EXPRESSIONS OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE PARADIGM

EXPRESII ALE PRACTICILOR CULTURALE ASOCIATE PARADIGMEI AGRICULTURII ALTERNATIVE

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Abstract: *It is more and more obvious the necessity of implementing another type of agriculutre, necessity that comes from peoples' growing interest in enviromental and health issues. Conventional managagement must be focused on long term sustainability. Alternative forms of agriculture must be sustained by authorities, communities, ideas, social behaviours and adequate lifestyles. Culture can contribute to the paradigm shift, from the conventional one to the alternative sustainable one. Culture can trigger awareness, can offer discussion subjects, can provide legitimacy and can create new oportunities in ways that enable sustainability to dominate agriculture.*

Key words*: culture, urban agriculture, community -supported agriculture (CSA), community, civic engagement,*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is one of the greatest challanges of the 21st century, both for economy and consumers. Agriculture, considerd one of the emerging sectors of the economy, is still a *pollutant sector, representing 9,6% of total sources of greenhouse gas effect emissions in 2008*.(SOER 2010, p.33)

Conventional farming often gives a lot of negative impacts such as soil erosion, nutrient runoff, loss of organic matter, impairment of environment quality, pollution of natural water by agricultural chemical and potential hazard to human and animal health from heavy use of pesticides (Diepeningan et. al., 2006).

Thus, the rising concern regarding the ecological impact of conventional agricultural practices(Stoate et al., 2001) has led to a shift towards alternative systems, which are explicitly aware of the externalities of agriculutural systems and try to minimize the impact through applying changes at agricultural system level. Organic farming is gradually replacing conventional farming (Hansen et al., 2001).

The organic approach(biological/enviromtenal) is not the only alternative for conventional production systems practiced or promoted at the moment. The terms „sustainable" and „alternative" cover both systems, the ones based on low inputs as well as the organic ones(Edwards et al., 1990; Francis et al., 1990).

Agriculture can be understood as a linked, dynamic social-ecological system based on the extraction of biological products and services from an ecosystem, innovated and managed by people, encompassing all stages of production, processing, distribution, marketing, retail, consumption and waste disposal (McIntyre et al., 2009).

Jules Pretty (2002, p. xii) mentioned the fact that agriculture has lost its essence: *In the earliest surviving texts on European farming, agriculture was interpreted as two connected things: agri and cultura, and food was seen as a vital part of the cultures and communities that produced it. Today, however, our experience with industrial farming dominates, with food now seen simply as a commodity, and farming often organized along factory lines. The questions I would like to ask are these. Can we put the culture back into agri-culture without compromising the need to produce enough food? Can we create sustainable systems of farming that are efficient and fair and founded on a detailed understanding of the benefits of agro-ecology and people's capacity to cooperate?*

McDonald (2005, p.71), pushes the understanding of socio-cultural relationships underlying agriculture further by „*exploring the complex ways that humans conceptualise, give meaning to and organise around agriculture as a whole".*

Starting off from these considerations, we shall go deeper into the theoretical framework regarding paradigms that shape modern farming: conventional and alternative, afterwards we shall present new forms of farming: urban farming and CSF(Community Sustained Farming). Further, is presented the degree of local authority implication in sustaining citizen implication in an atractive cultural life in rural and peri-urban areas as well

as in sustaining the development of diverse cultural offers, atractive, inovative and high quality. Also we shall emphasize the ways of expressing cultural practices asociated with alternative paradigms: civic engagement, community and celebrating local food.

MATERIALS AND METODS

***Agricultural paradigms*.**

Beus C.E. and Dunlap R.E.(1990) have brought an argument for two socio-cultural paradigms that influence farming: the conventional paradigm of farming, practiced at a large scale and strongly industrialized, and the second one: alternative farming – local, on the rise, which promotes major changes towards a more enviromentaly friendly and sustainable farming. Beus C.E. and Dunlap R.E., have tried to clarify and synthesize the underlying beliefs and values underlying the two farming approaches.

Thus, conventional farming stands out through centralization, dependency, competition, domination of nature, specialization, and exploitation, on the other end we can find organic farming known for decentralization, independency, community, harmony with nature, diversity and preservation.

