

PUBLIC POLICIES AND FOOD SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA

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The process of politicizing food sustainability in the city of Brasília: towards a transition of the local food system?

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» Introduction

There is widespread recognition in the literature that food systems are responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, the depletion of groundwater resources, the irreversible loss of biodiversity, and other socio-environmental damage (Clark et al., 2019; Béné et al., 2020). Unsustainable food systems lead to the destabilization and loss of the regulatory functions on which human life depends (Campbell et al., 2017; Springmann et al., 2018). Many studies have thus highlighted the need for a transition to sustainable food systems (Stassart et al., 2012; Hinrichs, 2014; Jurgilevich et al., 2016; Caron et al., 2018; Springmann et al., 2018; Vermeulen et al., 2020). Given this need, cities are regarded by several authors as places of social mobilization and as important drivers of the innovation that can make this transition to sustainable food systems a reality (Brand et al., 2019).

Historically, urban food policies have aimed, above all, to guarantee the supply of food to large cities, thus guaranteeing urban consumers a sufficient and diverse food supply (Daviron et al., 2019). In Brazil, this issue has gained in importance since the 1970s due to the acceleration of the rural exodus, which has led to the concentration of its population in cities. According to data from the last demographic census, in 2010, the urban population accounted for 85% of Brazil's total population (IBGE, 2011).

Largely the responsibility of the federal government, the supply logistics of Brazil's major cities were given a structure with the creation of the National Supply System (SINAC) and the Supply Centers (Ceasa) network, which had been planned for the nation's cities as early as the 1970s (Cunha, 2006). The municipalities were responsible for only part of the food policies. Compared to other issues such as transport, housing and the environment, the food system was considered far more of a rural concern than an urban one (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999).

The situation changed in the 1990s with the advent of high prices for agricultural commodities. As a result of these price rises, Brazil's poorest urban populations had serious problems accessing food (Hoffmann, 1995), leading municipalities to develop their own public food policies (Hawkes & Halliday, 2017). The city of Belo Horizonte was a pioneer in this area, implementing actions to combat food insecurity, which, in part, served as a model for the Zero Hunger Program, launched in 2003 by the Brazilian government with the aim of eradicating hunger and extreme poverty in Brazil (Rocha & Lessa, 2009).

In recent years, urban food issues seem to have become more diverse and complex in nature. Though the need to supply urban populations with sufficient quantities of healthy food continues to be an issue of concern for policymakers, public action seems to be more expansive in nature, as it relates to the sustainability of the entire food system (Dury et al., 2019). Specifically, these challenges result in a desire to transform a system that, on the one hand, involves the reduction of the waste, by-products and excessive pollution generated by all processes linked to the production and consumption of food (Alexander et al., 2017) and, on the other, to the reduction of the food system's contribution to climate change (Vermeulen et al., 2012), and lead ultimately to the improved management of natural resources used in food production (Westhoek et al., 2016), which equates to influencing agricultural production models to make them more sustainable (Eakin et al., 2017). Moreover, in many cities dependent on distant food supplies, the stated desire of a growing number of their inhabitants, especially the wealthier and educated classes, to reduce the environmental and social impact of their food consumption involves a desire to reconnect the city with the countryside (Bricas, 2019).

Although Brazilian cities account for a large part of the country's population and have acquired considerable economic and political weight, the question of how urban actors face these new challenges is still little researched in Brazil, albeit with some exceptions (Preiss et al., 2017; Niederle & Schubert, 2020). Nevertheless, Brazil's agrifood system, which is largely dominated by agribusiness and supported by federal public policies, is strongly criticized for its disastrous socio-environmental effects (Sauer, 2018).

The issue that we propose to address in this chapter is the transformation of the initiatives promoting the transition to more sustainable food systems that are emerging in Brazilian cities into policy, all within a context of the dominant position agribusiness enjoys in the country. We chose to address this issue through a case study of the city of Brasília, including the urban area of the Federal District. This area is home to 3 million people and has witnessed sustained demographic growth (IBGE, 2019). As the capital of Brazil, Brasília has considerable symbolic and political weight. It is also one of the cities with the highest income per capita in Brazil (IBGE, 2020).

On the basis of this case study of Brasília, we aim to answer the following two questions in this chapter: Which actors are working to transform food systems in Brasília? What actions are they engaging in to turn the issue of food system sustainability into the subject of local public action? Through these research questions, we aim to provide a wider analysis as to whether the politicization of the food issue in one of Brazil's major urban agglomerations is helping to bring about a specific and structural transformation of the food system and make it more sustainable as a result.

►► Methodology

In order to explain the processes of development and change in public action as it relates to food systems in Brasília, a methodology was applied that involved, first of all, analyzing the main documentary sources: academic literature, opinion articles, and the websites of different groups of actors involved in debates on food.

