

## 13 Conclusions

### Comprehensive change and the limits and power of sectorial measures

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#### Introduction

Based on, and adding to, the analyses presented in this volume, this final chapter provides an overall answer to the book's research question about the emancipatory power of geographical indication (GI). It opens here with a brief summary of the overall conclusions derived from the book, which critically reflect on the potential for GI to transform and re-organize the agri-food sector in spite of broader constraints at the societal level. Partial measures, such as GI, have not demonstrated the scope of action to generate significant emancipatory changes in agri-food. This represents a structuring conclusion of this book, to which the chapters provide more detailed and policy-relevant findings about how this limited scope of GI is negotiated and discursively presented in numerous contexts. To this end, the following section stresses that while GI cannot comprehensively change the agri-food sector, it engenders a number of outcomes that are relevant for discussions and efforts about the democratization of the sector. These outcomes are synthesized into six conclusions. This section is followed by a review of the salient historical arguments on the agrarian question and the environmental sustainability question, which provide corroborating theoretical explanation for the underwhelming transformative capacity of GI in the agri-food sector. To provide a clear frame for the unfolding contents of this chapter, a brief summary of the empirical conclusions is provided here.

The first conclusion indicates that the emancipatory role of GI depends on local social relations and socioeconomic conditions. This conclusion is made explicit through the argument that the constraints represented by existing structural conditions are mitigated not by virtue of the GI policy itself but by the ways stakeholders pursue their objectives by exercising agency. This finding, which has cross-cutting relevance for the subsequent conclusions presented here, suggests that the overt focus on the GI policy should not distract from or impede parallel support for other emancipatory or democratic activities.

Turning to its internal cohesiveness, the second conclusion indicates that the success of GI depends on how GI is implemented. Specifically, the unfolding of the process of GI implementation requires forms of adaptation to existing global and local conditions. Understood as a dynamic process, it is characterized

by the way numerous and complex local forces dialogue, cooperate and engage in conflict with an equally complex and numerous set of external forces. In this context, GI implementation involves a number of relevant interconnected and contradictory processes. This section of the conclusions specifically addresses the phenomena of the loss of heterogeneity, attempts to defend local identity in response to coercive standardization processes and the vulnerability of vernacular agri-food institutions.

The third conclusion addresses the ability of GI to provide protection against the unwanted consequences of the functioning of the market. The collective experience represented in this volume suggests that GI does not necessarily offer such a safeguard nor protection against the development of conditions that undervalue locally distinctive products. Indeed, the assertion that further control of markets represents a more desirable solution than business as usual is repeatedly questioned by the findings throughout this volume, demonstrating that GI generates desirable and undesirable outcomes simultaneously. Specifically, evidence that GI provides opportunities for local producers and their communities while generating positive economic results is often countered by equally convincing evidence that markets cannot be effectively controlled, that GI can be co-opted by large corporations and that its implementation can engender forms of discrimination, exclusion and neocolonialism which may undermine socioeconomic development.

This divergent outcome is comparable to the fourth conclusion, which stresses that although GI processes are a socially and politically aggregating force, they also commonly engender episodes of division and conflict. Communal action is an important tool for the empowerment of local producers and the establishment of connections between producers and supporting consumers. GI also positively affects the development of consciousness about the importance of traditional ways of producing food, the availability of quality food for consumers and cohesion of local communities and collective environmental stewardship. At the same time, however, these positive effects often create conditions that engender episodes of distrust and conflict. In this respect, GI implementation is not inherently resistant to the effects of existing power relations.

Regarding the anticipated or assumed environmental benefits, the fifth conclusion concerns the claim that GI is a tool for promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. In response to this, it is helpful to repeat the overarching conclusion in this chapter, namely that broad environmental and sustainability questions cannot be solved by sectorial measures such as GI. Furthermore, the empirical research presented in the book often rejects purported environmental claims, indicating that GI does not inherently provide impetus for the protection of the environment, biodiversity or even reduced use of agro-chemicals.

The last conclusion presented here refers to the desire of producers to remain in farming and food production despite increasing competition, a corporate dominated agri-food sector and the continuous negative effects associated with globalization and neoliberalism. Despite its limited scope of action, GI is a tool that addresses the existential question in that it allows not only producers but

also consumers to follow an alternative logic that appears emancipatory and opposes the requirements of the free market. GI represents a proposal that transcends the understanding of labor activities as simply economic events and sees GI stakeholders as stewards of history, tradition and culture who valorize the human relationship to food. This aspiration, however, must coexist with processes of commodification, wherein traditions and culture are reified to implement GI and, in doing so, emerge as products to be traded with a capitalist market logic. For many GIs, success is determined by the ability to sell the largest number of products at the highest possible price. By transforming tradition and culture into products that promote sales, these processes deny the beneficial effects of social change.

