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BALANCING FOOD HERITAGE, HEALTHY DIETS AND PLANETARY RESOURCES

UTAD - VILA REAL, (PT)

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

EDITED BY: Alberto Baptista and Catarina Cepêda
Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD)
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Addressing gender relations in localized agri-food systems research. A case study

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Abstract. Gender and food systems are interlinked in multi-dimensional and deep ways, but scientific literature show fragmented, disperse and partial approaches to the issue. Based on the initial works within an ongoing research project on values and sustainable food networks in Spain (called ALISOS), the present communication aims to outline some issues in which gendered power relations can be addressed within the framework of localized food systems. For this purpose a review of scientific literature has been arranged in order to identify interrelations among food systems and gender equity approaches, which results have been later discussed in several workshops to apply the main findings in a review of the initial formulation of the ALISOS Project. Our preliminary results suggest nine hypotheses to introduce a gender equity approach to localized food systems. Such hypothesis cover the different stages of the food chain (production, distribution and consumption). The conclusions stress the importance of including the domestic sphere in localized food systems research to unfold power relations and gender inequities within alternative food networks, and more generally the suitability to include a dedicated gender approach right in the design and development of SYAL research.

Introduction

Gender and food systems are interlinked in multi-dimensional and deep ways already addressed by scientific literature, but their interrelations still remain a rather fragmented, dispersed and partial body of knowledge (Dimasso et al., 2021). More precisely, an explicit aim of equity is widely recognized in the literature on Localized Agri-food Systems (Allen 2010). But gender issues in food systems have not been fully addressed yet in such an approach, especially in empirical terms. Based on a case study of reformulation of a research project on Localized Agri-food Systems, the present short paper aims to outline some building blocks on how to introduce a gender-sensitive approach within the research framework on Localized Agri-food Systems (in advance: SYAL).

Methods and sources

Based on the initial works within an ongoing research project on values and sustainable food

networks in Spain (called ALISOS), a review of scientific literature has been arranged in order to identify interrelations among food systems and gender equity approaches. The results have been later discussed in three online workshops of researchers (4 female, 1 male) in order to apply the main findings in a review and reformulation of the initial research objectives of the ALISOS Project. The first workshop consisted of a discussion on the different possible frameworks to apply gender analysis to SYAL research; the second aimed to create various hypotheses to be tested regarding three out of the four research axes of the project; and in the third workshop, a list of research activities to test the hypothesis constructed was agreed.

Theoretical framework and operational concepts

The relationship between gender and the food system has been addressed mainly by feminist studies, with particular emphasis on the gender

imbalance in food-related care work (Carney, 2011; Federici, 2012), and on the correlation between health (and usually non-communicable diseases), gender and food, with different expressions regarding class, culture and territories (Wardle et al., 2004; Hyder et al., 2005; Parsons, 2015). According to Allen and Sachs (2007), feminist food studies should address the connections between three dimensions of the gender-food relationship: (i) the material (women's food work in the labor market), (ii) the socio-cultural (women's responsibility for food-related work in their homes), and (iii) the corporal (women's relationship with eating). Feminist food studies does not generally include the perspective of ecological sustainability, and focuses mostly on consumption and downstream food system activities more closely linked to urban and Global North settings. On the other hand, alternative approaches

to food systems sustainability, such as agroecology, have incorporated the feminist approach (Trevilla et al., 2021). They highlight the close relation among women, food security and sustainable farming practices (Zuluaga et al., 2018; Khadse, 2017), and stress the social views and values given to reproductive and non-monetary work -often confined to the domestic space- in order to understand women's role in food systems (Bezner-Kerr et al., 2019), and unveil the subordinate role of women in peasant and rural communities as relevant keys to understand the specific political and collective action activities that women develop within the rural and farmers' movements (Siliprandi, 2010). Some agroecological literature points out the need to develop specific methodological strategies in order to properly address gender inequalities in research, such as non-gender-mixed deliberative spaces or gender-sensitive design of research activities (Khadse 2017). But, such literature is mainly developed in theoretical terms or based on disperse empirical data, focusing on case studies mainly restricted to peasant self-production in the Global South. Other specific approaches to food systems' multidimensional sustainability, such as sustainable food systems or urban food policies have very seldom addressed the question of gender power relations and inequalities. Di Masso et al. (2021) point out the need to introduce gender equity approaches within urban food policies, pointing out the need to take food out of the household domain in order to develop community food activities and

