that is slowly chiseling away at a 'foodhold' in the community, and the broader food production system of Arnhem.

Koster benefits from his background in marketing and sales; as he says himself: "This is not the 'normal' background for an alternative food system initiator. He views those 'normal' or original founders, as tree-huggers and hippies."¹² I have come across this view several times. Koster is involved in many other social and climate related projects and networks besides Kweekland and Puurland. This reinforces that fact that his work is based on an ideology of sustainability, instead of on the capitalist principles of profit. His ideals are seen in many areas of his dealings in life (I will give examples of this in due course). I have looked more closely into the profitable part of Koster's enterprise, considering if there are other motives (for instance, financial ones) besides his ideological values. I have not encountered any significant information on his motives. He moved from being an employee in a highly profitable enterprise to becoming a social entrepreneur who can simply get by financially. If profit would have been a motive, he presumably would have stayed where he was. His vision for a more engaged, solidary and sustainable world are even seen in dealings outside of his company (for example, he gives free lectures on sustainable food production in local schools). The story below shows that Koster feels responsible for how things evolve around him, and is not passive but active in his pursuit of change. He wants to engage in food production and create a more sustainable and local system food production.

¹² Notes of meeting on April 12th 2016.

2. Eating together

The agricultural economist Kneen states that the trend of the last half-century was a 'distancing' in the production and consuming of foods. He explains: "Distancing most obviously means increasing the physical distance between the point at which food is actually grown or raised and the point at which it is consumed, as well as the extent to which the finished product is removed from its raw state by processing" (Kneen 1993, 37). The rural sociologist Lyson declares that there is a great potential in relocalizing food production to make it more sustainable and to give communities more control over it, in opposition to the distancing, which gives the command over the food system to the multinational corporations (Lyson 2004, 84-85). Koster's enterprises are concerned with making these alternative modes of production a reality.

The following remarks elaborate on the analysis that certain insights can be sustained in the ideological motives that Koster is expressing:

I developed, together with the local bakery, a new bread for ham and cheese toasties for a school in the neighborhood. The school tries to have local and 'whole' foods in the canteen, to create a more sustainable and healthy environment for the schoolchildren. By being creative and working together we helped the school to become a little bit more sustainable.¹³

Koster is trying to create a food chain which is transparent, regional and as sustainable as possible. By eliminating many of the current distribution shackles and opaque systems of control, the chain becomes shorter, which increases transparency and sustainability. This is in line with what Shrybman and Lyson conclude: to achieve a sustainable agriculture and to combat climate change, we need to reevaluate the current food system. It will have to become more locally produced, more diversified, less intensified and not packaged (Shrybman 2000, 1).

¹³ Informal conversation on March 8th 2016.

2. Eating together

Based on several case-studies conducted in the U.S., Lyson explains that the participation and responsibility of citizens has positive benefits on the city community: “communities with high levels of civic spirit manifested higher levels of well-being and welfare” (Lyson 2004, 128-129). This sentiment corresponds closely to my findings as well.

Lyson identifies the benefits and possibilities of the creation of alternative food systems to reconnect and build community as a turn towards a more citizen-engaged way of life, which he states is both theoretically and practically possible: “Civic agriculture represents a promising economic alternative that can nurture community businesses, save farms, and preserve farmland by providing consumers with fresh, locally produced agricultural and food products” (Lyson 2004, 184-185). Gross (2014) agrees with Lyson and even states that a big part of the day to day food provisions that people and communities provide for themselves is already in the non-capitalist domain.

To illustrate, Gross makes use of an adaptation of the iceberg that Gibson-Graham (2006, 70) use to exemplify the extent of the non-capitalist economy. With regard to Figure 2.1, below, Gross states that “the top of the iceberg is dominated by global markets and transnational corporations reducing food to its monetary value. Below the surface of the water, you see an expanded view of foodways, many of which consciously work against the global capitalist food system and others of which sits comfortably within the dominant system” (Gross 2014, 16). Koster consciously tries to undermine the top of the iceberg and is attempting (and succeeding) at creating an alternative that is transparent, locally based and controlled by the users, the people that consume the food.

