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# Coexistence and Confrontation of Agricultural and Food Models

A New Paradigm of Territorial Development?

Foreword by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg  
With the Editorial Support of Sylvie Zasser

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# Chapter 19

## Confrontation Between Models: Coexistence to Navigate Between the Naivety of Consensus and the Violence of Polarisation



Patrick Caron

It is with complete humility that I admit that I cannot answer the main question posed by this book's coordinators: Do the coexistence and confrontation of agricultural and food models open the way to a new paradigm of territorial development?

At a time when the UN Secretary General convened a Food Systems Summit (September 2021) to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this approach raises a number of extremely relevant and useful questions. It is to be wholeheartedly welcomed, especially as we are witnessing a growing polarisation of positions on food, with there being no doubt in anyone's mind that the future of the planet and of humanity is at stake. Thus, there is a sometimes violent opposition between the proponents of local or organic food, who proclaim the need for quality, human and environmental health, and social justice, and the defenders of economic interests and the efficient organisation of supply chains, who raise the spectre of shortages. The former often demonise the latter, considering them vile poisoners of the planet and humanity. The latter, in return, denigrate the former, calling them irresponsible 'lefties' and 'champagne socialists'. The divides continue to grow between producers and consumers, between rural dwellers and urban ones, between defenders of ecological causes and advocates of economic pragmatism, between localists and globalists, all accentuated by the hyper-mediatisation of subjects and the functioning of social networks, without any structured spaces for dialogue.

The issue of coexistence therefore immediately raises that of confrontation. These two terms, brought together in this book's title, do not have the same status, and the 'and' that links them raises some questions. This detour is all the more relevant in the context of growing tensions, where divergent visions of the world and of society are pitted against each other. Is one or other of these visions the 'best', inviting each

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295

of us to pick up the banner, join the fight and delegitimise the other by means of caricatured arguments? Or do these archetypal visions invite us to find ways and means of rethinking development by articulating or generating a hybrid trajectory through their confrontation?

The book implicitly raises the question of the opposition between the different worldviews and the way in which they are manifested. The use of the term coexistence thus transcends the objective of a renewed look at diversity. From the outset, the notion of coexistence implies a hybrid dimension, both analytical in order to account for diversity, and normative in presupposing, even if it means exposing oneself to refutation, that coexistence would be preferable to uniformity. In any case, it implies being able to exist in the first instance.

After looking at the revitalisation of diversity, I propose to examine what the goal of coexistence entails and how it can be constructed, especially from a political point of view. In the conclusion, I will return to the notion of territorial development and to the way in which the detour through confrontation and coexistence makes it possible to inform a multiscale engineering of transformation.

## 1 Diversity's Welcome Return

Let us start by justifying the inclusion of diversity in the agenda, exploring its genesis and laying it out in some detail. The title of the book implicitly affirms the plurality of models. It was high time, too, after decades of advocacy of homogeneity and the promotion of a single model! Based on the need to control nature, increasingly so since de Serres (1603), on the one hand, and adopting a neo-Malthusian stance on the primacy given to the population explosion of the twentieth century and the increase in the availability of food, on the other, the promotion of a standard model was not, until recently, called into question. And this model worked well, allowing the world's population to double between 1960 and 2000, and, during the same period, leading to an increase in life expectancy and an increase in food availability per person (2500–3000 kcal per day per person between 1960 and 2000; Paillard et al., 2010).

The ingredients of the cocktail are well-known in some detail. Increased productivity of land, labour and capital, the absorption of labour into other economic sectors, and the use of fossil energy and chemical and genetic technologies are this model's main pillars. Processing of food products has also been based on the organisation of long supply chains to regulate supplies, ensure their diversity and achieve economies of scale through the concentration of resources in the agrifood sector. This has been accompanied by an organisation of the market based on lower consumer prices and on competitiveness as an engine for growth. In fact, what we have seen is a process of industrialisation, focusing on growth, efficiency and risk reduction. These developments could take place because of the low costs of so-called 'natural' resources. It was assumed that nature could and would provide the resources needed for production indefinitely, thus allowing, through technology and the use of cheap energy, to increase productivity and the volume of production and to fuel growth. Thus, the

ease with which capitalism allowed accumulation is largely due to the ecological surplus. Marx (1867) had already stated that the expansion of capitalism could only take place if abundant raw materials remained cheap.