Next, a round of interviews based on the sociology of public action was conducted. This approach analyzes the interactions between actors, the ideas they hold, and the places where these ideas, which are essential elements of the process of politicizing a social fact, are debated and disseminated (Hassenteufel, 2011; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2012). Public action is, therefore, approached as a coalition of actors who seek to create alliances around causes, groups moved by a system of shared beliefs or by a shared perception of a public problem and the solutions that are best suited to address it (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). This analysis grid was applied in 36 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2017 and 2019 with actors involved in the food sustainability debate in Brasília: producers, chefs, members of cooperatives and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSAs) initiatives, social movements linked to consumption, technical services, and local administrations in charge of food-related issues. The sample of interviewees was selected, firstly, on the basis of their participation in events, seminars and district councils discussing food-related issues and, secondly, using the snowball method, through which a key respondent provides access to other contacts for interview (Noy, 2008).

This research work was complemented by a workshop held in Brasília in May 2019 and attended by several of these actors. The workshop provided an opportunity to analyze the innovations and actions implemented with the aim of making the food system more sustainable, using a methodology developed as part of the URBAL project (Valette et al., 2020).

►► Stakeholders' involvement in the food policy-making process in the city of Brasília

In Brasília, the process of putting the sustainability of the food system on the policy agenda has been a gradual one. It began with work that was initially carried out by actors who supported the implementation of alternative approaches to agriculture, such as agroecology. It is only in more recent times that downstream actors of the value chains – i.e., consumers and intermediary consumers (restaurants and schools) – have come together to create a network of actors bound by certain ideas and positions relating to food sustainability.

The boost provided by the advocacy coalition on agroecology

The actors who first put the issue of transforming Brasília's food system on the political agenda were members of another alliance built around the agroecological transition. This alliance was the initiative of a small group of alternative-agriculture-supporting agronomists who created the Association of Ecological Agriculture (AGE) in Brasília in 1988. Some of these AGE activists entered the public sphere in the 1990s,

occupying positions of responsibility in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply, in the technical assistance and rural extension services of the Federal District (Emater-DF), and as district deputies (Sabourin et al., 2019). Some of these actors maintained their links with agriculture, owning agroecological or organic plots.

The actors in this group shared a particular vision of agricultural science, based on the principles of non-use of pesticides and respect for natural ecosystems (known as ecological agriculture). Acting across a range of decision-making spheres, these actors stimulated a slow process of institutional change in the 1990s by spreading agroecological ideas. Under their influence, a strong advocacy coalition was formed around agroecology, including many representatives of public bodies, producers, and associations. The activism of this coalition and the circulation of agroecological ideas within political authorities led to the development and implementation of public action in support of agroecology in the Federal District (Sabourin et al., 2019).

Given Brasília's status as the consumer market for most of this organic and agroecological production, a number of urban actors, such as the Ceasa, the Federal District's State Secretariat of Agriculture, Supply and Rural Development (Seagri-DF), the Federal District's Secretary of State for Education (SEE-DF), and other local services joined the advocacy coalition on agroecology to create fresh markets for organic and agroecological products and to supply canteens and restaurants in public schools and other public establishments (hospitals, nursing homes, and shelters for the homeless) in the Federal District. In doing so, they contributed significantly to making the food issue a subject of local public debate and to triggering the first public measures towards a transition to more sustainable food systems.

In 2014, these actors formed a working group on food procurement for schools of the Federal District, which allowed for the circulation of ideas on alternative food systems among new groups of actors, in particular nutritionists and SEE-DF officials responsible for the supply of school meals. These ideas led to a gradual change in the way food is supplied to the city.

In 2012, the government of the Federal District launched the Agricultural Production Procurement Program (Papa/DF) under District Law No. 4.752, of February 7, 2012, in support of other federal food procurement measures, such as the National School Meals Program (PNAE) and the Food Acquisition Program (PAA). The Papa/DF enables the government of the Federal District to purchase food directly from small rural producers and social organizations operating in the agricultural sector. It includes a mode for the procurement of agro-ecological and organic products for distribution at public establishments, such as school and nursery school canteens (Sabourin et al., 2019).

Farmers' markets provide another cornerstone of public policy in support of sustainable food and have grown significantly in size in Brasília, under the leadership of Emater-DF, Ceasa and Seagri-DF. In 2019, there were about 50 farmers' markets in the Federal District, the best known of them being the Ceasa's family farming and agroecological market. According to Emater-DF, the city's high levels of schooling and income account for the high demand among its consumers for healthy food, which thus explains the success of these markets. Health concerns are greater in higher

income brackets. Enjoying greater wealth, they are better able to buy more expensive organic and agroecological products. Given that the farmers of the Federal District produce on a small scale, farmers' markets are their main distribution channel, as they do not produce in sufficient quantity to access institutional markets.