These detailed conclusions about the role and impact of GI can be encapsulated in a more overarching closing statement: The emancipatory power of GI in all of its manifestations is contradictory in that it exhibits elements that promote but also hamper the democratization of agri-food and the socioeconomic conditions of stakeholders.

### **The sectorial relevance and contingency of geographical indication**

That GI is not the panacea that can comprehensively address the problems of agri-food is recognized by the chapters of the book, covering a wide range of countries and institutional settings. Simultaneously, however, these analyses underscore that numerous important outcomes can be achieved despite GI's more limited sectorial space of action, although these may be conflicting or inadequate. These outcomes, in their emancipatory or regressive forms, are associated with the conditions that define the people and places where GI unfolds. Accordingly, *the emancipatory role of GI depends on local social relations and socioeconomic conditions*. This observation, which is readily invoked in the literature, is used both to rationalize the limitations or failings of GI and to accuse GI of being too ephemeral or inconsistent. In presenting the first conclusion of this chapter, we wish to move beyond this by framing GI as an approach to regional agri-food governance rather than pretending that it is a cohesive and tangible policy. To this end, GI operates similar to many forms of (local) governance, in which *structural conditions* (power relations; economic and class structures; political and geopolitical conditions; etc.) are met by *human agency* or the ways local actors pursue their objectives and mobilize human and social resources to achieve them. It is fitting to view it as a *contested terrain* in which contrasting forces operate to establish results. As illustrated by Nizam, the effectiveness of GI is significantly affected by the existence of empowering discursive and participatory processes (reflexive localism) or the dominance of top-down, typically authoritarian processes that limit local participation (normative localism). The impact of GI is therefore not a linear process but rather a contingent one that can be proactively or reflexively managed if planners adopt

GI as an approach rather than attempting to shoehorn advocated policy into various local contexts.

### ***The problem of implementation***

As stressed by a number of the chapters (e.g., Feuer; Piatti and Dwiartama; Hegnes and Amilien; Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas), the success of GI is *defined by how its implementation takes place* and the multifaceted dimensions that affect how the normative component (planned outcomes) translates into history (actual outcomes). This is the second conclusion that derives from the analyses presented in the volume. These multifaceted dimensions are often defined in terms of adaptation (see Hegnes and Amilien). Yet this term is not synonymous with the one-way act of conforming to an existing structure/system. Instead, it implies a dynamic and complex process in which a number of local social forces dialogue, cooperate and conflict with an equally complex collection of external forces. As this process of implementation unfolds, numerous relevant, interconnected and contradictory processes/conditions emerge, including the loss of heterogeneity, the struggle for the definition of local identity and the relative vulnerability of the relevant institutions.

As far as the loss of heterogeneity is concerned, the analyses presented in the book (e.g., Piatti and Dwiartama; Hegnes and Amilien; Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas) show that while heterogeneity is a necessary precondition for valorizing the uniqueness of candidate products, the creation of a GI demands opposing processes of conformity and standardization. This contradiction stems from prevailing requirements for characterizing GIs and rendering them transparent and amenable to international authorities and consumers. In effect, the very process of creating GIs initiates a forceful representation of the many historically based, empirical characteristics that typify each GI product. This representation materializes through single-product definitions that – as they synthesize but also accentuate and, in some cases, eliminate some of the product's characteristics – need to be compatible with preordained requirements. Accordingly, at least two fundamental and interrelated components of the GI system tend to lessen heterogeneity. First, heterogeneity is lessened by the process through which local products' tradition and cultural embeddedness are made to conform to the global (e.g., World Trade Organization) and domestic conventions (e.g., national food regulations). Second, it is lessened by the process of negotiation that emerges as necessary for the legal definition and the consequent recognition of GI status. As illustrated in the chapters, homogenization forces include not only the social process of conforming to negotiated standards but also the political logic of establishing GI policies. In the latter, GI promoters often adopt the instrumental rationality of market relations, whereby processes of homogenization are encouraged in order to eliminate differences that hinder participation in market competition. In essence, tradition and culture are created and then standardized to be almost exclusively functional to market requirements.