2. Eating together

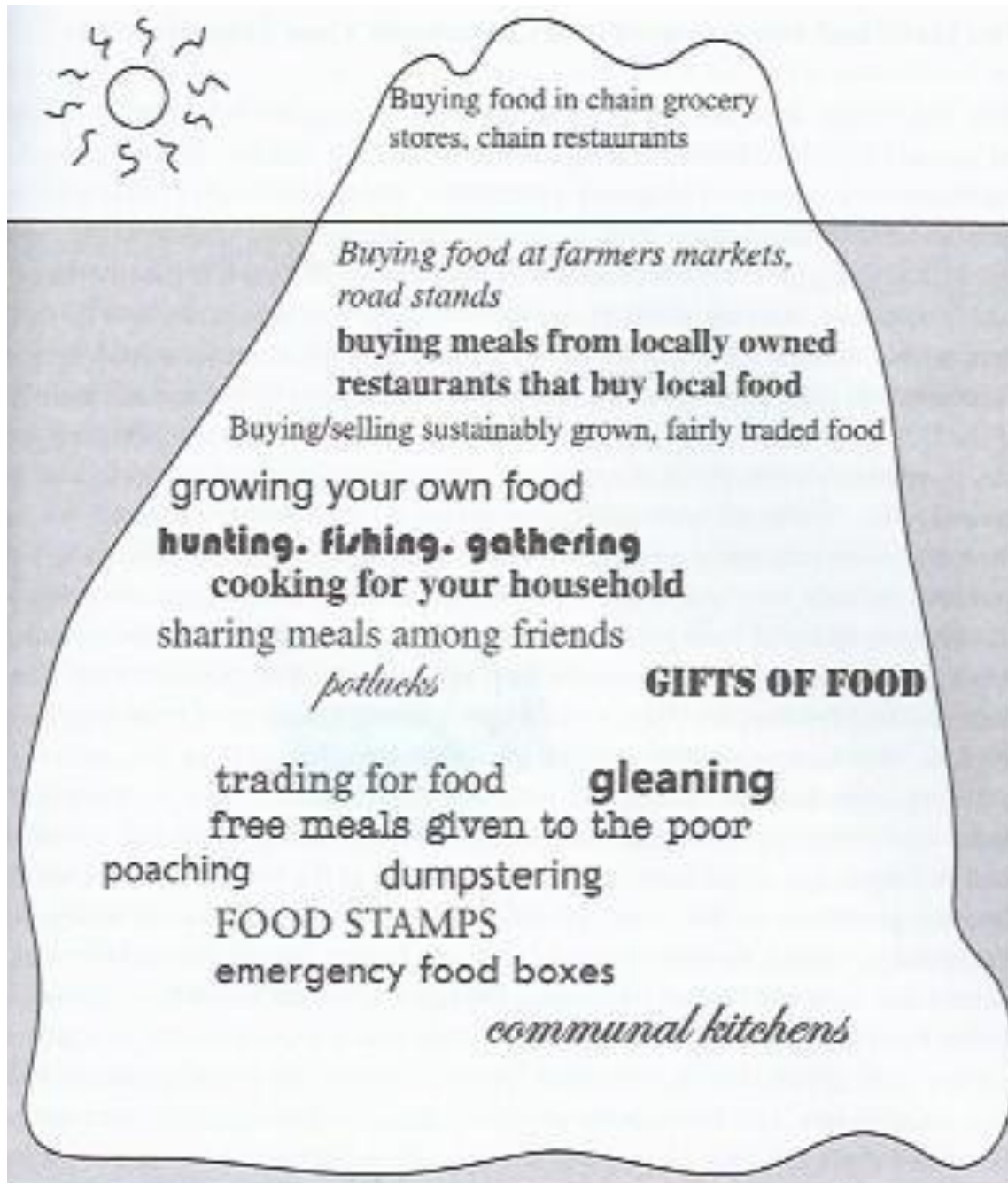


Figure 2. Our Complex Food System (Gross 2014, 17).¹⁴

Different paths, similar goals

Plowman seems to focus less on the social aspect of his alternative food system, and more on the ecological aspect. He does think the only logical way forward in the sector of food is if we turn away from the highly industrialized food system.

¹⁴ Figure is an adaptation from (Gibson-Graham 2006, 70).

2. Eating together

He deems it logical that we will have a more diverse, biological, regional, and thus more sustainable food system in the future. Plowman expresses his frustration at the time that we waste on deciding what the best course of action would be. He is more a man who rolls up his sleeves and takes action.

Something which stands out in comparison to the others, is that Plowman is not very network-minded. The result of this is that he does not have a like-minded community that can help him in succeeding to realize his wishes. As mentioned in the introduction, he works more on his own terms and conditions. In this aspect Plowman really differs from the others. It seems paradoxical to create a system, that is intrinsically in need of others to act together, and at the same time working as an *Einzelgänger*. Because of my participation in Koster's network-minded enterprise, a desire to help with networking kept surfacing in my mind, which I did after some doubt. The doubt I felt was accountable to actively participating in an essentially different way that Plowman operates himself. But my knowing that others were involved in realizing similar projects, it seemed logical to introduce them to each other in order to make Plowman's ambitions for a local food forest come true. I had previously met the city council official in charge of the portfolio of city agriculture, and I verbally introduced him to Plowman and arranged for an exchange of details. In spite of these efforts, nothing further has come of this so far.

Meadow's construction of a platform city farming was also to generate a more sustainable city. By educating herself she relished the obscurity of this practice and decided she wanted to share her quest. Because of her background in art and her connections in this world, the decision to conceive a public platform on this topic was logical. Although the system that she uses is rather different to Koster's, her goals are similar in giving people the knowledge to shape some of their own food production systems.

2. Eating together

Lyson also acknowledges the diversity of solutions to create a more sustainable food system. He expects an increase in the trends he is observing, that there will be an increase in self-shaped food systems from bottom up, not top down as was the standard in the global North in recent decades. While solutions towards more sustainable community food systems are various, “these efforts have one thing in common: they are all local problem-solving activities organized around agriculture and food” (Lyson 2004, 193-194).

2.2. Different ‘groups’, one table

My research focus is on Koster’s alternative food system, while he tries to increase his emporium to become a genuine alternative to the contemporary food chain in the region of Arnhem. Among the fascinating aspects are, for example, the elaborate network that Koster nurtures with a wide range of stakeholders, with his compelling story. This is not only alluring for others, but it is hard to resist for me as well. I felt and still feel a sense of commitment to his cause. In sub-chapter 2.3, I will elaborate on my own relation to the field. In this chapter I will expand on the different groups and their relation to the alternative food systems.

Consumers

The majority of ‘consumer’ participants in the system of Kweekland and Puurland are white, higher educated females with families. Does this mean that the consumer role is only possible for the middle or upper classes? The financial part of the food bags is relatively expensive in comparison with the cheaper supermarket options. The consumers either seem to believe in the alternative system and the ideology, or to buy into the ideology, and perhaps some of them also like the convenience of having their groceries and recipes delivered to them. Puurland is, in this sense, ethical consumption made easy. Žižek (2010) explains ethical consuming as the altruism is included in the product that you buy; this way one does not have to think about how one could change the flawed systems of the world for the better. As one has helped and did something good, although the underlying system is inherently unchanged (Žižek 2010).

2. Eating together

In my conversations with different consumers they all sustained a certain belief in working for a better world. However, it is difficult to say how belief, necessities and restrictions are related. As there is some effort necessary to participate as a consumer either financially and/or physically, it seems that the consumers do believe in the added value that the system provides. Additionally, the idea was expressed that it is not only healthy for the planet and the community, but also for the ones eating the natural, biological products was expressed. As the focus in this research was not on the side of the consumers but on the side of the creation of and participation in the system, the exact relationship of all these different consumer motivations did not become clear to me in the time that I was participating. This could prove to be an interesting topic for further research.

Participants

The group of people working in the system comprises volunteers, students and people with poor job prospects (for a variety of reasons). This is a difficulty, as the work ethics are different than for paid hands. Volunteer labor is based on trust and appreciation, not on payment. The community vibe seems to be akin to that of a big family: there is lots of openness about difficulties and struggles, and good news is greeted with happiness. Steven Koster seems to be positioned as a father figure; we all want to make him proud and crave his acceptance and appreciation. This makes the location work on Kweekland feasible, but according to Koster, this has led to complicated situations in the past. For example, one of the hands that work in the garden has had some personal problems. When this person came to work the gardens at Kweekland this was a great problem, but it soon disappeared or at least moved greatly to the background. The work and the community appreciation help lift this person out of the conflict with the private dispute. Recently Koster acknowledged that the issues seemed to resurface, but after a conversation about trust and reliance this person seemed to double the effort to please and cherish the community efforts.¹⁵

¹⁵ Informal conversation on April 19th 2016.