Emater-DF, a central actor in the transition of the local food system

As the body responsible for implementing most of the policies in support of agroecology and organic production, Emater-DF has played its part in bringing together the rural world and the urban food actors in Brasília.

A significant proportion of the technical support that Emater-DF provides for agroecology is focused on the smallholdings of family farmers. This public organization has a large number of technicians covering the area devoted to family farming in the Federal District, which has resulted in close ties between technical support staff and family farmers. On interview, an Emater-DF official said: "What perhaps makes the difference here is that there is a larger number of technicians. As well as providing focus, you get to give this personalized service, to go to the smallholding. At other Emater-DF offices, they do a lot of work with the collective."

This in-depth knowledge of the actors involved in family farming allows Emater-DF to provide a key link between those responsible for overseeing urban food policies and farmers. As a result, cooperation between Emater-DF and the agencies responsible for family farming support programs and federal and local procurement, among them the National Supply Company (Conab), Seagri-DF and SEE-DF, has been strengthened. According to an Emater-DF program manager, these organizations have strong, interdependent ties:

We ourselves depend on their resources, on the signing of the agreement between the Secretariat and the Ministry, which gives us the ability to take this policy out to the farmer. (...) And the Secretariat depends on us to reach out to farmers and engage with them.

Cooperation between Emater-DF and various actors, including Seagri-DF and the social family farming and retailer movements, led the government of Cristovam Buarque to launch the Program for the Vertical Integration of Small Family Production (PROVE) in 1995. The objective of PROVE was to sell local products in large supermarkets in Brasília. However, the program was quickly shelved following a change of government in the Federal District (De Carvalho, 2005).

Emater-DF operates directly in the urban space through various programmes. First, Emater-DF implements an urban agriculture program. According to its manager, this program aims "to promote, first and foremost, food production in urban areas." In reality, however, the volume of food produced in urban areas is very small and the program focuses more on educational activities, offering support for community gardening, mainly in schools:

We essentially work with schools, health centers, hospitals, youth detention centers, Papuda Prison, government bodies, be it education, health, etc. (...) Our biggest client is schools. We go to around 100 to 120 state schools in the Federal District every year. The work we do in schools is mainly teaching-related. That's the focus.

According to Emater-DF, this action is underpinned by the belief that by educating students at urban schools about agroecology, they can influence their consumption patterns and encourage them to consume healthier and more natural products: “We saw that as educators we can train new consumers. So for rural producers to have people who eat more vegetables and fruits (...) It’s interesting for us to have good consumers.”

Second, Emater-DF’s Center for Technological Training and Rural Development (Centrer) offers a series of food technology courses given by specialists. This center was initially located outside Brasília and mainly dealt with requests from the rural population. Its main objective is to increase the ability of farmers to add value by enhancing their capacity to process basic agricultural products. Centrer later moved to the central area of Brasília, close to the main organic food market, in the Ceasa complex. The training courses offered to family farming communities were gradually made available to the urban population, to directly attend to the requests of city dwellers looking to produce their own processed food and be less dependent on the food industry, or to sell healthy, homegrown processed products. In the words of Centrer’s head:

We have the housewives, the people who have very large gardens and want to use that space in some way and fill it with fruit trees, vegetables or medicinal plants. And then there are the social welfare institutions. We receive a lot of requests from churches, support centers, spiritual centers, and from organizations working with vulnerable people. These are where requests are popping up and where people are getting involved. (...) We try to bring farmers and city dwellers together at our training sessions, where they can interact with each other, and where they can promote what they have to offer and strike up relationships. Farmers’ markets provide a place where the producers can sell their products and build up their networks of consumers.

Through the Centrer’s actions, Emater-DF is also involved in safeguarding food heritage, an issue that urban populations are becoming increasingly aware of through the consumption of non-conventional food plants (PANCs) (Kinupp & Lorenzi, 2014). According to one of the Emater-DF officials interviewed, many city dwellers want to reconnect with traditional culinary practices: “There are many community vegetable gardens scattered around and they want to work in this way rather than follow the conventional practices showcased at the markets. They want to bring back the culture of our grandparents and parents in working with these types of products.” In response, Centrer held a training course on cultivating food products based on PANCs (mainly preserves and seasonings).

Third, although more sporadic and indirect in nature, the central role played by Emater-DF has also helped bring together rural and urban actors involved in the transformation of food systems. For example, a number of chefs who work at restaurants in Brasília and are looking to create cuisine based on local, agroecological and regional products regularly go through Emater-DF to contact agroecological producers and access information on the Community-Supported Agriculture (CSAs) initiatives in the Federal District. One of the heads of the Emater-DF program said: “The most common thing is for people from restaurants to get in touch with Emater-DF to find out who the farmers are (...) Then they call the farmers and buy from them at the gate. It is a niche area that is growing.”