Part and parcel of the GI process, then, is the continuous need to respond to homogenization tendencies by mounting a defense of local identity that protects the uniqueness of GI products. These countervailing forces are inherently contradictory. As explained by Shtaltovna and Feuer, assembling a GI policy that conforms to European norms about wine and embodies local identity and tradition is a fraught task, which is only further complicated if policymakers cannot enlist all of the constituent stakeholders. Discussing the case more broadly for East Asia, Feuer stresses that the enthusiasm for GI policies rests on their promotion as an indispensable tool for touting the cultural and economic value of local agri-food. Simultaneously, however, promoters argue that the value is even further increased if directed to the global market, which often entails cross-cultural adjustment that assimilates the traits of the commodified market-based global culture and thereby lessens heterogeneity. As these chapters contend, this process problematizes not only the reevaluation of culture but also the very understanding of local identity. Moreover, and as stressed by Hegnes and Amilien and by Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas, the presentation of local identity in cross-cultural terms frequently promotes innovation in a dissonant form. Innovation for the sake of cross-cultural adjustment often alienates producers and consumers from their familiar products, contradicting the very essence of local identity. In short, the defense of local identity meant to provide a check against the inexorable homogenization tendencies of GI struggle to transcend the requirements of the market, and consequently, GI may come to repress those aspects that are not amenable to market requirements.

The actions of pertinent institutions shape GI implementation, and accordingly, the strength and orientation of these institutions brackets the defense of local identity and adaptation to global and national food systems. As demonstrated by Hegnes and Amilien in their illustration of GI in Norway, well-resourced institutions facilitate local actors' efforts to mediate between external requirements and the demands stemming from specific local conditions. The chapter by Renard and Domínguez Arista on Mexico, however, demonstrates how strong institutions can have a perverse effect if they are co-opted by corporate players. In contrast, Feuer describes how the weak GI institutions found in Cambodia cannot prevent GIs from being co-opted by foreign corporations. Simultaneously, and as indicated in the chapter by Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas on Brazil, there are some desirable outcomes associated with low institutional strength, whereby the flexibility of a weaker institutional structure allows for the adaptation of GI to match different local realities. Yet the Brazilian case also indicates that institutional flexibility comes at the price of institutional instability. This arises because relatively independent local administrative systems hamper adequate levels of communication and governance. In turn, all of the above is affected by the notion of quality of action. As indicated by Nizam in her discussion of case of GI in Turkey, institutional actions may be branded as effective. Yet effectiveness, as in the case of top-down administrative decision-making processes, does not necessarily translate into the just distribution of added value among stakeholders. In summary, the contradictory

outcomes arising from varying institutional strengths and orientations make it difficult to ensure consistently positive implementations of GI.

***The issue of protection from the unwanted consequences of the functioning of the market***

As illustrated in the introduction chapter, debates on GI stress that a significant part of its emancipatory power rests on the containment of the undesirable consequences of the functioning of the market system. The empirical chapters included in this volume speak directly to this issue and provide insight into the potential of GI to resolve the contemporary agrarian question and the environmental sustainability question. The findings from each case are complex and contradictory, as evidence that GI improves the socioeconomic conditions of stakeholders is often accompanied by equally strong signals that GI contributes to or fails to counteract some of the negative outcomes of the functioning of the market. Accordingly, the third conclusion of the book is that *GI does not necessarily represent a safeguard against the working of the market*. It, however, represents a reaffirmation of the view that markets should be controlled. As discussed in various chapters, and particularly in the chapter by Blancaneaux in his analysis of French wine, the origins of GI rest on the desire to stabilize markets and restore confidence in the fairness of the system. Arguably, the entire GI project is based on the belief that markets should be fair and that producers should get a just reward for their labor. Also implicit in the rationale behind the establishment of GI is the acceptance of the tenets of Keynesian economics and the rejection of the neoliberal argument in favor of deregulated markets. As indicated by Bonanno, the shaping of the market in terms of political objectives (Keynesianism) prioritizes politically determined socioeconomic objectives over the neoliberal preference for self-regulating markets.

The issue of the effectiveness of GI as an instrument to regulate markets is at the core of the analyses presented in the volume. For all contributions, the concept of emancipation rests largely on the achievement of just rewards for producers, the prosperity of their communities, the availability of quality food for consumers and the sustainable use of natural resources. Achieving these objectives, however, is hampered by the characteristics of the current agri-food system with its global competition and dominance of “food from nowhere.” As indicated by Feuer, GI has emerged as a promise to local producers in newcomer countries of a requalification of their products and a mechanism for escaping the global mainstream processes of standardization and commodification of agri-food. Moreover, and as illustrated by Appavoo and Korzun, arguments in favor of GI, including economic benefits to producers, the viability of rural economies and the transparency about products and their production, are attractive features to many struggling minorities, not only artisanal producers. In effect, the analyses presented in the book trace how GI is optimistically characterized as a way to allow producers to attain functional and just access to world markets and to subscribe to a system that guarantees traditional and

quality forms of production (e.g., Feuer; Nizam; Piatti and Dwiartama; Sekine; Shtaltovna and Feuer; Weiler – all this volume). The negative effects accompanying GI's positive contribution to the control of markets are in turn characterized by GI promoters as manageable or at least fairly compensated for.