2. Eating together

That these values are not merely seen on the 'work floor', these episodes will illustrate: Besides the location based community of Kweekland, the ideology based enterprise does not stop at the gate. Koster took in the son of a friend who encountered some heavy weather. The solidarity principle he handles in his enterprise is also the basis for his private life. One of the metaphors he uses to explain his motivation to work with marginalized people is as follows:

Our society is like a road, a highway which we created, incredibly fast, in the last few decades. We all move towards the same direction, and if you cannot keep up with the speed you are parked along the sidelines. Yet, these people should move with the rest of us, even if it is on a secondary road, or even a land road, we should keep participating, otherwise they, and we, are missing out.¹⁶

Koster's opinion is that we are all responsible for each other, and that this is not just the job of governments and institutions. Seeing that many people feel left out of society, he wanted to get involved and take responsibility. This is similar to the conclusions Lyson makes in his research: "a growing number of practitioners and academics across the United States are recognizing that creative new forms of community development, built around the regeneration of local food systems, may eventually generate sufficient economic and political power to mute the more socially and environmentally destructive manifestations of the global marketplace" (Lyson 2004, 197-198). Furthermore, the focus is more on the long term: this is not something that we can do in a day, but we might be able to change our perspective for our children. Because you share so much in the community of Kweekland and Puurland, you start feeling responsible for each other, like a family. I asked, helped, listened and advised. I felt a great sense of belonging, which other participants also mentioned.

¹⁶ Observation on February 24th 2016.

2. Eating together

Community psychologist Jason (1997) states that the main two factors of creating a sense of community are, first, to create a mission that “encompasses the perception that one is actively engaged with others in the pursuit of a common purpose, which embodies values and goals that transcend individual participants” (Jason 1997, 72). The mission is created by the shared ideology. But the second characteristic, reciprocal responsibility, is more telling in this case; it “refers to the perception that there are acknowledged members of an ongoing group who are mutually responsible to each other” (Jason 1997, 72).

Mutual dependence

One of Meadow’s projects is focused on a neighborhood with a lower socio-economic background, a working-class neighborhood. This project, the ‘Veggie fraternity’, manages some of the green veggie boxes in a local children’s playground. The main participants are people from the neighborhood. The people involved do feel the need to be more engaged in their neighborhood, and, besides this, they appreciate gardening outdoors together. The aim to attract children and teach them something about the way food grows seems quite successfully achieved, but the success of these events felt like real victories; all the participants were enthusiastic and joyful. Jason explains that the attraction of mutual support groups and intentional communities lies in their capacity to build a sense of purpose and community (Jason 1997, 72). Jason further elaborates in his notes, quoting McMillan and Chavis (1986) which related this sense of community four aspects: “a feeling of belonging, a sense of making a difference, shared emotional connections, and a feeling that members’ needs will be met” (Jason 1997, 123).

Besides Meadow’s ‘Veggie fraternity’, the systems created by Koster (Puurland and Kweekland) are surviving or depending greatly on volunteers and marginalized people. Whom does the group of ‘marginalized’ people consist of in this case? They are, as Koster says, people parked at the side of the road—people with poor job prospects, some of whom have been facing such hardship for a long time. Some of them are people with a psychological disability or illness.

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The marginalized people and the alternative food systems depend on each other. Paying a full working salary would blow away the possibilities of the alternative systems and the 'marginalized' people need the social interaction and the feeling of significance. Similar, if society would take better 'care' of marginalized people, Puurland would collapse and Kweekland would have no means for existence. There seems to be a fragile balance. If Puurland would want to cater to more people, they might need to revise their strategy, by recruiting paid workers. The creation of these alternatives was conceived with the idea of mutual dependence and the mutual social, ecological and financial benefits. Keeping this delicate balance seems essential to sustain these core values. I will elaborate on this in chapter 3. Regulatory systems could possibly create difficulties for these alternative food systems.

In addition to the people working in the alternative systems, there are also food producers that work in a symbiotic relationship with the mainstream system. In this case Koster is a distributor of products and values. I have had some difficulties in getting to speak with the producers that deliver to Koster's food chain. These producers do not step into the limelight, and this is what they also seem to appreciate so much about Koster. He fulfills the role of engaging and telling the story to the public 'in the name of' the producers and stakeholders. They have extensive talks on how to shape and direct the food system to their liking. Several of the food producers are also involved in other alternative food systems in addition to the construction of Puurland. This gives them a certain security and continuity; it is unsure what their motives are in this regard. Either they have no other choice to stay in existence, or they want to spread the risk. The uncertainty of one system toppling over and dragging them down is diverted this way. This symbiotic shared responsibility for each other and the system, makes the sum of these alternatives stronger; or to come back to Jason, it is reciprocal (1997, 72).

2. Eating together



Figure 3. Kweekland: homely environment, meeting grounds for the neighborhood.¹⁷

2.3. Homely food

The first time I was participating in and observing Kweekland, it did not take long to feel at ease; everybody was chatting, talking about experiences and discussing problems. Everybody is curious and sweet towards me. There is a lot of joking and laughing. Humor is besides plain fun, used as a form of correction and testing; “Are you just talking and letting us do all the working?!”; “You really love to talk, don’t you?!”; “Don’t use too many difficult words, we won’t understand you!”; “Hey, I’m not as smart as you are!”. They still seem to be testing to see if I fit in. And besides the jest, there are also lots of compliments going around.¹⁸

Identity and culture are all highly connected to food. Producing food together, working together, and eating together all give you a sense of belonging to a certain community. My own experience of participation is a source of data in this chapter. A much heard sentence in my research field is: ‘You are what you eat.’ And as Koster adds, “this is not only metaphorically so, you really are what you eat because of the regeneration of your body.”¹⁹ This could extend to getting to know somebody by their eating habits. These alternative food systems are, in addition to new ways for producing and distributing food, also ways to build identity.

¹⁷ Photo, from the database of Steven Koster.

¹⁸ Observations and informal conversations on February 26th 2016.

¹⁹ Informal conversation on March 21th 2016.

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If you participate you are part of the community. As everybody participates in some form or another, everybody shows their opinion about food and its systems.

“As soon as you enter the location Kweekland, differences disappear, or are at least irrelevant for the interaction between the people. Everybody feels this, whatever your day to day position: being in a board of directors or being jobless. Age, background, reasons for being there are trivial, just being there makes you feel good and at home.”²⁰ The homely feeling is really the feeling that I and the other people working on Kweekland have; this is also the same feeling I heard expressed by visitors, either in official capacity or visiting for leisure.²¹ Reasons being considered for this feeling of belonging are the diversity of people, the homely arrangements, the ‘backyard’ ambiance, and the abundance of greenery and flowers. But people also express an inexplicable quality that Kweekland has, a quality which is hard to explain.