Several restaurants that have adopted a more alternative approach by offering, for example, a range of dishes based only on agroecological and/or local products, confirm the key role Emater-DF has played in making a wide variety of food available in Brasília. One of them said: “We had help from Emater-DF. They took us to Ceasa, to rural settlements and agroecological producers.”

►► Citizen initiatives that strengthen the advocacy coalition

Some Federal District inhabitants with an awareness of the issue of sustainable food have initiated actions that go beyond individual consumption choices of agroecological and organic food. For example, Brasília’s first collective vegetable gardens were created 20 years ago by citizens who wanted to carry out agroecological experiments in urban spaces. The manager of Emater-DF’s urban agriculture program said: “Our oldest community vegetable garden, in São Sebastião, must have been created around 15 to 20 years ago. It was the first community vegetable garden in the Federal District. (...) So, they took action, but they didn’t have the program.”

Emater-DF believes that citizen investment in collective vegetable gardens in the Federal District is gradually increasing, especially among Brasília’s wealthier classes, as they look to create new social ties:

In terms of urban agriculture, it is the middle and upper-middle classes that have taken action. (...) These are people who are not looking for a financial return, for cheap food. They are concerned about the city and the environment, and they have money to spend and time on their hands, which is the most difficult thing. Something else that motivates a lot of people is the chance to interact.

Some citizens involved in these urban agriculture initiatives have created urban agriculture groups as part of the Nossa Brasília Movement.¹ Although it is not particularly well organized, the group is led by some prominent figures with strong links to the advocacy coalition on agroecology, which successfully campaigned for the introduction of a law in 2012 (Act No. 4.772/2012) that provides specifically for policies supporting urban agriculture in the Federal District. This law was complemented by Act No. 6.671/2020, permitting the use of underutilized public and private urban spaces in the Federal District for the development of urban agriculture activities. The law prohibits the use of pesticides and the planting of genetically modified plant species in these spaces.

In terms of consumption, food safety issues are seen as a major topic of public interest, not least because of health scandals, such as “Operação carne fraca,”² which are frequently brought to light by health control agencies. Though still somewhat limited today, the political activism of Brasília’s consumers can be traced back to the late 2000s and their participation in organizations such as the CSAs and the international Slow Food movement.

Created in November 2009 in Brasília, the Convivium SlowFood Cerrado is made up of actors closely involved in food issues (chefs, consumers, academics, members of

1. <http://www.movimentonossabrasilia.org.br> (accessed on 19 May 2020).

2. In 2017, “Operação carne fraca” (Operation “weak meat”) revealed a meat adulteration scheme involving at least 30 slaughterhouses.

cooperatives, urban farmers, etc.). The group devotes its energies to highlighting the biodiversity of the Cerrado (a vast tropical biome covering more than 20% of Brazil, where natural vegetation is gradually being replaced by cash crops and pastures) and activities implemented by traditional communities to conserve it through its sustainable use as food (Duarte et al., 2020). The Convivium organizes food festivals that promote the Cerrado's biodiversity products, undertakes projects supporting the sustainable use of the biodiversity of the biome, and carries out actions that aim to combat food waste. These actions take the form of "Disco Xepa" festivals, during which volunteers are invited to gather and cook food that would otherwise be disposed of because it does not meet trading standards. The meals are then served free of charge. In Brasília, these events are carried out with the support of Emater-DF and Ceasa, which lays on the facilities and equipment of Centrer, next to the main organic and agro-ecologic farmer's market.

Although the public authorities do not develop projects directly with the Convivium SlowFood Cerrado, they do support its political actions. In the words of one manager of Emater-DF:

SlowFood is seen as a way of shaking people up and saying: It can be done. We can change mindsets and habits. They have the expertise for this. Centrer provides SlowFood with the physical support it needs in terms of machinery and equipment. In that respect, we do meet demand.

In recent years, the inhabitants of Brasília have engaged in many other initiatives in an effort to transform the way in which food is distributed and consumed, such as CSAs, the number of which have grown exponentially. The conferences organized by the European members of CSAs at the University of Brasília since 2012 have prompted some NGOs, among them Mutirão Florestal, to create their own CSAs in Brasília, the first three of them founded in 2015. The political activity of these pioneering initiatives led to the formation of a support network for the creation and consolidation of CSAs in Brasília, through communication channels on social networks, emails, and round tables. Within a short time, working groups were set up and the CSA Brasília website was created,³ while newspapers and TV and radio programs reported on the initiative. The objectives of the CSA Brasília Network are "to promote a supportive and healthy culture of food production and consumption." By 2020, the city had 36 CSAs, the largest such community in Brazil.

However, several of Brasília's CSAs have a very unstable and small membership base (members are known as *co-agricultores* or "farmer partners") and have problems in finding the money to continue operating. On interview, CSA members said the movement's political activity is limited, with each CSA focusing mainly on its own production and marketing activities.

