

FOOD & COMMONS



**by Peppe
Mastruzzo**

the San Carlo Common



food & drinks:
the basic means of civil hospitality

the little bull (torèt)

today:

some 700 million lack access to
drinking water

(WHO and UNICEF, *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation, 2014 Update*)

795 million are chronically
undernourished

(FAO, IFAD and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World, 2015*)



the Wall Street bull



- financial speculation can have disastrous consequences on the worldwide production of agricultural goods
- a rational and fair production of food is a global “common” to be protected by international law against private interests

is food a mere product?



- the “commons” perspective understands food as part of a complex balance between agriculture, environment, health and culture
- on the contrary, markets regard food as a mere product; food as a private good makes hunger still triumph in a world of lavishness

finance and hunger



- in 2008, the price of all 25 main raw materials increased at the same time; while usually some prices rise and others fall, this increase in unison is unique in history
- no particular natural event took place in 2008: no floods or droughts that triggered that increase in the price of rice or wheat
- the cause was the huge mass of capital fleeing from the subprime mortgage collapse

the ethos of the commons



- the “commons” are spaces, services and goods functional to the protection both of basic individual rights and vital public interests
- they are crucial for the free development of the individual as a human being

global commons



- some commons go beyond a local perspective to reach a global dimension:
- natural commons such as great water reserves, a clean environment, climate stability, biodiversity, and the ozone shield
- human-made commons like transnational infrastructures (the internet)
- global policy objectives like peace, security, monetary and financial stability

Pacha Mama: a common world

global commons are essential for a fair and sustainable world;
they satisfy the need of the present generation without foreclosing options for the future ones;
yet, they are underprovided due to the lack of national and international regulation



food as a global common

the right to food and water is protected in some national Constitutions;

yet, universal access to healthy food concerns global issues;

the right to food and the shared knowledge about its production are commons that go beyond the presence of the State (and of States)



food as a human right



“food” is a basic human right crucial for peace and security, humanitarian assistance, innovative sources of financing for development, monetary and financial stability

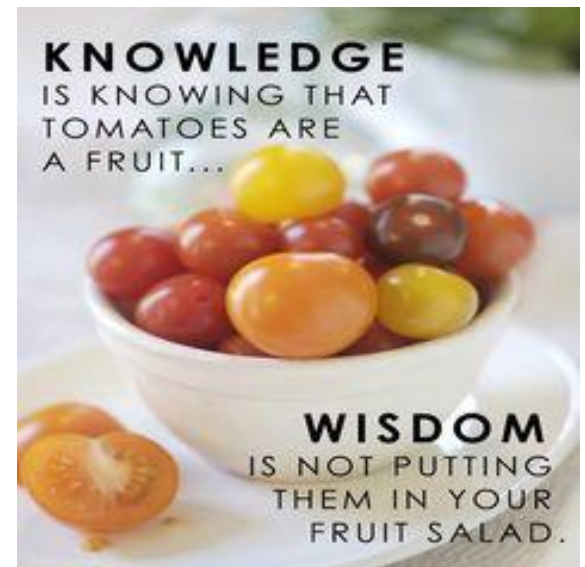
UN (2003), Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development, Final text

UN (2008), Doha Declaration on Financing for Development

food as global knowledge

food produces various utilities
both as a cultural good and as a
material good generated by
(agri)cultural techniques

a shared knowledge about food
production and preparation
that guarantees the ecological
cycle of life is a global common



food sovereignty



- in 2007, in Sélingué (Mali) “food sovereignty” was proposed as the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods
- “food sovereignty” puts the aspirations and needs of producers, distributors and consumers at the heart of food policies, defending the interests of future generations while resisting the current corporate trade and food regime

food and heritage



- the notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) gives international law perspective to the nexus between food and traditional knowledge
- article 2.1 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention defines ICH as the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills [...] that communities and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”

Francis & Food



“There is a great variety of small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world’s peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste, be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing. Economies of scale, especially in the agricultural sector, end up forcing smallholders to sell their land or to abandon their traditional crops. Their attempts to move to other, more diversified, means of production prove fruitless because of the difficulty of linkage with regional and global markets, or because the infrastructure for sales and transport is geared to larger businesses. Civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production.” (Laudato Si’, 129)

a local future



- local diets can be a basis for a conscious and sustainable policy on agriculture and food
- economically, they protect local products
- culturally, they promote the knowledge of the local environment and territory, and provide the basis for their collective protection

the current crisis



- the revival of almost forgotten food traditions can successfully confront the standardization of food production caused by supermarket distribution
- the crisis has clearly shown how worldwide agricultural production is distorted by financial speculation, revealing the catastrophe that international casino finance can be for the sustainability of life on this planet

the ethos of homo oeconomicus



economic activity is separate from moral values

markets are rational and individuals naturally seek to maximize profit

this jungle attitude & maximizing behavior eventually increases the welfare of the community

hence, in the global market, food must be handled as a private commodity

crisis as critique



- financial crisis as an inherent critique of the ethos of homo oeconomicus
- resounding collapse of the paradigm of profit maximization
- beyond the failure of economic science, social and moral collapse of an entire model of economy

crisis & finance



- globalization is first and foremost about finance
- foreign exchange transactions were 10 times larger than world trade in 1983; in 1992 they were 60 times larger
- this is the product of the paradigm that has won the battle of ideas in the last 30 years

what is finance?