As I mentioned above, food is intimately connected with identity and culture; we do not eat ‘together’ only for its nutritional value, but also because of its socio-cultural value. The action of eating together has a communicative aspect. The sharing of a table and food is a basic acknowledgment of membership in a group, like family members, but also broader collective identities, representing unification and solidarity (Montanari 2004, 93-95). Qualities and quantities of food that is eaten inform us about the social identity of the one eating it; this has been the case in the past, and it can still be said about current food consumption. The foods connected to a certain social position or identity have changed and varied over time, not only by access to foods, but also by ideology (Montanari 2004, 124-126,93).

Because this network is still surrounding me, living around the corner, I feel drawn towards the places that are connected with it. I even have a feeling of homesickness; it feels like I am missing my family in a way.

²⁰ Observations on June 16th 2016.

²¹ Informal conversation on March 1st, observations on March 15th and June 16th 2016.

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I have been back to Kweekland a couple of times, and I was warmly welcomed. Many ask how my writing is progressing, and how I am holding up. Hugs, shoulder pads and comments like “You go, girl!”²² are received gratefully, and then I am off again, knowing that I will definitely come back soon.

2.4. Conclusion

The alternative food systems that I observed and in which I participated are all about people. The mutual dependence, reciprocity and the ideological mission also create commitment, which results in a strong feeling of community. Especially with the creation of Kweekland and Puurland, Koster, as a community builder himself, has a great influence on these characteristic community building places. In short, charismatic personalities come a long way and can communicate the mission to others. Crucially, this also implies that if you are not charismatic or in any other way excellent in networking, your possibilities of realizing your goals are limited. In this way the ideology is a tool for building a community and achieving one’s goals. Other factors are the creation of possibilities, responsibilities, and means for appreciation and gratification of the community members. By sharing a table and bread, the feeling of belonging is increased, which also shapes a strong commitment to each other: this old tune still works.

Besides the social aspect having the goal of increasing well-being, it is also a tool for creating the commitment necessary to sustain the alternative system. This dual effect has a mutual beneficial quality: both participant and system ‘profit’ from it. As Lyson states, engaged city communities create “higher levels of well-being and welfare” (Lyson 2004, 128-129). The bonds of community and food provide strong ties to the city and the responsibility for the society as a whole. The community members and beyond are working on greater solidarity and sustainability. An increase in communities like these will result in an increase in welfare in the entire city.

²² Informal conversation on June 23th 2016.

2. Eating together

3.

power foods



3. Power foods

3. Power foods

With food as an increasingly hot topic in scientific research communities, government policy think tanks and the popular press, the field of food has a complex power dynamic. In the media there is a vast array of representations of food and food as a lifestyle (cooking and food TV shows, for example), and food and food systems are brought into question too. This happens in many different ways, for example, in the question of transparency of the food's origins and production systems, and in the place of food in our collective and individual health. On the national, provincial, and local political agenda food is slowly coming to occupy the center of attention. The focus on food seems to change for many from 'just' something satisfying, a facet of identity, into a greater and more important part of our lives, deserving a critical and examining focus.

On a more basic level, food is not merely an effective way of building identity or establishing a political position—it is essential to our existence. Here in the wealthy global North this is not the relation we have with food; for most of us the relation exists of mainly buying, preparing and eating. However, our food has often had a long journey before we get our hands on it. With everybody as a stakeholder (since everyone has to eat) this field is bound to be complex. In the field of research, I had many encounters with a wide range of people with a vested interest in food. I will focus on only some of these as there are too many different stakeholders and positions to elaborate on all of them. In this chapter I will start with a short overview of food politics and its frictions in general, and power dynamics *vis-à-vis* my own respondents—their motives and direct relations to the city council and regulations. Following this I will elaborate on the proceedings of some of the stakeholder's meetings and coalitions I attended. Also the factor of the impending doom is taken in account, which gives an interesting power dynamic.

3.1. Food security

The migration from rural areas towards cities is a global phenomenon that has increased over the last decade, and is expected only to intensify. All these urban mouths need to be well fed. But what does 'well fed' mean?

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What is needed to build a system that can sustain these hungry cities? According to the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) of the United Nations, the explanation of 'food security' is

[...] that food is available at all times; that all persons have means of access to it; that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety; and that it is acceptable within the given culture. Only when all these conditions are in place can a population be considered 'food secure' (Koc, et al. 1999, 1).

Because food security is a flexible concept it is frequently redefined. Here is the definition offered in 2001:

Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture organizations of the United Nations 2001).

Although the usefulness of the concept of food security has been challenged, it is still, in all its different forms and definitions, the dominant framework in international debate about food (Duncan 2015, 42). The multiple international players are increasingly regulating and attempting to provide food security, although the reality is still that food security is not a given; it is impaired by the multiple crises (Tansey 2008, Duncan 2015).

One might think that food is adequately provided for in societies in the global North, but problems with access to food are not far off, and even part of everyday life for some (Koc, et al. 1999, 1). Malnutrition and hunger seem not a problem for advanced industrialized countries, but there are many people dependent on food banks, and these numbers are rising (Tansey 2008, 1). Admittedly, the food security of the global South is more precarious than in the North, and it seems to be getting worse (Koc, et al. 1999, 1; Tansey and Worsle 1995, 222).

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By focusing on the four corners of one of the definition that the FAO uses of food security - availability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability - a sustainable food system can be built. To secure the lasting access to an adequate food system on national and domestic levels, food enterprises must be based on the foundation of economic feasibility, equity, broad participation, and the sustainable use of natural resources (Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014, 6).

Economic and climate crises, growing poverty, and the multilateral trade and investment agreements diminish and threaten the possibilities of gaining global food security (Forno and Graziano 2014, 1; Koc, et al. 1999, 4). There is an enormous increase in urban dwellers in the twentieth century, which is relevant because of the strong interrelationship between global and local, and urban and rural, especially in connection with food systems. As the demand of cities for food is increasing the concern for sustainable urban food systems is increasing in tandem (Koc, et al. 1999, 3).

Securing food is challenged by four factors. The increase in city dwellers, as mentioned above, is one. The other three are: unequal access to food; the inflexibility of the current food markets; and the detachment or loss of control over our food systems (González 2014; Koc, et al. 1999, 3-4). The current measures to secure food are on the basis of *caring* (like food banks and aid), instead of *curing* (as in building lasting sustainable food systems). These symptoms and ailments are the bases for major questions about the success of our current food systems (Koc, et al. 1999, 4; Shrybman 2000, 1). To provide sustainable food systems numerous laws, policies and regulations are in place to protect the individuals in society against the gain of powerful individuals, but laws are installed by humans, and are thus influenced and created by actors with particular interest (Tansey and Worsle 1995, 198; Shrybman 2000). With not only the increase of city inhabitants, but also as a result of the expected growth of the world population, the way food systems are structured now has a major influence on how the rapidly changing world is going to cope with these pending changes.