In the final analysis, many of the initiatives set up to create direct supply chains between producers and consumers lack sufficient influence to obtain political support. In the words of one of Seagri-DF's program managers:

A lot of things happen without the support of the state. A lot of farmer's markets operate without any government regulation. There are CSAs that operate outside

3. <https://CSAbrasilia.wordpress.com/>

government control. In terms of consumption, though, we can see that the biggest support the market can give is to strengthen the institutional market, which I believe is the main instrument that we now have in public policy for promoting sales and distribution.

These comments highlight the weakness of networks and the relative lack of political power that urban consumers have in transforming food systems. Consumer demands for change remain relatively unstructured and depend heavily on the activism of other groups. In this whole issue, the alliance around agroecology and organic farming is undoubtedly the most active, though there are two other groups of actors that also influence the political process as it relates to sustainable food: nutritionists and chefs.

► Changing attitudes among nutritionists

Nutritionists are regarded by producers as key actors that can truly bring their influence to bear in the transition towards more sustainable urban food systems, as explained by a representative of a farmer cooperative of the Cerrado:

The challenge is to put what is ours on the market. Everyone's heard of soda, right, but no one knows about *coquinho*⁴ juice. So, the interesting thing here is to change this idea that "what is ours is exotic, and what in the industry is commonplace." If chefs and nutritionists don't want to put it on their menus, they don't. We need to start doing is to change that mindset.

In the past, many nutritionists responsible for implementing food procurement programs were reluctant to include a certain proportion of family farming products on menus, particularly in school canteens. The food issue is widely addressed in Brazilian cities and links are made between food and health, with the focus on the nutritional characteristics of food being understood in a broad sense. In other words, food safety characteristics of these family farming products are taken into consideration. Generally speaking, family farming and agroecology products are often seen by nutritionists as posing more of a health risk than food industry products, despite the fact that agro-industrial production involves the use of a large number of pesticides and chemical additives. A Seagri-DF program manager said:

Nutritionists do not generally put typical family farming products on menus. They tend to go for cornstarch biscuits, margarine and bread, for example. But they have a problem putting homegrown things like a jam from the Cerrado biome on school menus and in school lunches.

As part of the working group on food procurement, the members of the advocacy coalition on agroecology started to put forward their ideas for closing the gaps between family farmers and nutritionists. According to the heads of Emater-DF's food procurement programs:

When we were in the working group, we raised the nutrition team's awareness of this. (...) When we were putting the menu of vegetables and fruits together, we worked as one to decide which ones to order. They also made a commitment to put seasonal products on the menu too.

4. *Coquinho azedo* is a fruit of the Cerrado biome.

Many nutritionists have agreed to come on board as a result of this effort to change mindsets, with many industrially processed food products now being omitted from menus at public establishments. A school nutrition head at the Federal District's Ministry of Education (SEE-DF) said:

Some 80% of our items are now based on natural products or are minimally processed. And only three of 62 items are ultra-processed. (...) We now serve 30 family farming items out of these 62, including fruits and vegetables. We have seen exponential growth in supply from family farming since 2015. We've been serving products since 2013, but since 2015 we've seen exponential growth, which has also come about because of the strength of the Federal District decree, and because the ministry's representative – the director – has formed a monitoring group with the Ministry of Agriculture's head of institutional procurement and with Emater-DF's head of public procurement.

Passed in 2015 and known as the School Canteens Act, Federal District Decree 36.900 prohibits, within the Federal District school network (commercial canteens located in schools, areas next to educational establishments, parties, events, etc.), the sale of certain foods that are particularly harmful to the food and nutritional safety of children (soft drinks, chocolate, sweet biscuits, fried food, etc.).

As a result of their interaction with the other actors that make up the working group on food procurement, the scope of action of the SEE-DF's nutritionists was expanded to include issues that extend beyond nutrition. Though their main focus initially was the health and nutritional quality of food intended for supply to school canteens in the Federal District, they gradually began implementing sustainable food education projects. A SEE-DF nutritionist said:

When we talk about school food, we always talk about school lunches and whether food is nutritional enough or not. But what we forget is that it's all a question of education and that we have to work on educating children. That's why we include food and nutrition education activities on the school timetable for a few weeks. Last year, for example, we focused on food waste. There's a week devoted to cultural heritage, which is when we include food heritage.

► Chefs as intermediaries

Restaurant chefs are seen as key players in the transformation of urban food systems because they play a direct role as intermediaries between producers and end consumers. Restaurants in Brasília that have said they are part of the alternative movement have shown an interest in buying agroecological produce from local producers. Among other things, this creates ties with CSAs.

