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Food as cultural capital in Rural Development: a comparative study between Japanese and British upland agriculture

Lois Mansfield (University of Cumbria, UK)

With the change in UK government policy to financially support public goods rather than production, farm businesses will once again need to explore a range of alternative mechanisms to ensure they are resilient enough to continue. In preparation for this, the Ministry responsible for food (DEFRA) is currently focused on the testing and trialling of agri-environment initiatives. Farms, nevertheless have much more to offer in terms of social and cultural capital which not only provide business continuity but underpin the production of natural capital and other ecosystem services so valued by society.

This paper reports on some of the findings of a Churchill Fellowship in Japan which explored how their Ministries support upland farm businesses in the Yoshina-Kumano National Park, SW Honshu, through rural development in terms of food as an aspect of cultural capital. A comparative critical analysis between schemes in the UK and Japan was then performed to explore new ways of improving food farm diversification in upland farming areas.

Innovation for and by whom?: the governance of agroecological innovations

Chris Maughan (Coventry University, UK)

The agroecology movement posits a radical challenge to conventional agri-food governance. Among other things, advocates of agroecology have called for the re-situation of food production and agri-food decision-making at the local level (Altieri 2009; Pimbert 2015; Snipstal 2015). Until recently, these claims have been made from the side-lines, marking out a powerful, but extreme, oppositional frontier. In recent years, however, this dynamic has shifted; agroecology is increasingly being adopted as the organising principle for sustainable food governance in some of the most elevated policy arenas in the world, from the regional and national level (such as France and the UK (Guillaume 2018; McCarthy et al. 2018)) to the international, such as the FAO and the EU (EC 2018; FAO 2018a).

On the surface, such policy processes appear to align with the core tenets of agroecology, such as local governance, 'food sovereignty', and participatory research and development processes. Yet, beneath the surface there are signs that such policy spaces are also vulnerable to co-option by mainstream interests, particularly where ideas of 'innovation' and technology transfer are in operation.

Using a combination of interviews (with farmers, farmers' representatives, researchers, and government officials), field observations, and analysis of a recent FAO consultation on agroecological innovation (FAO 2018b), this article puts critical pressure on some of the claims of these high-level processes regarding the governance of agroecological innovations. Building on grassroots innovation theory (Smith et al. 2014; Hermans et al. 2016), this paper asks the following key questions: are these policy processes capable of including and benefitting the communities at the front line of the struggle for local and sustainable food? If so, what qualifications need to be put on key terms like 'innovation' and 'local governance' to ensure the principles of agroecology are maintained and the benefits to rural areas maximised.

An incomplete alternative food system: The 'black-face spoonbill brand' initiated by the National Park Headquarter in Taiwan

De-Jung Chen (National Cheng-Kung University, Taiwan)

Wei-Ju Huang (National Cheng-Kung University, Taiwan)

'Alternative food networks (AFNs)' is an embracing term to cover the existing networks of producers, customers and other actors that embody alternatives to standardize and industrial mode of food supply (Murdoch et al., 2000). Here 'alternatives' may refer to organic farming, direct selling, and/or an ethical way of producing that connects to certain values, like fairness, animal welfare, and environmental friendly (Renting et al., 2003). Now AFNs have been widespread built for agro-product promotion and rural development, not only by the producers but also by the governments.

The brand 'black-face spoonbill' (黑琵牌), which emphasizes the value of environment friendliness in fish farming, was initiated by Tai-Jiang National Park (TJNK) Headquarter of Taiwan. TJNK Headquarter created the brand for the surrounding fishing farmers; as return, the fish farmers were requested to so shallow fish farming, which is more environment friendly from TJNK Headquarters' perspective. Although the plan of black-face spoonbill brand eventually failed, it is a negative example to show the complexity of the governance on AFNs. By reflecting on the case of black-face spoonbill brand, this article aims to explore the possible consequences of the governance on AFNs and further to examine the influential factors of AFNs building. Text analysis (in related reports) and qualitative interview (with the stakeholders in this project) are the main methods.

Marketing the Markets – supporting re-localisation of rural food economy thru facilitation of local produce markets

Rebecca Jones (Prifysgol Bangor University, UK)

Eifiona Thomas Lane (Prifysgol Bangor University, UK)

Luke Prosser (Prifysgol Bangor University, UK)

Local produce markets are spaces of community interaction, embodied food experiences and most vitally, selling and sharing spaces. Historically, rural markets faded away, while food and drink supply chains became longer. Produce markets are currently experiencing new waves of customer interest as they offer benefits to slower rural tourism and ensure that food grown locally, can be purchased locally. However, markets associations, often social enterprises by their key functions, are constantly challenged by administrative loads for their organisation and successful marketing. Stallholders in a small business struggle to volunteer time to organise such key activities, including recruiting new entrants, which are especially important in rural areas where both potential stallholders and customers are dispersed.

This paper discusses findings from action research collaboration, focusing on facilitation of local produce markets in rural towns across North Wales. Evidence is presented from a survey of market stallholders and interviews with stakeholders involved in supporting and developing these markets. Within the context of hopeful rural governance, it is suggested that a locally customised