This transformation, which we will call modernisation here, also known as the Green Revolution in the Global South, took place without any consideration of its detrimental side effects. These well-documented effects—the subject of increasingly frequent and strident warnings—have now become unacceptable to some people. Whether it is in response to environmental crises that point to the agricultural sector as the main culprit for climate change and biodiversity erosion, health crises linked to the sector's industrialisation, or social crises that have set the countryside alight, the need to change the model surfaces repeatedly. This is all the more true because increased food availability has not solved the problems of malnutrition. The number of people going to bed hungry every night is not decreasing despite the abundance of food (Caron, 2020), and the number of people suffering from pathologies associated with obesity is increasing dramatically and is fast becoming the number one public health problem (HLPE, 2017). The emergence of environmental conventions, following the Earth Summit in 1992, reflects the need for change at a global scale, sometimes provoking violent reactions. This change has been successfully embodied in innovations claiming to take care of externalities, such as ecological intensification (Griffon, 2013), but the so-called 'dominant' model remains, well, dominant.

Looking beyond the paradox of the growing divide between the calls for change and the impression that nothing is actually changing, we can observe an increasing number of so-called 'alternative' initiatives emerging in reaction to what mainstream agriculture today represents. We are in this way returning to the diversity of development models. Whether it an emerging reality or merely seems like one to us—after all, we do find it difficult to grasp all that deviates from the norm—, these initiatives are taking shape, becoming visible, federating, and seeking to lead. The examples of urban food policies, the explosion of 'organic' farming, and new behaviours with respect to the consumption of animal products are striking in this regard. Many other examples have also been presented in this book, showing how diversification, innovation, adaptation and transition contribute to the processes of differentiation.

However, such initiatives often run up against a threefold obstacle. First, they struggle to be recognised for the environmental and social benefits they offer and generate. They thus base themselves on criteria and indicators that are very different from those of production or productivity, which are the ones usually mobilised by mainstream agriculture and the only ones considered 'serious'. Second, they find it hard to convince those who are not already convinced. Third, they are unable to influence the development of public policies and more global frameworks of thought and action so that their effects can be translated at scales large enough to make a significant difference in the face of global challenges. These initiatives therefore tend to remain on the fringes and to be described as 'radical' by their detractors, and do not appear to be capable of driving structural transformations of food and agricultural systems at a significant scale.

## 2 Perceptions of Diversity: Scales, Debates and Instrumenta(lisa)tion

The debate on coexistence therefore leads us first to question the way in which diversity is perceived. It should be noted that the terms used to describe diversity vary, including in this book. They can refer to one or more of its facets and insist sometimes on the state—diversity, stylised model, coexistence—, sometimes on the process that makes it possible to achieve it—diversification, specialisation, hybridisation—, and sometimes on the implementation and articulation of the processes of action through innovation, adaptation or transition.

As the book's coordinators point out, the abstraction process that makes it possible to characterise diversity relies on the identification of ideal types and possibly on the development of typologies that differentiate between several of them. It is indeed a matter of undertaking a process of segregation, in the analytical sense of the term, aiming to distinguish and dissociate two or more objects of the same nature, whether they are spaces, resources, actors, goods, ideas, etc., often with a view to organising interactions or confrontations.

This abstraction process depends on the scale at which the analysis is conducted, and it is therefore necessary to agree on this scale and on the focus adopted. Indeed, what appears heterogeneous at one scale may appear homogeneous at another, and vice versa. The example of the diversity of farms is sufficient to convince us of this. The specialisation inherent in any production basin, whether it be animal products, export crops or non-food crops, for example, projects an appearance of homogeneity. On closer examination, the choice of a single production is most often accompanied by a wide diversity of structures, forms of organisation, practices and even productions, especially at the farm level.

