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ARTICLE

Growing the social: alternative agrofood networks and social sustainability in the urban ethical foodscape

Katerina Psarikidou & Bronislaw Szerszynski
Department of Sociology, ESRC Centre for the Economic and Social Aspects of Genomics, Lancaster University, Bowland North, Lancaster LA1 4YT United Kingdom (email: a.psarikidou@lancaster.ac.uk; bron@lancaster.ac.uk)

Agrofood practices have been an obvious domain in which to implement sustainability. Yet, despite the fact that food carries a dense set of social meanings and functions, sustainability's social dimension has been relatively neglected in studies of sustainable food initiatives. In this article, we draw on research carried out for the European project "Facilitating Alternative Agro-food Networks" (FAAN), and describe various ways in which alternative agrofood networks in the city of Manchester manifest aspects of social sustainability and the "moral economy," including relations of solidarity and justice with proximate and distant others, concern for land and for the global environment, social inclusion of the disadvantaged, and the reskilling of everyday life. However, we also argue for a different way of conceiving social sustainability, which involves not simply adding another "pillar" to the dominating dyad of the economic and the environmental, but subjecting the whole notion of sustainability to a sociomaterial turn—one that questions the ontological separation of economy, environment, and society. We show how this approach involves conceiving the urban "ethical foodscape" as a "moral taskscape" in which people dwell and move, interacting with soil, food, and each other through situated practices involving skill and judgment.

KEYWORDS: sustainable development, urban agriculture, food, metropolitan areas, social values, sustainable agriculture

Introduction

Since the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) brought to prominence the notion of sustainable development, agrofood practices have been an obvious, if challenging, domain for implementing sustainability. The "semantic plasticity" of the concept has allowed it to be adopted by diverse actors, from community supported agriculture initiatives to multinational corporations (Kloppenburg et al. 2000). However, most of these attempts and practices aim, at best, to balance the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability, and only to do so as conceived in a narrow way. Thus, their goal might, for example, be an agriculture that does not deplete finite resources or disrupt natural biological processes, while at the same time offering competitive advantage.

In this way, despite the fact that food carries a dense set of social meanings and functions, the social dimension of sustainability has been relatively neglected in the mainstream understanding of sustainable food initiatives. This neglect has not helped to counter the dominance of industrialized agrofood system and governance patterns, which have impeded social sustainability goals by providing few opportunities for meaningful public involvement in food production and policy making and by exacerbating health inequalities as measured by geography and social class.

Against this background, diverse organizations and actors from different backgrounds and interests in the agrofood sector have advanced, frequently in a prefigurative way, their own visions of an alternative sustainable agrofood model. Alternative agrofood networks (AAFNs) is a broad term used to describe initiatives that embody alternatives to the conventional industrialized, global agrofood system (Murdoch et al. 2000; Renting et al. 2003). Concepts such as relocalization, respatialization, resocialization, and reconnection have described the different qualities of the possible alternative agrofood paradigm that such networks might prefigure (Renting et al. 2003). Yet, AAFNs appear to enact alternatives not only to unsustainable agrofood practices, but also to the dominant understanding of sustainable agrofood practices. They thus further demonstrate sustainability's interpretive flexibility, by offering a different approach to sustainable agrofood practices, one that avoids narrow, desocialized understandings of ecological and economic value (Feenstra, 2002).

A number of studies have examined the sustainability potential of AAFNs, such as those involved in organic and local food (e.g., Marsden et al. 1999; Ilbery & Maye, 2005; Iles, 2005; Pretty et al. 2005; Seyfang, 2006). However, this work tends to focus on

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the potential of AAFNs for *ecological* sustainability, for example, by measuring "food miles," carbon inputs, and so forth, while others criticize the inadequacy of the AAFNs to "take care of the social aspects of sustainability" (Allen et al. 1991), to move beyond power asymmetries and socioeconomic inequalities, and to integrate social justice and broad-based equity considerations (Allen et al. 1991; Allen & Wilson, 2008; Brown & Getz, 2008; Getz et al. 2008). Moreover, most of the studies prioritize producer-led rural agrofood networks and the social issues that primarily affect rural actors and residents. In so doing, the work neglects ways in which sustainable agrofood networks go beyond rural settings to affect and involve urban populations and metropolitan regions where the growing commodification and globalization of the dominant agrofood system is increasingly responsible for producing a deskilling and alienation in relation to food production and preparation, or even food insecurity (Koc et al. 1999; Wrigley, 2002).