Some restaurants in Brasília have set up their own CSAs, such as Girassol restaurant, which now supplies itself. Due to a wide range of organizational constraints, however, the relationship between CSAs and restaurants in Brasília is not straightforward, as confirmed by the representative of a CSA:

I think the most difficult thing is the organization of the restaurant. A lot of restaurants also need to take a more flexible approach to keep up with production because production is seasonal and there are different periods. (...) A restaurant might have the same set dishes, but we can't always have the same food, because of seasonality.

Some restaurants and CSAs have tried to bring in and establish organizational innovations, not least through the creation of Communities Supporting Restaurants (CSR). The CSR principle is based on trust, with restaurant owners agreeing to buy a basket of produce, on a regular basis, from a community of farmers whose products and production methods they are familiar with. This innovation has not been successful, however, as the representative of a CSA pointed out:

We were trying to make the CSR the same kind of partnership as we have with the CSA. So, you pay at the end of the month. (...) We knew that to turn the CSA into the CSR, into a restaurant supporting farming, or something like that, that we would need them to give us a list of essentials that they use every week, on average. The problem was none of the restaurants ever sent us a list. We had a basic list that we talked about in a meeting, and which was written down, but we didn't know exactly what they wanted from one week to the next.

The way in which the restaurants of Brasília influence the transformation of food systems is not so much related, therefore, to the direct impact of their culinary activities than to the things they say in the public sphere. Some Brazilian chefs with big reputations play, in fact, major roles as political entrepreneurs, as one of the representatives of the Central do Cerrado cooperative pointed out:

None of the restaurants that take this approach have the capacity to use these products in any great volume. It's different with the most famous chefs (...) In terms of actual consumption, it doesn't have a major direct impact. (...) If a chef is making dishes with Kalunga monkey pepper, they'll only buy a kilo every six months, but when they talk about monkey pepper in a feature in the local newspaper *Correio Braziliense*, it generates a lot of indirect sales.

This has been confirmed by a number of well-known gourmet restaurants in the city, which use their fame to get certain messages across, as the owner of one of them said:

We understand that we are not just a restaurant, and I've spoken about us wanting to be a place where we are free to create – both in the kitchen and in terms of concepts – a place that needs to have an appeal, that is really focused on the producer, on sustainability, on the fairest way of doing business with partners, and which is fair with customers too. (...) Sometimes you might not use the product, but you can try to have an impact by talking about the Cerrado and promoting local products, for example.

Some of these restaurants are taking part in an initiative called “Panela Candanga.” A network of restaurants created in 2016 by a group of leading chefs, it aims to “discover and rediscover the role of Brasília in national cuisine.”⁵ The network organizes events showcasing local cuisine, including regular Panela Candanga fairs in Brasília. According to its website, these actions help establish a narrative, a story, that gives local cuisine solid roots:

Besides extolling the virtues of dishes made with local ingredients, the chefs go a step further and draw attention to what is behind this creative process, where these products are from and how they reach Brasília's tables. The aim is to provide a different culinary experience, to present, through cuisine, a Brasília unknown to its people, and to bring to each dish the history of its ingredients. It is to offer new ways of understanding food and to identify each mouthful with our own culture.

5. <http://panelacandanga.com.br/sobre/> (accessed on 5 September 2020).

Brasília's chefs also take part in other events such as food festivals organized by the Convivium SlowFood Cerrado, cooking demonstrations in shopping malls and schools, and more exclusive initiatives. These include "Cerrado no Prato," which is described as a collective of chefs and other culinary professionals "that understands cuisine and tourism as levers for promoting the sustainable use of the Cerrado's sociobiodiversity and, at the same time, contributing to the biological and cultural recognition of Brazil's second largest biome."

The chefs and restaurant owners involved in activities and discussions on the transformation of the food system in Brasília operate in very different ways, however. While many of these actors limit their role to speaking about the transformation of food systems, a few put their words into practice, mainly by preparing food that respects certain principles that correspond to a certain vision of food sustainability, using recyclable and non-polluting packaging (some restaurants operate a zero-plastic policy, for example), setting up waste recycling programs, and taking part in food education activities, mainly in schools.

For example, the Ecozinha Institute brings together about 15 restaurants in Brasília and has as its objective: "to implement actions that result in the economic, social and cultural development of society and its institutions, with an emphasis on environmental education and conservation, promoting a new low-carbon, circular economy through food."⁶ The institute has rolled out a kitchen-waste management project, which involves setting up recycling containers near restaurants for the collection and treatment of waste, including glass, that is normally consigned to local landfill sites.

Another example of these actions involves a restaurant that does not have a set menu and prepares different dishes every day, depending on the products offered to them on the day by producers with whom they have long-standing relationships. The restaurant's chef and owner said: "It's a menu that evolves from bottom to top. It's not my head that makes the decisions; it's the food supply, which makes the restaurant more environmentally friendly, right? We don't have a set menu, which means we're not asking producers to provide the same food all year long." The chef is also an activist, both with Convivium SlowFood and her own restaurant, where she tells customers about the restaurant's guiding principles. The chef sees this stance as a political act: "I think that educating people through cooking is absolutely wonderful (...) I see it as a revolutionary act. There is something political about what you eat."