We can also look at the example of the tensions that have accompanied the rise of environmental concerns in agricultural development thinking. Whereas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in America and Africa, isolation in nature reserves was seen as the best way of preserving nature and in particular emblematic species, this practice is now accompanied by an inclination to promote biodiversity in so-called 'ordinary' natural areas. Over the past 20 years, this debate has been reflected in the land sparing/land sharing controversy (Phalan et al., 2011), which links local transformations to global food and environmental issues. In order to combat the erosion of biodiversity attributable to agricultural activity, is it better to differentiate, through zoning, between areas to be isolated and those where agricultural production can be carried out by promoting an increase in production, in order to limit deforestation, curb the expansion of agricultural areas and spare protected areas? Or would it be better, in contrast, to limit or reduce intensification processes, even if it means that farming areas have to have a larger expansion? This debate requires a combining of views at different scales, as illustrated by the analysis of the impact of ecologisation measures implemented in the Amazon. For example, the archipelago of protected areas created locally to the south of the Amazonian agricultural frontier in Brazil, in northern Mato Grosso and southern Pará, constitutes

an obstacle to the expansion of development at the scale of the Amazon basin and in turn modifies the trajectories of local transformation in contact with each of these areas (Duheron, 2006; Caron, 2011).

The specialisation/diversification debate has already been expressed through the formulation of two antagonistic visions of agricultural development in reflections on the multifunctionality of agriculture and rural areas (Caron et al., 2008), especially in the Netherlands, a country in which the spatial dimension of processes and the need to segregate have historically been so important. Thus, there has been a clash between the proponents of a model known as ‘conventional’ in terms of the intensification and specialisation that it embodies, and the promoters of an alternative, so-called ‘integrated’ agriculture. Whereas the former rely on the capacity, if necessary, to compensate for the externalities generated and to organise the renewal and recycling of resources through circularity, and on the establishment of protected areas, the latter rely on diversification and environmental management of agricultural areas through agroecology. A similar distinction can be observed in the opposition between the advocates of differentiated policies based on the leveraging of local products in areas suffering from so-called ‘natural’ handicaps, such as mountain areas, and on reliance on the market and competitiveness elsewhere, and those who advocate that such policies should apply also to other agricultural spaces.

While the distinctions are indeed germane for each of these illustrations, the question that arises in these different cases is how—and at what scale—to recognise, organise and manage diversity, taking into account the effects—and externalities—that it generates locally or at a distance. In turn, diversity highlights the importance of the scale at which an analysis is conducted.

As we can see, agreeing to look at diversity means recognising and grasping it, and this exercise in abstraction is closely tied to the intention to act. It lends itself to very many forms of instrumentation. We can take the example of the opposition classically described between industrial agriculture and family farming. A third category, family business farming, identified by Sourisseau (2015) and his colleagues, and Bosc et al. (2018), leads us to think in a new way about the provision of agricultural support and the design of public policies. Defined by the use of permanent wage labour and by a partial disconnect between the farm and the family, it differs from corporate farming by the family control of capital. It is also fully integrated into the agro-industrial system. ‘As diverse as the typical family farming forms, [the family business farming forms] also have a role to play in the future of family farming’ (Sourisseau, 2018).

This instrumentation is therefore a vector as well as a support for policy design. Segregation, in the sense of marking a difference, opens the door to exclusion on the one hand, and to integration on the other. These two extremes drive a permanent dialectic made up of power relations built on duality and which contribute to it. History is replete with examples, such as South African apartheid (Lhopitalier & Caron, 1999) and the very existence of the Palestinian territories (Caron, 2011). Bouard et al. (2014) show how the integration/segregation dialectic offers a key to understanding the recompositions in New Caledonia.

By comparing the spatial translation of political segregation in latifundian Brazil, in South African rural areas and in the Palestinian territories, I have shown, however,

that limiting the reading of social dynamics to the two obvious factors of the partition of spaces, on the one hand, and the exclusion-appropriation pair, on the other, is not sufficient (Caron, 2011). While segregation structures precariousness, the control of flows of people, goods and merchandise through the porosity of borders between segregated spaces makes it possible to organise complementarity while forging and maintaining political control. Migration flows in apartheid-era South Africa or the closure of the Palestinian territories illustrate both the political dominations at work as well as the complementarities that transcend them, driven by the circulation of goods or the labour market. This analysis invites us to think about coexistence and thus to go beyond the Manichean dualism generated by confrontation and segregation.

### 3 Coexistence: The Challenge of Managing Diversity

Accepting the challenge of coexistence means choosing integration, as opposed to a segregationist vision of development, which is considered negative. Integration, guided by the principle of ‘common destiny’, should make it possible to better respond to the many development challenges (integration of spaces, populations, cultures, etc.).