In this article, we draw on research carried out for the European Facilitating Alternative Agro-food Networks Project (EU FAAN Project) and identify ways in which AAFNs can help to deliver social, as well as economic and ecological, sustainability. Our analysis is primarily based in an urban setting and highlights the social dimensions of AAFNs beyond farm-level practices. We look into the ways that AAFNs constitute new "ethical foodscapes," built around the practicalities and routines of everyday urban life, which transform food into not only a material component of the food chain, but also "an expression of cumulative moral sentiment" (Little et al. 2010).

Our research relies on semistructured interviews with key actors in the alternative agrofood sector in Manchester, supplemented by ethnographic observation, publicly available documents, press releases, and Internet sources on food relocalization and agrofood initiatives in the city. We look at a diversity of municipal, charitable, and grassroots initiatives, including small-scale retailers and producers, workers' cooperatives, market gardens, mobile grocers, food and health programs, community garden projects, organic agriculture, and permaculture schemes. We show how alternative food systems not only carry economic and environmental benefits, but can also meet many of the criteria that have been enumerated for social sustainability. Our discussion uses the political and economic discourse of the "moral economy" to further understand and investigate the social sustainability potential of agrofood practices (Sayer, 2000). But we also argue that understanding social sustainability as a lived reality involves not simply adding another, social pillar to the familiar dominating dyad of the ecological and the economic, but requires subjecting the whole notion of sustainability to a sociomaterial turn that takes us beyond an ontological separation of economy, environment, and society.

Sustainability, Social Sustainability and Agrofood Practices

The Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, challenged the traditional understanding of development by insisting on the need to take account of the effects of economic development on the ability of society and nature to reproduce themselves. Sustainability has been criticized as vague and underspecified, but nevertheless has provided a discursive terrain for the formulation of imaginaries that connect previously separated spheres of human activity. The dominant way of conceiving the multidimensional nature of sustainability has involved describing it as consisting of three independent, but necessary, "pillars": environmental, economic, and social. This depiction of sustainability received an institutional endorsement at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and was more recently underlined by the United Nations 2005 World Summit, whose Outcome Document referred to the "three components of sustainable development—economic development, social development and environmental protection—as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars" (United Nations, 2005).

However, social sustainability has generally been seen as the weakest of the three pillars—the one which is hardest to implement and easiest to neglect. In the academic literature, it has been conceptualized in diverse ways, underlining the theoretical difficulties in analytically comprehending, framing, and defining the term in a way applicable to wider sustainability projects and agendas. Ballet et al. (2003) define it as "the improvement of the capabilities of well-being (economic, social or environmental) for all, through the aspiration of equity on the one hand…and the transmission across the generations on the other hand." Social justice, with a special reference to environmental justice, is central to Agyeman & Evans' (2004) use of the term "just sustainability" to describe the importance of intra- and intergenerational equity in democratic participatory processes. Magis & Shinn (2009) suggest that integral to "the social dimension of sustainability" are the four principles of human well-being, equity, democratic government, and democratic civil society. Particularly in an urban context, social sustainability has been conceived as requiring the development of sustainable community (Dempsey et al. 2011), involving concepts and principles such as social capital, social

cohesion, and social inclusion. Boström (2010) follows Agyeman & Evans (2004) in arguing that all the above descriptions of social sustainability can broadly be summarized under the two dimensions of the substantive and the procedural: the social *goals* of sustainable development such as health, equity, and social cohesion, and the *means* to achieve those goals, such as participation, empowerment, and accountability. However, the lack of agreement about the nature of social sustainability as a separate pillar has hampered its translation into policy and implementation (Littig & Griessler, 2005; Davidson, 2009). Sustainable development has thus mainly been perceived as an environmental issue, one that involves the integration of environmental concerns into economic decision making (Lehtonen, 2004).

The conceptual openness of sustainability as a principle is also evident in attempts to apply it to agriculture (Kloppenburg et al. 2000). Francis (1988) describes sustainable agriculture as a "management strategy" whose goal is to reduce input costs, minimize environmental damage, and provide production and profit over time. In a similar vein, Smit & Smithers (1993) define the concept as referring to the use of resources to produce food and fiber in such a way that the natural resource base is not damaged, and that the basic needs of producers and consumers can be met over the long term. Others emphasize the importance of social goods by applying the three-pillar model to their definitions of sustainable agriculture. John Ikerd (1993) insists that "sustainable agriculture must be ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible," while for Feenstra (1997), "sustainable agriculture refers to a system that integrates environmental health, economic profitability and social and economic equity." However, as Allen et al. (1991) comment, most of the time, sustainable agriculture initiatives succeed in challenging only "some but not all the assumptions that underlie agriculture's non-sustainable aspects, generally neglecting questions of social justice" (see also Altieri, 1988).