The owner of another establishment confirms this political stance, which prompts the restaurants of Brasília to promote ideas as part of their aim of transforming food systems:

The restaurant was born with the idea of giving talks and running courses. We're not just about selling things; this needs to be a place of transformation too. This is a learning process for us and for our customers. Our mission is to show that it is possible to eat better and pollute less.

Some chefs are backing up the actions taken by the advocacy coalition on agroecology by taking part in events that aim to bring urban and rural communities closer

6. <https://www.institutoecozinha.org.br/>

together. For example, the head of the Centrer spoke about a chef who regularly participates in Emater-DF training workshops held at the farmer's market:

We organize workshops from time to time and he comes here on a Saturday, which is the day of the farmer's market, and he brings all his expertise, picks up what he sees at the market, makes all these dishes, and shows them to the urban community. (...) The chef already knows who the producers are. He already knows with who he's buying the herbs from here. (...) The proximity between chefs, the urban community and the producers at the market is what creates this relationship of trust. They come into contact with each other at the market, and producers ask them to come and visit their properties.

A SEE-DF nutritionist spoke of the participation of a chef, who is also a professor of gastronomy at the Brazilian Institute of Higher Education (IESB), in the projects they are implementing to encourage school canteens to use more natural produce from family farming and fewer ultra-processed products. The project, which goes by the name of "Chef e Nutri na Escola" (Chef and Nutrition at School) aims, for example, to have a chef going into schools and working with cooks to create recipes using food procured through institutional purchasing. One of the nutritionists responsible for this project explained the role of the chef:

The aim is to use the food that we have in our school meals to develop cooking techniques with the canteen cooks and work with them on putting dishes together. (...) The chef works with the menu of the day and tries to come up with more innovative ways of preparing it. (...) He focuses on the issue of waste, because he saw for himself that the cooks were throwing a lot of food away.

According to one of the managers of SEE-DF's Food Procurement Program, the project is yielding tangible results in terms of the transformation of food systems, as it is connecting the culinary world with school meals:

It totally deconstructs the glamorous image that chefs have. (...) Chef e Nutri na Escola is the star of our program. It attracts the most attention, it's very Instagrammable, and we can see that it generates a lot of positive coverage in the media. We have a lot of other things going on. We have the Ministry of Health's public policies, and we have partnerships, etc. But it's the success of Chef e Nutri na Escola that drives the others and helps them all achieve success.

► Discussion

Analysis of the politicization of the food system transition in Brasília reveals that some urban populations (mainly those with higher levels of education and income) want to see change with regard to issues such as access to healthy food, the environmental and social conditions of food production (linked to the environmental degradation of the Cerrado or the protection of traditional communities, for example), waste management (especially packaging), and food waste. As it was described in Brazil, the social demand for the transformation of food systems is similar to that studied by authors in other continents, who have shown that urban actors – once mere consumers of food products supplied by the rural population – are now responsible for a large number of innovations. These urban actors take action and organize themselves in transforming the entire food system, from

production to waste management (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016; Debru et al., 2017; Hawkes & Halliday, 2017; Kropp, 2018).

The desire for change among actors relates to a demand to regain local control of public problems that are administered at national and international levels and where there is great deal of interference by powerful private actors in the agrifood industry. In this respect, the politicization of food issues in the city of Brasília is similar to that observed by other authors (Fouilleux & Michel, 2020). In fact, the actions taken by actors in the urban area of Brasília is clearly presented as a counterweight to food systems based on agro-industrial modes of production and distribution, described by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (2008) as “food empires.”

One of the peculiarities of Brazil is that, in recent times, this movement has been linked to the large-scale dismantling of public policies directly connected to the food system (Sabourin et al., 2020). This process began in President Dilma Rousseff’s second term in office, when Brazilian Congress representatives defending the interests of agribusiness instigated a series of measures aimed at limiting public support for family farming, which depends heavily on programs combatting food insecurity. The dismantling of these policies gathered pace under the President Temer administration and culminated in the closure of the National Council of Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA), one of the first actions of the President Bolsonaro administration on January 2, 2019, the first working day of the year.

In the face of these policy changes, some actors in Brasília have sought to continue with a process that began in the 1990s and organize resistance and opposition to a specific vision, widely promoted by federal government, of food systems based on the production of standardized and industrially processed food and promoting the consumption of ultra-processed products. The increased presence of family farming and agroecological products in the Federal District’s public food procurement programs, the emergence of programs supporting urban agriculture, the sudden growth of agroecological markets, and the advent of programs aimed at the development of chains of processed family farming products, and food education initiatives implemented with the help of chefs and nutritionists are all clear signs of a dynamic that aims to change public action in favor of sustainable food systems in the city of Brasília.