Choosing coexistence also marks a commitment to a path of negotiation with the supporters of dominant positions and models, in order that alternatives can survive and flourish. This choice rejects both the status quo as well as the imposition of an alternative option through a revolution marked by confrontation and force. It is therefore a choice of mediation that is made, which, of course, cannot ignore the context in which it is embedded and in which it participates. It is just not possible to envisage such an option when one of the parties involved has no other view than to eliminate the other.

So what are the arguments that underpin and confirm the choice of living together? First, it is what I will call ‘heterosis’ by analogy with evolutionary biology, namely the increase in capacities and the gain in performance resulting from a confrontation between alleles. Second, this option makes it possible a priori to avoid the loss of control over trajectories inherent in any revolution, or the inertia generated by dominant power relations. By not putting all its eggs in one basket, it also relies on a building up of resilience (Bousquet et al., 2016) and thus on the capacity to adapt and find solutions to the shocks that are bound to occur. Finally, it reflects a rejection of exclusion, including for normative, ideological and even moral reasons. Integration has a positive connotation in current thinking and is perceived as necessarily more favourable than a segregationist vision, which leads to exclusion.

Thus, coexistence appears at first sight to be desirable and beneficial. However, it is necessary to analyse it closely, and in particular the performances and effects it generates. Similarly, the political positions of the actors involved are important, since they may condition the possibility of coexistence. Coexistence is a gamble that cannot be taken for granted, and this examination can thus help to choose between various possibilities. We may find that positions and power relations may be such



as to make any form of coexistence unimaginable, leaving only the possibility of revolution to bring about change. On the other hand, coexistence can be chosen as an option in which a progressive trajectory of change is undertaken in a targeted manner, step by step, consisting of transitions during which each of the coexisting components are transformed, thus contributing to the reconstruction of new configurations. Finally, motivated by their common destiny, a group of actors can also target a desired situation, and agree to organise, at the relevant scale, the best way to reach it together.

Thus by choosing coexistence, we are referring to a construction. Such a process presupposes that the terms of the confrontation between the elements present are clearly explained, whether they be actors, forms of organisation, actions, etc., and, in particular, of what may be controversial. It is therefore necessary to see, recognise, name, qualify and affirm the existence of these elements which we want to organise in a coexistence in order to characterise the synergistic and contradictory interactions—and the disagreements—that link them, and to identify the ways of organising and managing their coexistence. These paths are based on the design and implementation of incentivising, arbitration-based, regulatory and investment mechanisms at broader and more legitimate levels. It is therefore a dual process that has to be put in place: of regulation, as we have just seen, and of mediation to trigger a maieutic effect. As coexistence is not self-evident, it is necessary to clarify the positions of each party and to establish or re-establish the conditions for dialogue between them, and to identify the obstacles that need to be overcome. Once the disagreements have been clarified and recognised, the terms of an agreement can be worked out.

What is at stake concerns several registers, all of which have been illustrated by numerous examples in this book, and this in different regions of the world. Sometimes it is a matter of mobilising, facilitating access to and distributing resources—land or water, for example—or products to ensure the cohesion of the project and the community. In other cases, the main issue is the organisation of complementarities, by acting on flows, to renew resources and guarantee the sustainability of living together. The priority sometimes is to regulate competition, often expressed in a violent way in short supply chains at the local level, and other times is to prevent negative externalities. Finally, it may be a question of organising the production of positive amenities and of thus creating a heritage or an asset that can be leveraged collectively.

#### **4 The Territory as a Supporting Framework: Yes, but Not Only**

Management of diversity, collective projects, regulation mechanisms, articulations of innovation, adaptations and transitions: we have laid the foundations that make the territory an appropriate framework for organising coexistence, when it is desired and possible. Territories, which are forms of anchoring for living together, are indeed

relevant frameworks, at the scale that defines them, for strengthening the capacity of multiple actors to coordinate and define together the orientations to pursue (Caron, 2017). As Valette et al. (2017) state, and as illustrated by numerous examples in this book, ‘The territory is more than a mere framework mobilised for innovation. Localised agrifood systems illustrate this capacity of territories to stimulate the emergence of organisational and institutional innovations, to themselves become drivers of change .... Because of the proximities and the forms of social capital that constitute it, the territory is, in fact, a form of organisation that permits the internalisation of certain transaction costs, the minimising of economic risks, the facilitation of learning processes, the leveraging of know-how and traditional knowledge, the guaranteeing of the application of quality criteria to a product or a form of production ..., all the characteristics that make it an asset that can be mobilised in the processes of production....’