Although there is undoubtedly a range of approaches to agriculture, these two paradigms not only illustrate the sociocultural tensions within agriculture today, but also help us to understand the vital role of culture and values in agriculture as well as their connection to sustainability. *'Our cultural values will be paramount in determining the outcome of the [paradigmatic] conflict'* (Jackson, 1987; cited in Beus and Dunlap, 1990, p. 596). Culture represents *'one of the main elements of every social system'* (Johnson, 2000, p. 73). Culture is now understood as '*the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products or way of life of a particular society, people, or period'* (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2009). Around the world, these distinctions have been nurtured through policies and practices, not only in the valorization of skilled human activities implicit in, for example, the management-heavy prescriptions of organic or biodynamic agriculture, but also in the communities, ideas, customs, social behaviours, products and ways of life associated with alternative forms of agriculture.

In the context of EU's growing urban population, a solution and challange for assuring food safety is the development of urban farming.

As an example of the alternative paradigm, urban (and peri-urban) agriculture has been described as *'agriculture occurring within and surrounding the boundaries of cities throughout the world and includes crop and livestock production, fisheries and forestry, as well as the ecological services they provide'* (Mclntyre *et al,* 2009, p. 288, cite in Sumner et.all., 2010, p. 57).

Urban agriculture is undertaken by residents in an effort to take control of food security, social ills and environmental degradation in their communities by providing food, jobs, environmental enhancement, education, beautification, inspiration and hope (Bourque, 2000).

In large American cities, a nascent but ambitious movement is already under way to cultivate a new urban agriculture, with operations ranging from backyard and rooftop gardens to restaurant salad gardens to large community farms located in greenbelts and reclaimed industrial areas that produce orchard fruit, vegetables, honey, even livestock and farmed fish (Roberts, 2008, p. 308).

CSA has emerged in 1960's Japan where the „*tekei"* concept was born, „tekei" meaning „partnership". In 1986 it emerged in North America as well, afterwards extending on a global scale.

CSA (also known as community-shared agriculture) is 'an arrangement whereby a group of people, one of whom is a farmer, agree to share the costs and products of a seasonal vegetable garden' (Fieldhouse, 1996, p. 43).

Consumers relate to the farmers in one of three main ways. They may be shareholders,members or subscribers and while each involves paying a set amount to the farmer in return for food, consumers may also engage in various activities on and off the farm and contribute to farm operations at various levels (Abbott Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995, cite in Sumner et.all., 2010, p. 58).

CSA can be considered as a '*form of direct marketing of agricultural products that can be an important facet of a more sustainable, locally based food system'* (Kolodinsky and Pelch, 1997, p. 129).

The ASPF has started working in 2008 – it is a alternative economic system which is built on colaboration and trust between producers and consumers. The first partnership has materialized in 2008(ASPF Jivu

Timişoara Partnership), Mr. Ioan Jivu being the first producer sustained in the development of the ASPF partnership with consumers from Timişoara. In 2010 a new partnership is signed, the ASPF Leordean Partnership(Arad), by wich Ms. Mia Leordean, a fruit and vegetable producer from Cuvin, com. Ghioroc, county of Arad, wants to sign 12 contracts with families from Arad, which can benefit weekly of fresh fruits and vegetables.

These infantile activities confirm the appearance of CSF in the counties of Arad and Timiş.

Selling agricultural products, localy raised, directly to the consumer has major implications in developing a trustful and secure envrioment good for both sides. Studies emphasize the fact that farmers are more involved in direct marketing, which is linked more to community involvement rather than selling through brokers or export(Gigleux and Garcin, 2008).

The analisys of urban agricultural literature and CSF has revealed three key themes that emphasize the way **culture** is a central part of the CSF farm of this study: civic engagement, community and celebrating local foods.

In Romania, more precisely in the county of Arad, we cannot talk about urban agriculture yet, although the term could be seriously taken in consideration as a recovery for small producers surrounding the town.

The CRIES Asociation (www.cries.ro) is a NGO that wants to help develop a social and solidary economy in Romania. The Asociation for Sustaining Pesant Farming(ASPF) is the first solidary economy project initiated by the CRIES Asociation in partnership with the European IRIS Platform and the International URGENCI Network.