infrastructures. Njuki et al. (2022) recommend four key areas for empowering women in local food systems, and thus improving gender- and nutrition-sensitive programs: improving women's leadership and decision-making in food systems, promoting equal and positive gender norms, improving access to resources, and building cross-contextual research evidence on gender and food systems.

Background

The ALISOS research project aims to analyze Sustainable Food Networks (SFN) as chains of values, from the SYAL approach. To this end, fieldwork is being carried out in two Spanish territories with different characteristics. On the one hand, the region of Madrid, with a marked urban character and a high density of SFN projects, especially regarding distribution and consumption initiatives. On the other hand, the region of Castilla y León, with a strong rural component and a very low population density (25 inhabitants/km² average), a lower development of SFNs, and a greater weight of production in these (Sánchez et al. 2022). The project is structured along four axes of analysis of the AFN: (1) values; (2) spatial analysis; (3) governance and social networks; and (4) public policies. In the initial project bid, the gender perspective was mentioned, but it was not included in the statement of objectives nor was it developed in detail in the methodological plan.

Results

The review of the available scientific literature on gender and food systems led to a collective re-reading of the project objectives and the activities planned to cover each of them. From this debate, hypotheses were established linked to three of the four axes of analysis (since the group did not include any researcher involved in axis 2 (spatial analysis), covering the different links in the food value chains (production, distribution and consumption) in a cross-cutting manner; and questions to be introduced in the fieldwork in order to test these hypotheses. These results are described below:

Regarding Axis 1 (Values), it was discussed how food-related care work continues to be performed by women, who are responsible for the mental and manual preparation of food provision. The relationship between "good community" and "good health" continues to be one of the priority values and roles developed by women. Therefore, it will be necessary to obtain information on the household structure and, based on this, to know how the tasks related to food and care are organised. Also, in order to work on the hypotheses associated with values, it will be essential to know what

considerations women take into account when making decisions about their participation in the SFN and whether these motivations are linked to the tasks of care and attention to the family, traditionally assigned to women.

Based on such reflections, three hypotheses were established: (1.1) food is a domestic and care work performed mainly by women, which makes them more sensitive and closer to SFN, its objectives and products; (1.2) men involved in SFN are more sensitive to issues related to gender equity, especially in the space and process of production and distribution; and (1.3) women are more sensitive to achieving the value of "good community" in projects around cooperative strategies and processes, as opposed to competitive strategies and processes.

Axis 3 focuses on the Territorial Governance of SFN (Torres-Salcido and Sanz-Cañada 2018) and more specifically on the organization of logistics and the networks of actors involved in it. Within this axis 2 hypotheses were put forward: (3.1) in the area of production, women are protagonists of small-scale agroecological family farming that allocates its products for family consumption and the surplus for sale in local markets and short marketing circuits. This is a consequence of women's position and living conditions, related to their immediate and strategic needs; and (3.2) the presence of women in collective and associative spaces related to food movements and agroecological production is greater, however, when the social and/or political valuation and economic importance of the initiatives or decision-making spaces increases, women are relegated in the positions of power. To explore the veracity of these hypotheses, an analysis will be made of the motivations, interests and values that lead women to participate in agroecological production as well as in SFN. At the same time, the sexual division of labour and the position of women in the decision-making processes within this type of initiative will be analyzed.