- finance is the “market of money”: if you need food you’ll go to the market, i.e. the meeting place between farmers and consumers
- similarly, financial markets should be the meeting place between those who have savings and those who need capital
- finance should be a mere instrument at the service of the economy

today finance is an end in itself



- the role of finance as serving the economy is lost, and finance today means making money out of money quickly
- hence the gigantism of financial markets: in 1990 Wall Street was as big as **35%** of US GDP; before the crisis in 2006 it exceeded **350%**
- i.e.: there is a hypertrophic mass of purely speculative transactions whose expected profits largely exceed real production profits

expo & hunger



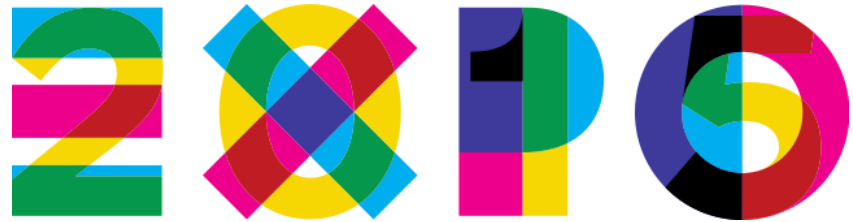
- since there are no rules on speculating against food prices (and hunger!) the food market, naturally subject to price fluctuations, becomes an ideal hunting ground
- this must be addressed in our 2015 Villarceaux Declaration

Villarceaux 2015



we must point at a fair international regime of food, water, energy and knowledge, non-severable entities understood as global commons to be protected from speculation and non-ecological use

responsibility



- responsibility is the exercise of one's freedom and dignity as a *homo civicus* (P. Calame)
- responsibility involves taking into account the immediate and deferred effects of actions, whether individual or institutional (P. Calame)
- property or enjoyment of a primary resource induces responsibility to manage it to the best of the common good (P. Calame)

figures of financial immorality

- all the import-export of goods and services in the world amounts to 20 trillion dollars **a year**
- the currency market exceeds a volume of 4 trillion dollars **a day** – i.e. more money flows in the financial markets in five days than in the “real economy” in a whole year
- over 98% of capital circulation is not linked to the real production or trade in goods and services: it is just money chasing money to make more money

casino-finance & catastrophe

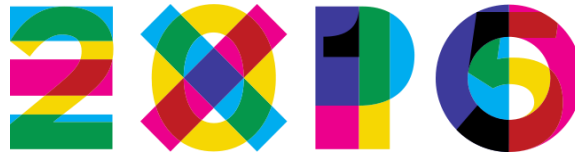


instability is the essence of casino finance, not just a side effect: you buy to make prices go up and then sell at a higher price – the greater and quicker the increase, the more you will gain;

through the derivatives, speculators can now cause those very price fluctuations from which they will gain;

i.e.: they not only speculate on prices but can now trigger those price oscillations they will bet on;

the greater the disaster, the more lucrative the game



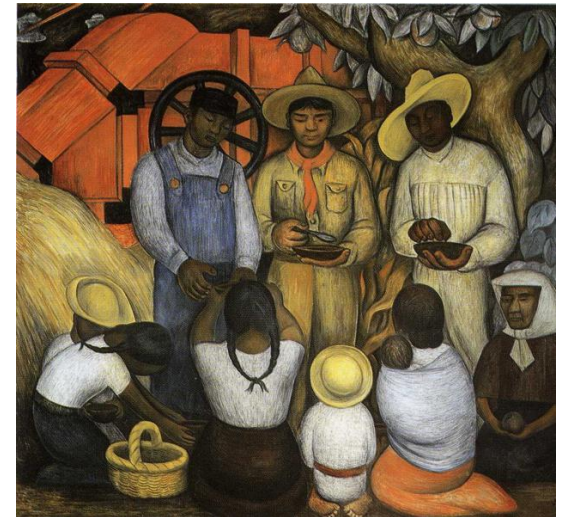
“A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress. Frequently, in fact, people’s quality of life actually diminishes – by the deterioration of the environment, the low quality of food or the depletion of resources – in the midst of economic growth. In this context, talk of sustainable growth usually becomes a way of distracting attention and offering excuses. It absorbs the language and values of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy, and the social and environmental responsibility of businesses often gets reduced to a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures.”

(Laudato Si’, 194)

future for food

a thick ideological apparatus today proclaims its faith in technological innovation as a condition sufficient for survival

but there will be no future without a radical ethical shift, where people have food not only if they have money to buy it



Thank you!