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RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

Morris(1996) metioned that „ *'small' is the measurse of efficient, dinamic, democratic and enviromentaly friendly societies".* In Canada, the sustainable approach of the food system is often labled as „*community development".*

Maintaining civic engagement.

Citizens' growing concenrn regarding access to healthy food and desire to sustain local farmers are determinant factors in maintaining civic engagement.

Abbott Cone and Kakaliouras (1995) denote CSA as a social movement whereby a new institutional arrangement is created 'that addresses multiple societal needs – healthy food, healthy land and healthy social relationships' (p. 29). Their research into four CSA farms in the United States revealed that members articulated their commitment to the farms in moral terms – as part of their moral responsibility to care for the land, communities and food producers. Lyson (2004, 2005) argues that civic agriculture embeds agricultural and food production in the community; it involves 'communitybased agriculture and food production activities that create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship and strengthen community identity' (2005, p. 96). These enterprises are examples of 'local problem-solving activities organised around agriculture and food' (p. 98).

CSF farms, unlike other more conventional ways of farming, exists *because* of the interdependent relationships maintained between the farm and the community, many of these relationships being made of the cultural practices of mainainting civic engagement, building community and celebrating local food.

Culture creates the climate in wich efficiency, fairness, agro-ecology and cooperation could emerge and thrive.

The community is a very complex subject, but it reflects the fact that it is culturaly linked, as Bell and Newby say(1961, in Johnston, 2000, p.101): „*being part of a community implies 'culture and way of thinking or expressing'".* Tegtmeier and Duffy (2005, p.5) describe CSF farms as being „*a new marketing and community building concept*" and say that, at their peak, CSF farms provide their members with a „*link which builds communities, with farmers, neighbours and landscapes*".

Celebrating local food is one of the most clear ways of expressing culture, emphasized through the ceremonial or festive life of the community. Research regarding CSF farms indicate a common celebration trend. CSF farms organise events wich include potluck suppers and farm tours, festivals, culinary show-offs and distribution of leflets(Abbott Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995).

The County Cultural Center of Arad* is active in the life of the people of arad, offering:

-support for citizens to get involved in a atractive cultural life in rural and peri-urban areas, more specificaly it supports cultural activities dedicated tot celebration and maintainance of colective cultural memory (The Celebration of Bread in the village of Beliu, Traditional Praying, Meeting the young teenagers of the village etc.)

-support for developing a diverse, atractiv, inovative and high quality cultural offer, organizing fairs and fesivals accross the county(The Celebration of Wine in the Vineyard of Arad, wine tastings of wine produced in the Miniş-Măderat Vineyard, from the wineries of: Păuliş, Miniş, Şiria, Pâncota; the Autumn Fair; The Tradional Foods(cheese, sausages, cakes etc).

CONCLUSION

The main objecitv of the agricultural future of this century is obtaining healthy produce, maintaining soil fertiliy, optimizing agricultural production and the enviroment, without neglecting de food security issue. Thus, it is up to the entrepreneurs wich farming paradigm will be chosen: conventional or alternative. But, consumers will certainly decide upon which products they will buy.

In the counties of Timiş and Arad the emerging of CSF is in an infatile state, but we could notice them since 2008, respectively 2010. Serious involvment is neccesary from the local authorities in promoting these new forms of farming.

As a alternative paradigm form, urban agriculture holds a great cultural potential. Urban farmin, such as CSF farms, could be the spearhead

* http://www.ccja.ro/

of reintroducing culture back intro agriculture and creating ***sustainable farming systems***. (Jennifer Sumner et al., 2010).

Culture plays a central role in the alternative paradigm of urban agriculture. Social science researches on cultural aspects of farming are a essential component in the proccess of making us understand all forms of farming (urban and rural, conventional and alternative) and also important in establishing a certain path towards enhancing relationships between people, earth and nature. Cultural elements of urban agriculture, manifested in CSF farms and expressed through civic engagement, community and celebration of local food, enhance our understanding of the alternative paradigm.

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