Taking a slightly different approach, Gordon Douglass (1984) identified three different conceptualizations of sustainability in agriculture, namely resource sufficiency, ecological sustainability, and social sustainability. While seeming to map onto the idea of the three pillars, Douglass's typology identifies not different dimensions of sustainability but different schools or philosophies. In his description, Douglass underlines the narrow technocratic framing of the first two models of sustainability, since the initial one is primarily concerned with sustained yield and long-term benefits to agricultural producers and the second with the need not to violate or disrupt vital biological and ecological processes (see also Allen et al. 1991).

Douglass's preferred third philosophy of sustainability, which he variously describes as community, holistic, or social, presents social sustainability not as a new pillar to be added to the economic and the ecological, but as a whole new paradigm within which to think about the linking of sustainability to the ecological, the economic, and the social. He identifies two important dimensions of social sustainability, which correspond with Agyeman & Evans' (2004) notions of the substantive and procedural aspects of social sustainability respectively. The first includes justice or fairness in the relationships between community members, food sufficiency, inter- and intragenerational equity, and protection of the rights of future generations to derive benefits from resources (Yunlong & Smit, 1994). The second involves participation in decision making as part of a greater democratization of agrofood sociopolitical processes.

Like Douglass, we argue for a conceptualization of social sustainability not as a separate set of requirements but as a different way of thinking about sustainability as a whole—one that does not relegate social questions to a separate sphere. In our case, however, we want to argue that the very conception of the social as a third "pillar" or "leg" of sustainability performs a problematic conceptual split between the social, the economic, and the environmental, one that encourages narrow and reductionist understandings of both ecology and economics.

Toward a Sociomaterial Analysis of Sustainability

In this article, we argue that the very conception of the social as a third "pillar" or "leg" of sustainability is problematic, and leads to narrow, desocialized conceptions of nature and the economy. For example, treating environmental issues as belonging to a separate ontological realm from the social—the former to be defined by the natural sciences, the latter by the social sciences—leads to neglect of the crucial, yet often hidden, political work involved in defining what belongs to our common world (Latour, 2004). This engenders a situation where, as Davidson (2009) points out, sustainability discourse is largely dominated by an idea of nature that emphasizes "equilibrium" and "stability," which can in turn encourage a politics predicated on ideas of balance and stasis rather than a radical openness to new possibilities (see also Marcuse, 1998). It also obscures the ways in which environmental problems and their definitions are entangled with problems of social structure, such as social injustice, exclusion, and

gender inequality, and in ways that make problematic any attempt clearly to separate them (Becker et al. 1999).

Similarly, the separation between the economic and the social encourages the perpetuation of the "economism" and "productivism" of modern economic rationality (Lehtonen, 2004), so that what is "sustained" is typically what Karl Polanyi (1957) identified as the social disembeddedness of economic relations from social relations, and the inequalities of power and affluence that follow (Marcuse, 1998). It can encourage a "capitalocentric" view of the economy, where capitalism is presented as a unified system capable of colonizing the entire social space and of subsuming economic forms and practices that could otherwise be scattered over a diverse economic landscape. In other words, the separation of the economic and the social can encourage the shrinkage of the economy into a singular space dominated by capitalist relations of production and excessively formal and monetized forms of provisioning and exchange (Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006). Along these lines, the actual practice of sustainable development can also reinforce a narrow "sustainability" imaginary, one which erases crucial aspects of its social dimensions and serves to reinforce capitalism's hegemonic dominance.

We thus argue that the difficulty in conceptualizing and implementing social sustainability originates in part from its very identification as a separate pillar. Instead, we suggest that an understanding of social sustainability requires not the notion of a third pillar, but a *sociomaterial turn* in the whole way that we think about sustainability. Such a turn would be *social* in the sense of attending to social relations, practices, cultural meanings, and normative judgments, but also *material* in terms of recognizing that social life is conducted by embodied beings in constant exchange with their physical environment. Thus, rather than understanding the social as something that needs to be traded off against the economy or the environment, our approach sees both as always already entangled in the social. We draw on Sarah Whatmore's (2002) idea of "hybrid geography," which she uses to resist the ontological separation of nature and society. Following Bruno Latour (1993), Whatmore uses "hybridity" to signify not the bringing together of two or more things that existed in a pure form prior to their combination, but the recognition of the heterogeneous entanglements between social life and matter. So, rather than regarding sustainability as being produced by joining together three ontological domains, we explore sustainability in alternative urban food networks as a heterogeneous set of sociomaterial practices, against the background of which the three independent "pillars" are artificial abstractions.