However, the extent to which negative effects of the market can indeed be mitigated is difficult to predict. For instance, Blancaneaux underscores in his review of the highly mature case of French wine that market instability and the development of mass-produced, poorly differentiated GI products could not be countered. Similarly, the dominant market position occupied by large corporations or external actors is difficult to oppose. The cases presented by Feuer (Cambodia) and by Piatti and Dwiartama (Indonesia) illustrate that GI remains an inconsistent tool for developing countries to leverage against foreign investors seeking to appropriate locally generated value. These cases also highlight that GI, when applied to former colonial value chains such as coffee and pepper, may even engender forms of neocolonialism. Piatti and Dwiartama, along with Feuer, demonstrate how limited social change, the inadequate distribution of socioeconomic rewards and persistent unequal exchange represent sufficient reasons to question established narratives that understand GI as an instrument of emancipation. They indicate that this is particularly the case in developing countries, which are facing not only powerful domestic actors but also entrenched international presences. A variation of this problem is uncovered by analyses from middle-income countries, such as those of Renard and Domínguez Arista (Mexico) and of Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas (Brazil), which show the discriminatory effects of GI in favor of large politically connected producers. This problem extends to advanced countries, as represented by Appavoo and Korzun (Canada), Sekine (Japan) and Weiler (Canada and the United States), where the authors underscore that the implementation of GI does little to unseat highly established producers/corporations from positions of power in the food value chain. These authors call for broader reforms, as current GI programs are inadequate to reach declared objectives. Particularly relevant is the limited potential of GI to provide a solution to issues of labor relations and labor remunerations. Sekine demonstrates that GI offers, at best, only partial solutions to the improvement of the working conditions of producers (tea farmers) in general and wage workers (tea pickers) in particular. Echoing Sekine, Weiler shows that the viability of GIs, as represented in the new artisanal food sector, can even depend on labor exploitation.

### *Aggregation, mobilization and conflict*

Discussions on the emancipatory dimension of GI (see introduction chapter) underscore its power to bring about social and political aggregation among actors involved in the production and consumption of traditional or local food. In these discussions, social and political aggregation, or collective action, is considered an important tool for the empowerment of stakeholders, and this rests on

at least two aspects of GI. The first refers to traditional know-how that emerges as a binding factor not only among producers but also between producers and consumers as traditional ways to produce food are sought and deemed superior to mainstream production and products. The second refers to the importance of locality that materializes through the recognition that specific places offer special resources that cannot be available and/or replicated elsewhere. These two aspects generate emancipatory outcomes because they create movements that aim at favoring local actors, changing undesirable socioeconomic relations, safeguarding traditional culture and more. Renard and Domínguez Arista; Sekine; Hegnes and Amilien; Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas; Shtaltovna and Feuer and others all show the importance that the *process* of creating GIs has in fostering the formation of movements for the advancement of the interests of local producers and sympathetic consumers, even if the establishment of a GI is not the final outcome.

GI is also recognized as a shared point of reference that affects the development of consciousness and feelings of membership not only among producers but also for consumers as they feel empowered to be able to choose desired food products and participate in alternative, perhaps shorter, value chains. As chapters in this book stress, enhanced communication among stakeholders strengthens community formation. Hegnes and Amilien, as well as Appavoo and Korzun, indicate that the establishment of novel forms of communication, including the consummation of new vocabulary about food-cultural knowledge, allows for a better understanding of the important links among people, places and food. They add that this process can foster wider engagement. Following the conclusions of other chapters, they state that enhanced communication improves the interaction between producers and consumers to the benefit of both groups, or even enhances societal relations.

Yet GI-generated social aggregation is not free of problems; instead, it is frequently accompanied by issues such as distrust and even conflict. As indicated by Renard and Domínguez Arista; Nizam; Piatti and Dwiartama; and Niederle, Wilkinson and Mascarenhas, GI implementation often requires the divisive creation of artificial boundaries and the consequent difficult task of grouping together heterogeneous actors through the creation of cultural, political and economic common denominators. As highlighted by Feuer; Nizam; Renard and Domínguez Arista; Piatti and Dwiartama; and Sekine, attempts to create new groups and group membership and identity often clash with local stakeholders' existing interests. Particularly problematic is the translation of abstract ideas about a product into codes of practice in which specific standards for GI products are established. While agreement may be reached on the proposal to create a GI product, the establishment of the specific characteristics of this product emerges as a contested terrain since benefits may not be equally distributed among producers. The case of mezcal, illustrated by Renard and Domínguez Arista, further stresses that problems do not simply end with exclusion but instead can escalate to the more serious forms of overt discrimination. These analyses allow us to reach our fourth conclusion of the book:

while GI represents an aggregating force, it also produces centrifugal forces that engender division and conflict.