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A flexible, dynamic food system, adaptable to different cultural needs, seems essential to the world of tomorrow (Tansey and Worsle 1995, 231-232).

According to journalist Naomi Klein the globalized and industrialized agricultural system is accountable for between 19 and 29 percent of CO₂ emissions, and even more is attributable to the food system as a whole (Klein 2014, 78). According to Tansey serious doubts have been raised about the long term sustainability of industrial agriculture and its assumed potential to 'feed the world' (Tansey 2008, 3). As mentioned above, Shrybman claims that industrial agriculture and global export is one of the biggest driving forces behind the increase in greenhouse emissions (Shrybman 2000, 1). This is a structural problem, because the trade regulations and policies do not permit sustainable actions in the agricultural sector and its markets. Shrybman states:

[...] the distance between producer and consumer must be radically shortened to reduce the energy demands of transportation, as well as to eliminate much of the need for processing and packaging. This will mean re-establishing the local production and distribution systems that have only recently been dismantled in the cause of globalization. It will mean diversifying agricultural economies to meet the needs of local communities, rather than international markets. It will also mean producing food rather than agricultural commodities. Finally, it will mean local self-reliance rather than global inter-dependence. (Shrybman 2000, 12-13).

Montenari argues that the current clashes between rich and poor countries is exemplary for the contradictory interests in today's society between many factors, such as humanitarian aid and utilization of commodities. These contemporary stresses are the far-reaching effects of the struggles for the control and exploitation of food resources, which have always been part of human history (Montanari 2004, 26).

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Tansey corroborates this by explaining that the disproportionate power of multinational food corporations is shaping the food system and the international policies around food, instead of the people eating the food and using the systems (Tansey 2008, 6).

3.2. Food- and stakeholders

In this sub-chapter I will elaborate on some of the numerous operations of stakeholders and assemblies that I encountered over the last six months. The selection of events, stories and anecdotes I made is intended to showcase the diversity of institutional interests in food production. In this part of the thesis I have tried to illustrate the complexity of the field and the many power relations, the current movements and intentions that are at play in our contemporary food system.

Food producers

A local biodynamic farmer that is working with Koster explained his current position and his future vision on the food system. This method of farming is work-intensive, because of the diverse products, polyculture (a farming method in which multiple kinds of plants and animals are cultivated), and the slow and natural growth of the crops and the absence of pesticides. However, this way of farming keeps the soil fertile and healthy, and the people living in the vicinity of the farms are being provided for and kept healthy as well. In the view of this biodynamic farmer this way of farming is the most sustainable solution. He is very dependent on volunteers: the marginalized, holiday workers, students and other unpaid workers.

In my eyes the technological solution is not the way to a sustainable world. I believe that this will create unforeseen problems after problems that we will have to fix. However, people working the land is sustainable, and both environmental as well as social. This will be the future.²³

²³ Informal conversation on June 6th 2016.

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As this farm and farmer is an alternative food system in itself, he seems to express the same goals as Koster: to be able to shape the food system, together, into a solidary and sustainable system for everybody, people and land alike. Again Lefebvre's theory of 'the right to the city' (2000) is the main motivation that is articulated to have the democratic right to shape the common facilities together in a way that is sustainable for everybody, including future generations. It is interesting, in this case, is that it results in the necessity for this farm to operate partially in the non-profit domain by attracting people that want to work in a socially-oriented organization, or that need this setting to reintegrate into social life, or have no other possibilities of work.

Koster explained that there is a difficulty in working with the current policies around profit in these constructions: unpaid workers could make the products cheaper and could provide you with higher profits, but this is ruled as 'unfair competition'.²⁴ These equal trade policies could undermine the intentions of a business that is both trying to provide a place of solidarity and care, and is profitable. These discrepancies are also what Shrybman refers to in his research as a structural problem between trade and sustainability (Shrybman 2000, 12-13). It depends on the wished results, as, according to Althusser (1984), ideology is the basis for the way institutions operate. As the results are to the advantage of big multinational corporations and work to defend their interests in efficiency and profit, the values of sustainability and solidarity seem to be disregarded in the current policies.

The way that institutions operate and decide on policies is a way of reinforcing the dominant ideology through various means of repression (Freeden 2003, 25). As Lyson asserts:

²⁴ Informal meeting on April 12th 2016.

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Communities can provide alternatives to the products of the global food system only if they develop the necessary infrastructure, maintain an adequate farmland base, and provide sufficient technical expertise so that farmers and processors can successfully compete in the local marketplace against the highly industrialized, internationally organized corporate food system (Lyson 2004, 194).

Montenari declares that although the meaning of a meal is profoundly tied with culture and identity, it is never severed from the concrete, economic and nutritional, value of the foods (Montanari 2004, 98). Alternative food systems that are based on values other than economic ones could partially contradict what Montenari states, since the detachment of food and food production from economic value could initiate an alternative social worth.

In addition to the 'alternative' farmers, I talked to some producers and horticulturists in the current mainstream system. Some of them are skeptical that these alternative methods of farming have a viable future, as they have worked so long to perfect, specialize and automate their working processes. A much heard motive is that there is no other way to feed the world, or to make a profit, than to make the food system more efficient. It seems to be a slogan in current industrialized agriculture. Although there is plenty of skepticism towards change, there are also many little moves towards sustainable systems in the ecological or social domains.

A former government official, who later became a farmer, explained that "making the distinction between regular farmers and other, biological or alternative farmers is thought of as quite offensive. If you call a farmer a regular farmer, they will not be on your good side."²⁵

²⁵ Field of a meeting on June 2th, 2016.

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There is apparently a division or a struggle between farmers that support different methods. Calling someone a regular farmer turns out to be derogatory. This seems to imply that there is a distancing by farmers from a term that has the connotation that is tied to industrialized farming.

Lunch money

One of the first gatherings that I attended included the presentation of a European subsidy that the province of Gelderland is allowed to release for the development of the countryside. The meeting was organized by Het Gelders Kennisnetwerk Voedsel, on an impressive farmstead in the Gelderse countryside. Those present comprised several social entrepreneurs in food and farming, some nonprofit organizations in this same field, and many governmental officials. First, there were a couple of presentations by entrepreneurs, designed primarily to inspire and to share knowledge and possibilities. Multiple subjects were discussed: getting rid of outdated regulations, creating opportunities, the strength of having social goals, biodiversity, governmental facilitation of local products, local food systems. A comment on the relation between policies and opportunities was “if you can explain it to a child, it is valid.”²⁶ This quote was in stark contrast to what followed: the introduction of the subsidy and its regulations.