The social capital and the ‘living together’ issue that underpins it make the territory the vector and the active framework for the development of a pact based on diversity and its management to orient the future. I am indeed saying here that intentional management is required in the case of coexistence, whereas in many cases the territory itself is not managed, its transformations resulting from the distributed action of a large number of actors (Lardon et al., 2008).

In other words, even if the exercise is not free of pitfalls, particularly that of identity-based exclusion, nor of deceptions, such as the disguising of opportunistic greenwashing practices, it is at the level of the territory that the global challenges of climate change, renewal of resources, anticipation of migratory processes, the organisation of exchanges, and food security—if not overall security—, can be won. It is at this level that we can remake the world.

But organising coexistence at a given scale, that of the territory in question, is not sufficient. A significant transformation at the scale of global challenges cannot be achieved solely by the infinite reproduction of local initiatives. Several decisions that condition the behaviour of actors have to be taken at other scales or in other spaces: legislation, policies, organisation of markets, etc. These decisions pertain, in particular, to scales at which public policies are designed and implemented to stimulate local innovation, resolve tensions and conflicts, regulate processes of differentiation and competition, guarantee respect for rights and justice, and ensure territorial planning and cohesion. The transformations hoped for in order to meet the challenges of sustainable development are based on a combination of factors and processes, which constitute a regime (Garel & Rosier, 2008), some of which take place at a local scale, others at national, regional or international ones.

This observation invites us to call into question the myth of being able to scale up and out by replicating successful local processes, which are necessarily contextual. In contrast, a pact built locally can be exported to other places and to other scales in order to enable a project, a vision of the world, or a process of transformation. It can contribute, for example, to the design of appropriate national public policies, whether it is a question of supporting local dynamics or making relevant choices and addressing trade-offs. It becomes the basis for a global transformation process to be undertaken by relying on the complementarity of local innovations,

territorial dynamics, national policies and international frameworks. Such a pact thus modifies the terms of coexistence and its political management at other scales, infra and supra, including through the traces of clashes and confrontations whose marks it leaves behind. As an iconoclastic proposal, we can even suggest that desirable transformations can be initiated by the implementation of mediation processes at the scale at which alliances and coexistence are possible, before influencing the processes taking place at other scales and coming up against irreducible clashes.

## 5 Conclusion

As we can see, coexistence leads to a renewed relationship with diversity. Given that it implies a relationship to action, it even transcends the sole objective of a renewed look. While recognising this diversity in all things and at all scales, coexistence suggests the capacity to act on it, to manage it, to make it the basis of 'living together'.

It thus invites us to clarify the categories of analysis and biases, to enrich the dialogue between disciplines, to structure the interfaces between science and policy, and to (re)define the role of the researcher in the transformations underway. By highlighting the polysemy of the term 'model', which is at the same time an analytical archetype, an expression of a desired future, and a standard for action, the coordinators of this book pose in particular the challenge of the interface and the interactions that have to be promoted between these three acceptations. This is indeed a major issue that calls the researcher's posture into question and which the challenge of coexistence also raises.

By affirming diversity and the need to grasp it, coexistence sets the stage for confrontation. However, the goal is not so much to generate coexistence as to organise and manage it, and, for scientists, to specify what science and its disciplines can say about it.

Coexistence's political acceptance repudiates a dual vision of the world and the affirmation of opposing extremes, whether they be stylised representations or concrete realities. Without denying the possibility that this duality may indeed correspond to a fruitful stage of political implementation and organisation of confrontation, thinking about and constructing coexistence is in some ways an alternative to the major revolution that we will have to urgently undertake in the face of planetary challenges. Taking the path of coexistence is to bet that the world can be built by transcending the polarisation promoted by merchants of doubts and certainties, a polarisation exacerbated by the current hyper-mediatization pervading our societies. Coexistence offers an alternative to this polarisation, the outcome of which will certainly be either a procrastination resulting from power relations or a revolution with unpredictable effects. The challenge of coexistence is the goal of a utopia based on a trajectory that refuses to founder, on the one hand, into the naivety of a consensus incapable of overcoming the status quo and, on the other, into the ease, violence and uncertainty of dual confrontation.

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