### ***The protection of the environment and sustainable use of natural resources***

Protecting the environment and sustainably using natural resources are among the outcomes often mentioned as desirable byproducts of GI. The rationale behind this claim rests on the assumption that traditional production is not only endowed with a light ecological footprint but also associated with environmentally friendly sensibilities. This rationale is reaffirmed in analyses presented in the book, such as the chapter by Appavoo and Korzun, which offers GI as a solution to combined social and environmental problems affecting minorities in Canada. Simultaneously, however, other analyses reach opposite conclusions, once more underscoring the contradictory nature of GI. One of these instances is the case of the GI for matcha, a powdered green tea analyzed by Sekine. Specifically probing the ecological impact of the establishment of this GI, she stresses not only that ecological requirements are not inscribed in the code of practice but also that GI does not intentionally contribute to biodiversity or aim to reduce the use of agro-chemicals. A more serious example, from Renard and Domínguez Arista, suggests that the popularity engendered by the GIs for mezcal and tequila has directly led to unsustainable wild harvest of agave in Mexico. In essence, the fifth conclusion of the book is *that as far as the protection of the environment is concerned, GI remains an unsystematic and contradictory measure*. Its potential to encourage more sustainable use of natural resources and safeguard of the environment coexist with instances in which alternative approaches to the use of natural resources and the environment are neither contemplated nor practiced.

### ***The existential question***

In various forms, all the chapters in this volume indicate that GI is employed as an instrument to support the livelihood of local producers and realize their desire to remain in farming and food production. In this representation, these people want to maintain their ways of life despite highly competitive markets, a corporate dominated agri-food system and adverse socioeconomic phenomena such as globalization and neoliberalism. GI, in other words, emerges as part of the process of affirming identities (i.e., artisanal food producer, small family farmer, Indigenous producer and conscientious consumer) and the political struggle to preserve ways of life that are not only threatened but also on the verge of disappearing. Appavoo and Korzun; Nizam; and Shtaltovna and Feuer offer GI as imperfect forms of protection of indigenous ways, while Hegnes and Amilien view GI as a tool that empowers traditional farming communities. These chapters represent policy contexts in which the GI framework has nominally been erected to encourage local producers to exercise self-determination, be protected market players and maintain the freedom to choose a path of

existence that transcends economic necessity and offers alternatives to the constraints established by external forces.

Presented in these terms and despite many of the limits discussed in this book, GI represents for many an emancipatory mechanism that opposes the logic of the free market and its standpoint that only profitable economic activities deserve moral and social support. In this context, GI symbolizes a rejection of the processes of alienation that reduce all labor activities to merely economic events. Alienated labor is deprived of the ability to interpret work in noneconomic ways and select priorities that transcend efficiency, profitability and calculability that are functionally associated with making profit. Unalienated labor, conversely, is free to imagine and pursue different priorities that include the safeguarding of history, tradition and culture; the valorization of human activities and desires; and the fulfillment of people's aspirations. Often, GI products are more expensive and require more production time than their "mainstream" counterparts. However, the GI proposal aims at employing logics that are different from the instrumental rationality of seeking profit. Under these different logics, stakeholders are emancipated to pursue what they *feel* is "right" rather than what *is* right because it is economically profitable.

Simultaneously, the chapters of the book underscore how this emancipatory aspect of GI contains at least two fundamentally contradictory dimensions. The first refers to the unavoidable commodification entailed by GI, which provides a constant pressure for homogenization that becomes, as indicated in some of the cases analyzed in the volume, a dominating effect. The chapters illustrate that stakeholders come to see GI products as commodities that, as such, should be sold at the highest possible price and quantity and to the greatest number of consumers. Additionally, the ability of GI to address local issues is conceptualized in terms of its ability to generate additional revenue. Placed in these terms, GI remains framed in the commodified dimension of dominant social relations and, consequently, it loses a significant amount of its alternative power. The second dimension refers to instances in which stakeholders' self-determination is conditioned by the requirements to remain faithful to tradition and traditional ways of life. In this case, the creation of GI is understood in terms that forfeit change and the potential to overcome undesirable conditions associated with the support of tradition. While the negotiated character of the social creation of tradition permits some leeway here, the conservative dimension of the rootedness to tradition is also explicit. Thus, it tends not only to constrain the freedom of stakeholders to embrace new forms of production but also to readily adopt new social arrangements that may improve their overall well-being.