The POP3, the third subsidy of the Plattelands Ontwikkelings Programma [‘Rural Development Program’], is a European fund structured by the province. This subsidy opportunity is for the development of a short facilities (food) chain and innovative concepts. The main themes presented were that the funding should provide facilitation, stimulation and connecting of rural areas. After this initial introduction of the concepts it became increasingly complex to understand the demands that are required for funding. Questions about regulations were mostly unanswered, the presenter commented: “I’m also unsure, but I know that we have to apply these requirements, we’re also bound by these demands.”²⁷

²⁶ Observation notes of a meeting on March 3th 2016.

²⁷ Observation notes of a meeting on March 3th 2016.

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There was a lot of rumbling and grumbling of the people present, the Gordian knot seems hard to unravel even for the officials working with it.

After this first introduction I accompanied Koster to a later follow-up of POP3. This time it was organized by the province, and they expanded on the demands for this specific funding. Again there was some irritation from the audience about the pre-funding and extensive paperwork that they had to do. Koster and a civil servant explained that this elaborate system is high in demanding paperwork, there are no funding guaranteed, and it has to be payed up front. The last part made Koster indignant: “it makes especially hard for young or penniless innovators to apply for this subsidy.”²⁸ These complex granting systems also demand extensive work in preparation both from the government beforehand as from the people applying for funds. Koster presented an alternative;

What if all these people present would get an amount of money on the way out, they would do their good work, show the results, present them on paper. Then the whole apparatus to create this Kafkaesque system would be redundant and they would have money left in the end to give to the really great plans. No commissions, no great public servant apparatus, no paperwork, no endless rulemaking, and less time-absorbing.²⁹

The indignation and frustration with this inefficient apparatus was obvious. Koster explained that if he could do without it he would—indeed, he does so most of the time. But these subsidies are also still seen as an opportunity for development of new concepts that have not proven themselves yet. The applicants have to be tenacious to succeed in raising the subsidies. There seems to be a similar anger and frustration at governmental structure as towards corporate systems. Both governments and corporations are seen as disabling self-organization and the right to shape the common systems.

²⁸ Informal conversation March 23th 2016.

²⁹ Informal conversation March 23th 2016.

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City council

At the start of my fieldwork, I talked to Koster about his interaction with the city council, and what his experiences were with the numerous city civil servants. His answer came in detail via email with a list of personal reflections on his experiences with the government employees he had had by this point. These reflections, explaining action of the officials, were especially telling of the perspective that Koster has towards civil servants: “after reading back what I commented, it says more about me than the government employees.”³⁰ What was it that made this so obvious? He referred to the effectiveness and the goal-oriented actions he experienced with the officials. This feeds the cliché that entrepreneurs are much more purposeful, and they experience officials as mere paper pushers (although Koster evidently had ‘good’, purposeful experiences with some governmental officials).

Every year several visions of long-term direction in overall policies are presented online by the Arnhem city council. One of the most recent mandates is trying to shift toward a different general situation, more flexible and innovative, and not necessarily working with existing models and solutions. They want to focus on intentions rather than on regulations (Gemeente Arnhem 2016, 3, 7-9). Is this vision possible in practice when people and institutes are used to working a certain way? Castells states that the governmental institution realizes the appeal and importance of environmental and sustainable conciseness, but they are disabled by bureaucracy, personalized leadership and increasing dissociation with the citizens (Castells 2000, 3). Furthermore, one can wonder how and if the long-term vision is constricted by elections every four years. An example from the field in which these long-term ambitions and the short-term gains of not stepping on any voter’s toes seem to collide, is the horse fields within the city boundaries. These little patches of land are dotted the north side of town; some of them house ponies and horses, and some have nothing on them but a few sheds.

³⁰ Email of December 10th 2015.

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Koster and Kweekland would like to expand the city farming in combination with local people that need care and want to be engaged in farming work. As grounds are scarce within the boundaries of the city, these horse fields would be a possibility, and one that would also be in line with of a participating and sustainable society the city council has articulated in its mandate (Gemeente Arnhem 2016). Although some, among which Koster and several others, including some city officials, think this would be logical combination, the permission has been stalled for some time without a positive outcome. However, as a city official stated in private, “the possible problems that the current users might cause, a few rich horse owners, is a reason to neglect this possibility until after the elections in a year.”³¹ The prospect that the city has in mind also matches the analysis of Lyson:

Communities that nurture local systems of agricultural production and food marketing, as one part of a broader plan of diversified economic development, can gain greater control over their economic destinies. They can also enhance the level of civic engagement among their residents, contribute to rising levels of civic welfare and socioeconomic well-being, revitalize rural landscapes, improve environmental quality, and, ultimately, promote long-term sustainability (Lyson 2004, 197).

Both the statement above, and the intended vision of the city council, acknowledge the positive power and engagement of communities that engage in the production of food within the city boundaries. But the reality is still that the city council ‘nurtures’ rather short-term goals of reelection than long-term benefits for the city community.

³¹ Observation on April 6th 2016.

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The discrepancies between the perspective on impending motivation of the city council and the practicality of actions could imply a shift in ideology. The current ideology has shaped the policies and the structure of operations of the governmental agencies, where the ambitions are formed by new insights and ideology. What definitely could be stated is that there is at least a gap between how the alternative food systems and the council's mandate see the routes for improvement and the rules they have to abide by (Gemeente Arnhem 2016, 7). Exemplary of this is the agitation about the horse fields in the city, the incompatibility of long term goals and the discrepancies with the short term of administration that a city council is in office.

Another interesting miscalculation is between the city council and Plowman. One of the problems in Plowman's venture is the tremendous difficulty of finding proper ground for his food forest plans. The city council does have grounds for hire, which they want to have cultivated as food forest. According to Plowman the problem with this is that it needs lots of money to cultivate: "you still have to pay the rent although the income of the lands will lie in wait for another couple of years."³² Other problems that Plowman has encountered is that the grounds are too small to make a decent living, and hard to reach. In the meanwhile, the city council has high expectations of the possibilities.

Some of the conclusions of my conversations with Plowman are that, although the city council is slowly increasing interest in these alternative food productions, their expectations are not realistic, and in a way lacking the perspective of the proprietor. The case is similar to that of the horse fields: the short term goals of establishing a trendy food forest and still making money out of it are leading, and not the long term goals of creating communities, food system alternatives, and sustainability.

³² Informal conversation on June 7th 2016.