With regard to Axis 4 (Public Policies), four hypotheses were established: (4.1) women involved in agricultural activities continue to work double (sometimes triple) hours related to care work and their condition of "support generation" (Camarero et al. 2009), which hinders their participation in the decision-making spaces and associative entities of the agricultural sector, whose schedules and formats do not facilitate the reconciliation between care-work and political participation; (4.2) the invisibility of women's work in the agricultural activity, as well as the high masculinization of the sector, hinder the incorporation of women into the spaces of debate and collective decision-making in the associative entities, under equal conditions, together with a tacit hegemony of certain non-inclusive ways of doing

and communicating (Siliprandi 2010; Khadse 2017; Zulueta et al. 2018); (4.3) Spanish Law 35/2011 on shared ownership of farms has not generated a greater incorporation of women as owners or co-owners of farms (Prados 2022), which prevents their access to specific public aid for women, as they are not eligible and remain invisible/informal; and (4.4) rural development policies incorporate some elements of affirmative discrimination, but they are not having a real impact on a greater and better incorporation of women into agricultural activity.

The way to validate all hypotheses from axes 1, 3 and 4 is proposed especially through qualitative social research techniques, especially by introducing specific questions in semi-structured surveys or non-mixed focus groups, or through ethnographic techniques such as life histories. Although they are generally seen as activities to be carried out with women, we emphasize the interest of questioning men with these hypotheses, in order to identify possible gender-based divergences in their positions and to identify ways of working on gender inequality with men involved in AFN.

Conclusions

We have performed a review of a research project, in order to develop gender-sensitive tools within a SYAL approach to Sustainable Food Networks. Our work states as a first conclusion the possibility and suitability to include a dedicated gender approach right in the design and development of SYAL research, including specific gender-sensitive tools in the methodology as a cross-cutting research axis for the different axis of the project. Such a gender-mainstreaming approach appears to be complementary -and not exclusionary- to the introduction of specific tasks for approaching gender issues in SYAL research, and indeed would allow the deployment of a comprehensive gender approach to all dimensions of research.

Our results suggest nine hypotheses to introduce a gender equity approach to localized food systems. Such hypotheses cover the different stages of the food chain downstream processes (production, distribution and consumption), and are thus useful for a longitudinal approach to the food chain. But, in order to include a more comprehensive approach to food networks sustainability able to enhance overcoming its metabolic rift, both upstream processes and reproductive (non-monetized, care-related) work must be included (López-García and González de Molina 2021). In order to address the full sustainability potential of SFN within SYAL, including social sustainability, our research stresses the need to focus on food-related reproductive work, which brings us to go beyond a

simple food chain approach. In this sense, our hypotheses could be rather organized in at least three dimensions: (1) the values that enhance SFN to keep on working, based on non-monetized work and activities to keep and reproduce the communities involved; (2) the condition and position of women within SFN and in the food chain itself, what includes the valuation (both in social and economic terms) of their work, and access issues to public funding and support, and to the share of value along the food chain: and (3) public and political participation, both within SFN and in food systems governance spaces and processes. For fully deploying such an approach, our research stresses the importance of developing gender-sensitive tools for including the household realm in SYAL research, in order to unfold power relations and gender inequities within SFN that are clearly linked to food-related care work, and to the reclusion of such work within the household (Allen 2010).

The preliminary nature of our work shows, in any case, important gaps regarding the application of feminist food studies to SYAL. For example, a precarious approach to what SYAL processes happen within the household domain challenges our ability to understand the relations among SFN and the human bodies (both women and men bodies) that are part of them (Allen and Sachs 2007). Additionally, there is still a lack of specific conceptual and methodological tools for addressing intersectional discrimination axes crossed with gender, such as class, age, culture and territories (Wardle et al. 2004; Hyder et al. 2005; Parsons 2015). Addressing intersectionality will help us to a more powerful and comprehensive understanding of power relations within SFN and agri-food policies, and thus develop gender-sensitive policies and governance tools for SFN.

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