### ***GI and comprehensive change***

The research question of this volume probes whether GI represents a progressive alternative to the socioeconomic conditions that characterize the contemporary agri-food system. As globalization and neoliberalism shape social and industrial relations, centrifugal forces have altered established equilibria and

created new and arguably more severe challenges for historical agri-food systems. In this context, the relevance of GI in influencing the conditions of agri-food can be explored through its capacity to resolve two historical questions: the agrarian question and the environmental sustainability question.

### *The agrarian question*

The agrarian question refers to the conditions of people who work in farming and food production. Formulated in the late 1800s, Karl Kautsky sought in his classic book *Die Agrarfrage* (the Agrarian Question) (1988 [1899]) to address the issue of the well-being of farmers and peasants given the inadequacies of the then-dominant theories of the evolution of agriculture. At one pole of this debate stood the classic laissez-faire theory in which the coexistence of family farms and large industrial farms were a constant and indeed a feature of the free functioning of the market. According to this theory, the free market allows a sufficient range of new entries into farming such that a natural coexistence of family and large farms would reproduce a multifaceted farming sector. Simultaneously, open competition would encourage processes of internal reconfiguration, allowing small and medium-size operations to expand and transform into large industrial farms featuring mechanization and the use of industrial inputs and wage labor. As illustrated by classic laissez-faire theorists, the pursuit of self-interest on the part of farmers would guarantee the existence not only of efficient forms of production but also of the sustainable use of natural resources (Smith 1981 [1776]). At the opposite pole of the debate, the classic Marxist-Leninist view of farming proposed the theory of the proletarianization of family farmers and the concomitant emergence of green factories whereby urban manufacturing's capital concentration and centralization would be reproduced in the farming sector (Lenin 1961 [1908]). In this view, the disappearance of family producers is inevitable, as they would be transformed into wage laborers. Accordingly, policies designed to improve the living conditions of farmers were to be discouraged because they simply delayed their unavoidable proletarianization.

For Kautsky, and likeminded social democrats, both these positions were incorrect, as they did not contextualize the existence of family farmers and peasants in the overall evolution of capitalism and its necessary equilibria. Kautsky contended that family farming performs several functions in the capitalist economy. One of them is that of a reservoir of labor for large farms and for the manufacturing sector. As additional labor is needed in manufacturing and agriculture, family farm and peasant labor are released to satisfy this demand. The opposite occurs in periods of crisis when surplus labor is retained on the farm, thus contributing to social and economic stability. Following this analysis, Kautsky concluded that because of the functions that they perform, family farms would continue to persist despite economic hardship and capital concentration.

Additional arguments about the relevance of family farming were proposed by theorists sympathetic to the position of Kautsky. In this vein, some argued

that family farmers and peasants' paramount desire to own land allows them to endure high levels of socioeconomic hardship. This is the case of the theory proposed by Max Weber. He contended that peasant farming is characterized by high levels of labor self-exploitation. This is a condition, he continued, that allows peasants to pursue the ownership of farmland. Rather than following an economic rationality, peasants obey a different logic that privileges their desire to become owners of their farms (Weber 1958). Alexander Chayanov's *Theory of Peasant Economy* (1986) offers another instance of the different logic that typifies the behavior of small farm holders. For Chayanov, peasants are primarily interested in subsistence production. Accordingly, the quantity of per capita labor performed on the farm is a function of the number of family members and their ages. The younger and more numerous the children in the family are, the more labor is necessary to support them. Once these children become adults and can work on the farm, peasants diminish the per capita quantity of labor performed. In essence, for Chayanov, peasants are not interested in generating surplus value and, therefore, it would be difficult for them to follow the logic of capitalist accumulation.

Throughout the 20th century and the first decades of the next century, this classic debate evolved significantly, primarily due to the drastic reduction of the size of the agricultural labor force and the increased efficiency of agricultural production. Increasingly sophisticated means to control output and modulate agri-food commodity prices, coupled with increasingly assertive world trade, caused what had been deemed economic crises to become issues of national interest. In this context, the agrarian question has been transformed from an issue of universal relevance to a problem that remains significant in some regions and national contexts. It is also an issue that is no longer necessarily economic. Its social dimension has become quite relevant, as exemplified by instances such as the aging of the farming population, the concomitant lack of interest in farming by younger generations, the understanding of farmers as stewards of the land/environment and the rising interest in local, GI and artisanal food.