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Foodtopia

The title of this paragraph is the same as that of a conference I attended about the future of the food system and specifically a debate about agricultural policies and their preparation for future scenarios. On the website of the The Netherlands EU Presidency 2016 the following statement is made: “European agriculture is at a turning point. It’s clear that future agriculture must and will change. What can policy makers and entrepreneurs do now in order to prepare for the future?”(The Netherlands EU Presidency 2016 (s.d.)). The deliberation and debate was an initiative in the framework of The Netherlands EU Presidency 2016, organized by several big stakeholders like Slow Food Youth Movement, European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) and Groupe de Bruges (The Groupe de Bruges (s.d.)).

In attendance was a wide range of stakeholders, from policymakers to producers, from cooks to researchers. There was a planned brainstorm session. To initiate this, research was presented by researcher Petra Berkhout from Wageningen University. The research was on current trends and the three future scenarios in which these might result: high-tech, self-organized, and collapse. In the following narrative I will relay my experience of that afternoon:

There followed a short round of questions. One was: What is the preferred scenario? Collectively we all want the self-organized scenario. We split into three pre-selected groups of roughly thirty people, and we talked about the scenario we were designated. I was in the group discussing the self-organization scenario. In discussion on of the points that kept surfacing was altruism, that we have to take care of each other. As we were all brainstorming, I stated that I did not agree with the term, ‘altruism’. I suggested the use of the word; solidarity, mainly because I have acquainted myself with this descriptive concept in the last year studying Sustainable Citizenship. I explained that I thought altruism to have a connotation for a form of charity, a one-way street, and also related to a difference in power between ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’, while the concept that we were talking about seemed to be more about equality and reciprocity.

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Everybody seemed to agree on this, solidarity was thought of as part of the self-organized scenario. Afterwards we collectively created a mind map of facets which we expected to be part of this particular scenario.

After the discussion and mind-mapping in the three separate scenario groups, we continued collectively. All groups presented the results of their potential scenario. There were some surprises at the outcome. Everybody still preferred the scenario of self-organization, although the realization that the scenario of collapse will eventually result in self-organization did affect the earlier resistance towards this scenario. This was in spite of the expected tremendous human suffering that this scenario implies. The scenario of high-tech still offers hope, but was not seen as a solution; it was also seen as potentially leading to the scenario of collapse. Granted that nobody really expects high-tech to disappear from view, we concluded that it should not be our hope and focus. The conclusion of this meeting is that the focus should be on diverting collapse or softening the blow of partial collapse. To meet these conclusions about the future, agricultural policies should focus more on more polyculture in farming, diversity, creating knowledge about farming, sustaining more rather than less farmers, new possible models of cooperation and sustainability. One of the comments regarding this was that it is “exactly the opposite of what the agricultural policies are currently realizing.”³³

In this anecdote the discrepancies of current models and policies and the expectations of participants is again made clear. Is it possible for these alternative ‘sound bites’ to instigate the turning point, a more sustainable food system equipped for potential future scenarios? The relevance of the future, makes the power dynamic even more complex. I will elaborate on this in the next sub-chapter.

³³ Observation notes of a meeting, on April 14th 2016.

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3.3. Future foods?

The global climate summit in Paris 2015 differed from all the other conferences, debates, books, documentaries and all other predictions of impending doom because of its references to climate change a major factor in the debate about the food system. However, it is presently where this factor of the future climate doom scenario plays a role.

Raskin (2014) states that we are in a transition period, but he says we just have to choose what we are transitioning to. According to Raskin we are at a crossroads with multiple possible futures, and he stakes his claim for a more sustainable and just future. There are two major fronts involved in this decision: technical and political. The technical front has, in Raskin's eyes, no validity, as endless scientific tests prove that the transition can be made. It is the political presence which is complex because it involves human values and collective action. Raskin states that "the efforts of an active minority can ripple through the cultural field and release latent potential for social change" (Raskin 2014). The curiosity towards this mentioned social motive and the connection with the practicality of local transition-ideology is the basis for this research.

The research into a sustainable transition has vastly grown in the last couple of decades, with all kinds of different fields, disciplines and angles to the activities of transition. Some research sustains the evidence that cities and urbanized areas are significant in the transitioning state, because of the demand for food (Cohen and Ilieva 2015, 200). Others find that the transition is increasingly directed by transnational relationships and actors that transcend the nation-states (Tansey 2008, 64; Truffer, Raven and Murphy 2015, 69). Specifics for sustainable transition are multi-layered, like the existing social conditions, the cooperation between different scales, connecting qualities and the power of actors. The last component, power, is unevenly distributed and this sustains the argument that big actors have more possibilities and dominance on the terrain of transition (Shrybman 2000,1; Tansey 2008, 64-65; Truffer, Raven and Murphy 2015, 70).

3. Power foods

Alongside this, it is clear that small stakeholders, operating in a local network, have a major advantage over large scale and anonymous corporations. It is the social preconditions of location, in combination with the connectedness, that have a powerful, reinforcing characteristic which could overtake centralized 'power' (Truffer, Raven and Murphy 2015, 70). This supports clichés such as strength by numbers, and is what Koster, together with many of his network, is trying to accomplish by steering towards a sustainable food system.

Besides the multi-faceted, multi-scaled and multi-staged system of a transition toward sustainability, there is the also difficulty in a multitude of stakeholders. Loorbach and Rotmans say that a transition with the preconceived objective of sustainable development is especially problematic, because it is essentially a subjective and ambiguous norm (Loorbach and Rotmans 2006, 188). One of the powerful concepts is Rotmans's (2001) 'transition management'. This does not refer to management in the usual sense of the word, it should rather be taken in the sense of influencing and steering of autonomous processes, such as cultural change. This flexible and adaptive tool can be used in direct and indirect ways, making use of markets, plans and institutions (Loorbach and Rotmans 2006, 195). Essentially this is what the alternative food systems of this research are trying to achieve.

3.4. Conclusion

There seems to be a large degree of friction between active groups that want to alter existing governmental models and the systems in place. The current 'old' ways and policies are often in the way of innovation and new solidarity pacts. These new routes make the quality of '*gunfactor*' (the factor of granting favors to someone you like or know) and especially network even more important. Besides, the responsibility for the future is also a big factor; many different players feel or are being told there is an urgency in creating a more sustainable food system. But how to proceed is not yet known with any degree of certainty.

3. Power foods

Ideology is part of a choice, as is how one goes about regulation. Governments make a choice on the basis of beliefs about importance and relevance of certain policies and domains, resulting in the reinforcement of the dominant ideology. The basis for those choices are the beliefs in significance, economic profit, efficiency or solidarity and sustainability. This is a reflection on ideology in practice; there are no good choices or wrong choices, and it only depends on perspective. Although there is no basic right and wrong in ideology *per se*, the current policies and systems can deviate from the beliefs of some. As the mandate of the city of Arnhem makes manifest, it is the vision of future policies and regulation that has changed, while some practices are still operating in another way. Which direction this dynamic will go is uncertain. However, it is clear that there is a lot of movement towards change in the field of food.