To do so, we use the idea of the "ethical foodscape," a term suggested by Goodman et al. (2010), "as a way of conceptualizing and engaging critically with the processes, politics, spaces, and places of the praxis of ethical relationalities embedded and produced in and through the provisioning of food." Cultural geographers have long argued that the provisioning of food in the city is amenable to spatial analysis (e.g., Bell & Valentine, 1997); the notion of the ethical foodscape extends this analysis by attending to the normative dimensions of spatially situated practices and to relations of local and distant care.

The particular way that we use this term gives it a more sociomaterial interpretation by drawing on the notion of the "taskscape" developed by the anthropologist Tim Ingold to describe a spatial arrangement of practical operations conducted by skilled agents in an environment. For Ingold (2000), "[e]very task takes its meaning from its position in an ensemble of tasks, performed in series or in parallel, and usually by many people working together," and such tasks are typically arranged spatially, like features in a landscape. Each taskscape also has its own temporality, its own pattern of rhythms and flows as it is progressively built up within "the current of sociality" (Ingold, 2000). In our analysis, the ethical foodscape of urban local food networks is also a "moral taskscape" in which their members dwell and move, interacting with soil, food, and each other.

This way of thinking about social sustainability involves not adding a separate set of social issues, but expanding how we think about both economy and nature in order to recognize their inseparability from the social. It implies that the economy has to be conceived in a broader sense than that recognized by neoclassical economics, as including a range of formal and informal economic activities involving reproduction, production, distribution, exchange, and consumption (Sayer, 2004), and as extending beyond the cash economy into a wider set of sociomaterial processes including labor, work, material flow, energetic exchange, and value creation. And it means conceptualizing the environment not just in narrowly technical terms of cause and effect, but in a way that recognizes the inherent multiplicity of human relations—semiotic, material, and affectual—with nonhuman nature. The next section illustrates this move through an analysis of AAFNs in Manchester.

Social Sustainability and AAFNs in Manchester

The Background

Over the last couple of decades, UK food producers and consumers have shown increasing interest in generating or supporting alternatives to conventional agrofood chains. Stimulus for this development came from food safety issues—the 1996 "mad cow" scandal, the late 1990s controversy over genetically modified food, and the 2001 foot-and-mouth epidemic—which enhanced public anxiety and demands for more trustworthy food sources. With expanding urban populations in many parts of the world, a growing concern about food insecurity, poverty, and malnutrition has also stimulated alternative agrofood strategies in and around many other cities (FAO, 2007). In relatively affluent settings like the UK, growing concern about the environmental impacts of industrial agriculture and the global trade in foodstuffs has helped to stimulate interest in alternative systems of food production and distribution. AAFNs have, moreover, benefited from a cultural reaction in parts of society against the way that the conventional food system excises the direct experience and understanding of food origin, quality, and preparation—a manifestation of modernity's wider tendency toward the deskilling of everyday life and the "sequestration of experience" in relation to external nature (Giddens, 1991).

Our analysis, based on research carried out in 2008–2009, focuses on the city of Manchester. According to national statistics from 2009, Manchester is one of the UK's largest cities, with a population of 483,800 people. It is a metropolitan borough of Greater Manchester, currently the third most populous county of England with 2.6 million people. Historically, Manchester grew rapidly during the nineteenth century due to the expansion of the textile industry, and related manufacturing and trade. This traditional economic dependence on industrialization, as well as the wet weather conditions and the hilly topography, has significantly slowed agricultural development in the region.

More recently, the gradual postwar decline in industrial activity and consequent depopulation of Manchester have significantly changed its economic landscape; the city council's economic strategy has shifted toward finance, the knowledge economy, and the creative industries, although many areas of the city still have not recovered from the loss of manufacturing employment. As for the agrofood sector, very few residents of Manchester are currently employed in agriculture; food retailing prevails as the most important part of the food chain in the Manchester economy, and many residents are also employed by large food-manufacturing companies (Manchester Food Futures, 2007). But many of Manchester's specific challenges relate directly or indirectly to the contemporary agrofood system, and as we shall see, a number of initiatives have emerged that in different ways use food as a focus in their responses to these urban challenges.