As the complexity of these phenomena makes sweeping generalizations problematic, proposals that could address the agrarian question clearly cannot be limited to the sectorial space of farming. In other words, throughout its history, the agrarian question has never been about agriculture per se. But its resolution has involved the reorganization of entire economy and society (Ray 1998). This dimension has not changed, and therefore, it requires that solutions to the agrarian question be framed in proposals that involve changes for the entire society. More specifically, issues concerning labor relations, the use of natural resources, the production of safe and adequate food and its distribution and demand cannot be simply addressed by generating measures that are exclusively confined to the agri-food sector. While proposals focusing on the sectorial dimension of agri-food will more likely constitute a significant portion of the intellectual and political production, a meaningful restructuring of agri-food should transcend the sectorial sphere (Mooney 2004). Following this point, GI has not been able to be, by itself, an instrument that would engender

significant changes in agri-food. Given the nature of current labor and production relations, the expansion of GI and its improvement only creates relatively marginal alterations in the functioning of capitalist markets and agri-food production. Although this assessment perhaps asks GI to achieve an unfairly expansive scope of action, we state it here as a counterpoint to appraisals of GI that do believe in its capacity for resolving and counteracting structural constraints. Similar considerations are pertinent for the environmental sustainability question.

### ***The environmental sustainability question***

While the challenge of safeguarding the environment also transcends the sphere of agri-food, the clarifying question to pose for agri-food production concerns the extent to which production practices (regardless of how historical they are) allow for an objectively sustainable use of natural resources (Bellelli, Marescotti and Touzard 2017). As illustrated in the chapters of this volume, the realization of environmental sustainability question requires more than relative improvements within the scope of the agri-food sector, let alone the scope of GI policies. These findings are not surprising when seen against classic and contemporary debates on how best to encourage a safeguarding of the environment.

Classic economic theory proposes the market equilibrium solution to the environmental question whereby the increased use of natural resources is controlled by price changes. This is also the solution proposed by classic neoliberals. Criticizing environmentalists' arguments about the excessive use of natural resources by mainstream industries, Friedrich von Hayek (2011 [1960]) contended that demand-generated price increases stimulate the search for further cost reductions and efficient production techniques. In the case of contemporary environmental limits, neoliberals argue that the environmental issue is effectively addressed through market mechanisms (Friedman 1970; Jordan, Wurzel and Zito 2004). This phenomenon is substantiated, while also revised, in some fashion in Henderson's (1999) analysis of capitalist agricultural development in California. Henderson documents how apparent environmental limits were consistently overcome through major capital investments and concurrent technological upgrading, such that California could transform hitherto unproductive lands into a global agricultural commodity producer. This was achieved by the fact that California, as a pioneer agricultural zone, lacked the usual "drag" of historical agri-food systems and could, as proposed by Hayek, achieve increasing efficiency. Seen inversely by critics, the capitalist development of California agriculture entailed internalizing forms of environmental and labor exploitation that would soon (and increasingly thereafter) be re-evaluated as problematic externalities.

It is therefore important to point out that the neoliberal view departs from the classic *laissez-faire* theory proposed by Adam Smith and 19th century philosophers, such as Emile Durkheim, who were seeking an answer to the environmental question. Here, two general principles are particularly relevant for

the establishment of desirable economic growth and a balanced society. The first refers to the importance of the human sentiment of sympathy. Sympathy, Smith contended, must accompany competition so that the pursuit of self-interest goes always together with the respect of others and their interests (Smith 2010 [1759]:81). This means that the framework within which self-interest should be sought is defined by the collective understanding of what is considered good by the entire society, an idea echoed one century later by Durkheim (1993 [1887]). Stressing the importance of the role of the State in defining national priorities, Smith saw the sphere of moral obligations, such as environmental conditions, framing economic goals, while Durkheim (1984 [1933]) believed a sustainable equilibrium ought to be reached through the conscious implementation of appropriate political measures (social facts) (Durkheim 1984 [1933]). The second principle refers to the need for a “just” socio-economic system. The prospering of the economy, Smith believed, cannot be achieved unless justice informs the organization of society. In this context, economic activities must be subordinate to the continuous existence of a just society. This type of society is one formed of moral people who place the overall interests of society above their own and avoid situations in which their actions create harm to all aspects of society, including the environment.

For Max Weber (2002 [1905]), the evolution of capitalism is based on the continuous rationalization of social relations. Rationalization signifies the application of formal rationality – or the instrumental use of all resources – to achieve capital accumulation. While rationalization advances capitalism, it also creates significant problems as it eclipses the adoption of other forms of rationality, such as substantive rationality or acting based on values. Accordingly, the rational exploitation of the environment, although fundamental for the expansion of capitalism, remains a significant liability for the future of society and thus requires alternatives. Weber further stressed the importance of thinking about the future of society in terms of the application of substantive rationality. This form of rationality was practiced in the past but has progressively disappeared in contemporary society. In this context, the call for protecting the environment assumes a fundamental dimension in the construction of a better and sustainable future.