In this turbulent and changing landscape, alternatives to the mainstream are of the utmost importance. Current policies and short term goals are a hindrance in achieving a climate of change. Alternative systems show, experiment with and develop new possibilities, which is a necessary route to becoming more sustainable.

3. Power foods

Conclusion

Conclusion



Conclusion

Conclusion

In the field of food there are many different active players. The alternative food systems that I researched are an example of these stakeholders. Change is necessary, and it is happening, as scientists and (inter)national governments stress. How are these changed concepts and ideologies of sustainability and solidarity practiced in 'reality'? The alternative food systems of this research are a demonstration of these concepts and ideologies at work in real practices.

As ideology is a creator of 'reality' and vice-versa—it is created in practice. Ideology could be seen as a shaping tool. Ideology breaks down old logic, which was naturalized and thought of as common sense, until there is reflection on this logic. A new ideology in this case breaks down the liberal-capitalist ideology, creating a new logic in itself, a new common sense. The alternative food systems are interconnected with this ideology; they create community by sharing similar thoughts of how the world should work. At the same time, they distance themselves from an opposing ideology, both in the creation of community as well as in the breaking down of the other ideology. Sharing an opponent is one factor in binding a community together. This ideological ground gives many opportunities in shaping networks in social and power relations. The alternative food systems I investigated use this new logic and values as important building blocks to create an alternative system and support for these new structures and experiments.

Koster's Kweekland and Puurland are dependent on a successful community base for existence. The participants that I spoke with all share these ideological beliefs of solidarity and sustainability. This moral high ground, to 'fight for a better world' seems to make them happy and give them the feeling of necessity. Both the consumer participants as the participants that work on the grounds of Kweekland are willing to make an effort in shaping this regional food system. The abilities of Koster to tell his story are also a binding factor, besides the participant this quality can also create *gunfactor*, he can bind other entrepreneurs, alternative food systems and city officials to his cause. This structure of several engaged groups make reaching certain goals easier and more accessible.

Conclusion

The alternative food systems are pursuing the creation of a food system that is solidary, sustainable and wholesome for all citizens and the future.

The power dynamic of the field is complex, with many different players, all with their own positions, goals and wishes. Network and *gunnen* seems to be essential in the current intricacy of the food system. The discrepancies between the practicality of the system and the actors' increasing sense of urgency seem to help forge networks and create possibilities to maneuver that are essential to keep new alternative food systems afloat. While there are many actors in the field of food that have this feeling of necessity, it seems that the uncertainty of these unknown territories also give opportunities to the researched alternative food systems. Current systems of governance and big multinational corporations are a hindrance in achieving a food system shaped by the people, namely citizens that are most depending on it. However, the momentum of the climate issues and multiple crises, creates also opportunities to experiment because of the uncertainty of the 'right' route.

The citizens right to shape, experiment and develop more sustainable, localized and solidary alternatives is seen in the self-organization by scientists, governments and alternatives. Experimenting towards more sustainable food systems is a necessary step to changing the whole food system.

These past months in the field have given enough insights, data and stories to answer the research question: *To what extent are alternative food systems in Arnhem based on ideology, how does this influence the structure and choices of the enterprise, and how is this related and negotiated with other share- and stakeholders?* The alternative food systems and their participants that I have researched have all expressed that a considerable part of their motives are founded on ideological concepts such as sustainability and solidarity. The actual practice and forms of structuring their enterprises on these social ideals might differ, however extensive choices are first weighted and viewed through these concepts before decisions are being made.

Conclusion

Besides these building blocks, ideology is also used to shape community, create believers and distance and deconstruct the dominant liberal-capitalist ideology. These same values play an important role in positioning and negotiating in the complex power dynamic. Forming networks and being able to tell a convincing story are strong tools in shaping these alternatives. Rigid governments, policies and corporate moguls can be a hindrance for these small local solutions—but these features can also be their strength. The movement instigated by all sorts of big agendas, actors and crises are fertile grounds for alternative food systems.

Discussion/afterword

The research field was easy accessible, but it was hard to confine it into a manageable size because of its richness for research. I noticed a tension in my own participation between engagement and objectivity. For now, this has given me thoughts on my future career as an engaged anthropologist. Besides the fieldwork, I had some difficulties in the writing process with distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant data. The process of writing this thesis was an emotional rollercoaster, though it was also especially rewarding. Overall the last months have made me grow, as an engaged sustainable citizen and as a proud anthropologist.

As mentioned several times, the field of food is currently full of activity. I also noticed this in my theoretical inquiries. There are extensive sources that elaborate and research the function, dysfunction and power that food has in different scale of the food system. Although this seems to be a 'high-quality' problem, it also makes it hard to find the most relevant framework for this thesis. I attempted to gather a wide array of disciplines to give the best possible framework for this research. The extensive choice that I found in the field of food was not supported by voluminous choice in theory about ideology. Some of the arguments and books used for the theoretical framework on ideology is considerably older than the past decade. This said, it seems there is some leeway in the thinking about ideology, maybe because the relevance is not as acute or because the 'older' works are still accurate and applicable on contemporary society.

Conclusion

Perhaps this is because it is an elusive topic, hard to understand and not as fashionable; or perhaps it is packaged in a different format and I should have spent more time looking for it.

The implications for professional practice that this research has brought to the fore are the importance of a good story, network-forming abilities, and institutional compromises between visions and practices. If the goal is to actively changing current systems, there should be possibilities within policies and regulations for experimentation; for example, not sustaining multinationals but nourishing local civic engagement and local citizen economies. Communities and civic engagement in combination to the right to shape common (food) facilities would create more well-being and welfare. Other possible implications for government, which is not new, is the shunning of short term goals and evolving practice towards long term goals. It implies that changing systems of short term payment (elections/money/profit) towards solidary and sustainable long term goals could make a difference. These examples would help to develop a more balanced and wholesome society for everybody.

To end, I will address in brief some possibilities for further research in this field. The discrepancies between governmental visions and practices has fascinated me and could be a topic in regard to the forming of ideology. Networks are another intriguing subject, creating insights in network dependencies and interaction between stakeholders. In the introduction I refer to my choice of ideology as a framework rather than a Foucauldian discourse or power analysis. However, researching the alternative food systems in light of Foucault's work could give an equally rich and diverse perspective on these alternative systems.

As mentioned before, the focus in this research was not on the side of the consumers, delving deeper into the different consumers could be interesting for further research. Likewise, the forming of community and individual identity in these alternative food systems could prove a rewarding theme.

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