The shift towards more sustainable food systems was initially brought about by actors from the alternative farming world making their way into the institutions of the Federal District and circulating their ideas there. Our results show that the process of turning the issue of food system transformation into policy depends, in large part, on the actions of an advocacy coalition devoted to agroecological transition, in which Emater-DF plays an important role in linking the urban and the rural worlds. These results echo the findings of studies that have shown that alternative food networks are emerging in Brazil and are bringing family farmers excluded from agricultural modernization into contact with urban markets (Cassol & Schneider, 2015; Darolt et al., 2016).

However, while complementing these studies, our results also highlight the connection that has grown between networks traditionally formed by urban consumers and family farmers and other categories of actors, such as chefs and nutritionists.

In the case of nutritionists in Brazil, the actions taken by these actors were previously limited to issues of health quality control and improving the nutritional quality of food. We have shown that they now work within the policy framework that they

are part of (school food programs) in supporting the movement of resistance to the dominant food system, contributing to the development of various measures aimed at increasing the use of family farming and agroecological produce in schools.

The strengthening of ties between the world of nutrition and alternative food systems in the urban space has invigorated the broader political struggle waged by Brazilian nutritionists against the excessive consumption of processed and ultra-processed products, which leads to increased problems of overweight and obesity often associated with diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer (Martins et al., 2013). Nutritionists have thus manifested their opposition to the pressure imposed by major agribusiness groups, which have worked their way into the public domain in an effort to minimize the nutritional problems caused by junk food (Azevedo, 2019). At the end of 2020, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply issued a technical note requesting that the Ministry of Health remove the term “ultra-processed foods” from the Food Guide for the Brazilian Population, a document that provides the people of Brazil with guidance on eating a healthy diet and warns against the consumption of ultra-processed foods. Nutritionists reacted by issuing a resolution in support of the Food Guide.⁷

For their part, chefs and restaurant owners in Brasília are taking action through various channels and initiatives to ensure that food system sustainability becomes a public issue on the political agenda. In terms of the principles regulating meal preparation, chefs are expanding the boundaries by showing a preference for organic produce, prohibiting the use of monoculture products, and using only products purchased directly from producers. Some have drastically changed their culinary practices, for example, and are creating daily menus based on products supplied directly by farmers, making investments in remote rural communities, and taking part in social movements promoting sustainable food. Others are supporting initiatives on recycling and combating waste and the use of polluting products such as plastics. Our findings thus back up those of Niederle and Shubert (2020) in the city of Porto Alegre, which show that some restaurants involved in the veganism movement are engaging in practices, such as establishing close ties with local producers, that go far beyond the decision not to eat animal products.

Our results also indicate that some chefs promote local produce from the Cerrado biome to create a unique culinary identity for the city, in line with the conclusions of other studies (Zaneti & Brumano, 2019). They seek to spread the message about food system transformation more through their fame and presence at media events than through their purchasing and culinary practices.

This diverse positioning generates a certain tension among Brasília’s chefs. While there are some who look to radically transform the food system and engage in activism, there are others who believe that their identity as chefs gives them the freedom to become political entrepreneurs. These tensions are reminiscent of those reported on by Duarte et al. (2020) as a result of the elitism that stems from the “gastronomization” of local species. Similarly, the activist chef Tainá Marajoara, denounces the expropriation of Amazonian identities resulting from this “gastronomic spectacularisation” created by some famous chefs (Granchamp, 2019).

7. <https://www.fca.unicamp.br/portal/pt-br/comunic-2/comunicacao-noticias/comunicacao-not-sociedade/1527-mocao-de-apoio-ao-guia-alimentar-para-a-populacao-brasileira.html>

► Conclusion

While the creation of an extensive coalition of actors of the city of Brasília on food sustainability suggests that the issue of food system transition has gradually become a public problem, the actions undertaken by these urban actors have not translated into a coherent and structured public policy framework. The initiatives that have been implemented remain too fragile and poorly connected to bring about a shift in public action leading to sweeping reform of the food system.

The main reason for these limited changes is that the coalition of actors is still very weakened by diverging viewpoints. On the one hand, among the chefs, the representations of food and the modes of action to transform the system are not homogeneous. On the other hand, the relationship between the urban and rural world is still far from harmonious, as shown for example by the difficult relationship between restaurants, who have their own economic and commercial approaches, and CSAs, which seemingly cover a wide range of initiatives and are insufficiently robust and coordinated with each other. There is no question that there is a greater dynamic of change towards a sustainable food system in the city of Brasília, but it is still way from being a movement that could prevail against food industry and distribution actors, who are more powerful and organized.

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