In the case of Marx and the Marxist tradition, the connection between the resolution of the environmental sustainability question and change that involves the entire society is made overtly clear. The major tenet of the Marxist position is the unsustainability of capitalism as it engenders not only the uncorrectable exploitation of labor but also of the environment. Illustrated by Marx in his discussion on “Large Scale Industry and Agriculture” in *Capital Volume I* (1977, 636–639), the contradiction between the evolution of capitalism and the safeguarding of the environment rests on the very implantation of capitalist social relations and the expansion of industrialization and urbanization that it engendered. Popularized by contemporary works on Marx’s “Metabolic Rift” and the “Second Contradiction of Capitalism” (Bellamy Foster 1999; Moore 2011; O’Connor 1988), this theory contends that pre-capitalist societies were

based on a stable and sustainable metabolic interaction between cities and the surrounding rural (farming) areas whereby the natural resources (i.e., nutrients) necessary for the production of food for the cities were recycled to the countryside as waste. While preventing advanced urbanization, the time reduced technological development placed balancing limits on the exploitation of natural resources. With the growth of capitalism, these sustainable conditions were forever altered. The expansion of industrialization and the concentration of population in large urban areas mandated the extraction of an unprecedented quantity of raw material and the production of an equally large quantity of food. As the growth of cities required increasingly large quantities of nutrients, balancing amounts were not returned to the countryside, causing an unequal exchange between urban and rural areas. As a result, urban pollution developed in tandem with the depletion of natural resources. In essence, for Marx and the Marxist tradition, the environmental crisis is intrinsically linked to the unsustainability of capitalism.

The extent to which GI, which is an instrument designed to latch onto capitalism while mitigating unwanted economic and social consequences, can engender environmental values is undermined by its built-in respect for the preservation of traditional or historical practices and livelihoods, regardless of their objective environmental performance. This historical review of the role of the environment in capitalist development demonstrates unequivocally that sustainability is unlikely to be achieved as a matter of course in the development of agri-food. As a consequence, the environmental performance of various GI products is not systematically assured but is instead idiosyncratic and dependent on broader conditions in society. This echoes the judgment reached concerning the agrarian question, namely that GI cannot play a comprehensive emancipatory role in the resolution of the environmental sustainability question. The requirement of comprehensive change essential to the resolution of these two questions simply transcends the sectorial dimension of GI. Additionally, GI remains a market-based instrument. Therefore, arguments that identify the origins of agri-food problems in the inadequacy of the capitalist system are likely to find GI an ineffective instrument to address the structural conditions of a market-based society, as highlighted by the Marxian and Weberian traditions. Simultaneously, however, while the limited emancipatory dimension of GI is a contention shared by the analyses in the volume, the chapters document that the sectorial dimension of GI offers numerous “partial” yet relevant outcomes.

### ***The emancipatory power of GI***

The overarching conclusion derived from this volume is that the existing *emancipatory power of GI*, which represents a beacon of hope to many agri-food stakeholders, is contradictory because it is diminished by the very factors that enable it. This general conclusion can be applied to the overall experience of GI illustrated in this book. GI is predominantly a market mechanism that is employed to combat the negative outcomes of the functioning of the global market. Its deployment,

however, occurs in a context in which the mechanisms that define market functioning are not substantively altered. In essence, GI does not have the scope of action to modify the overall functioning of the market. And yet, it is an instrument that is over-optimistically charged by promoters with achieving a number of objectives that are alternatives to the currently dominant character and conditions of the agri-food system. In this case, however, the contradictory aspect of GI arises from its inability to ultimately promote significant alternatives to market relations or escape structural constraints imposed from outside the agri-food sector. This implies that the conditions that engender fundamental market trends such as capital concentration and centralization, marginalization of smaller producers and the exploitation of natural resources are not comprehensively changed. To some extent, though, the emancipatory dimension of GI appears undeniable, because it promotes processes that do mitigate certain negative consequences of the dominant agri-food system. Therefore, and despite its limits, GI can be considered a “least-bad” tool that should be employed and constantly refined to achieve a more economically just, socially acceptable and environmentally friendly agri-food system. The evidence provided in the chapters of this volume provide insights about how to proactively refine GI policies, but it also reminds us to remain sanguine about the potential for truly emancipatory outcomes. The conditions under which an emancipatory role could be played is arguably a topic that deserves further investigation.

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