The Network

In Manchester, the threat to the viability and well-being of local communities and economies posed by factors such as poverty, unequal access to goods and services, social exclusion, and health inequalities has prompted the emergence of a loose network of alternative food initiatives operating in a diverse range of spaces across the city. The network under investigation consists of urban food producers and retailers, cooperatives and family businesses, citizen-led initiatives, and charitable and nonprofit organizations, which variously use or support alternative methods of production such as organic cultivation and permaculture, and/or alternative methods of distribution. These initiatives enact their members' aspirations for a more environmentally sustainable agrofood system to mitigate climate change, peak oil, food miles, and food insecurity. But they also collectively perform the space of the city in different ways, through moralized and embodied interactions with food, with the land, and with humans both proximate and distant.

Manchester Food Futures (MFF) is a local authority strategic partnership with a central role in coordinating and supporting the sustainable agrofood initiatives under discussion. Following its community strategy of "making Manchester more sustainable" by 2015, MFF is providing and supporting opportunities for residents and local organizations to get involved in projects, training, activities, and events pertaining to sustainable food. A wider network of local food initiatives directly or indirectly involved with MFF has coalesced around the project of creating a more relocalized food system in Manchester. In this article we focus on a selection of these projects:

- The Herbie Van, a mobile greengrocery set up by the independent charity Manchester Environmental Resource Centre (MERCi) and funded by MFF that provides affordable, fresh produce in areas of Manchester with low levels of social and physical mobility or access to fresh food, as well as to local schools, sheltered housing, churches, health clinics, and residents groups (MERCi, 2012; Subject One/MB, 2009).
- The Healthy Eating Local Food Partnership (HeLF), a social enterprise initiated by the community voluntary sector and funded by MFF that engages mental-health service users, young peo-

ple, and the community in healthy local food growing, cooking, and retailing activities and thus provides work-based learning opportunities and "moving-on" services, which help people to join mainstream society (Subject Two/RP, 2008).

- Valuing Older People (VOP), a local partnership initiative launched in 2003 by the Manchester City Council, National Health Service (NHS) Manchester, and community and voluntary organizations for targeting and engaging Manchester's elder population in sustainable food activities.
- Unicorn Grocery, a workers' cooperative that sells local, organic, and fair-trade food and donates 5% of its turnover to projects consistent with its principles.
- The Glebelands Market Garden, a small cooperative run by former Unicorn workers that provides fresh, local produce to local businesses such as Unicorn and Dig Food.
- Dig Food, a family-based organic noncertified box scheme specializing in good-quality, locally-sourced organic produce.

Beyond its work for an alternative supply system, MFF has also been active in supporting a number of community food-growing projects, many of which are directly aimed at realizing social benefits. For this reason, they developed Growing Manchester, a program currently supporting fifteen food-growing projects. In these projects, citizen-led initiatives have been an essential part of the network. For example:

- The Manchester Permaculture Network, a grassroots initiative set up by local community members interested in principles of permaculture that supports several community food-growing programs.
- Action for Sustainable Living, a charitable organization, and the Sustainable Neighborhoods Action Group, a pool of individuals and network groups in the community, both promoting sustainable living including local food and food growing (Subject Three/HSK, 2008; Subject Four/MT, 2009).
- The Association for Manchester Allotments Societies (AMAS), which supports the city's local allotment societies—which in turn allocate allotments of land to individuals for the growing of food—and its horticultural societies.

The Moral Taskscape of Local Food in Manchester

The network sketched above constitutes a microcosm of Manchester's ethical foodscape; in this section we bring out a few key characteristics of this foodscape, largely using examples drawn from the initiatives discussed. First, the ethical foodscape consists of a diverse range of spaces with very different social characteristics, such as shops, cafes and restaurants, farmers markets, allotments, guerrilla-gardened public spaces, community gardens, therapeutic landscapes, home-based food-buying coops, gardens, and window boxes. These function as "utopic spaces," spaces that have "social centrality" for certain social groups and in which ideas of the good society are put into practice (Hetherington, 1998). The ethical foodscape, as we suggested above, is thus also a *moral taskscape*—not simply an arrangement of space but also an array of practices, of performances involving skill and judgment. This configuration is held together through complex movements of food, people, knowledge, and ideas between these utopic spaces. However, as well as movements, the foodscape is also crisscrossed by a wide range of other kinds of interconnection, as practices close the felt distance between local producers, small-scale retailers, and consumers, and between sites of production and consumption. Some spaces are also sites for more passionate and sensuous engagement with food and soil (Degen et al. 2010); some initiatives, such as Herbie, HeLF, and VOP, expand Manchester's "ethical foodscape" beyond the natural habitats of affluent consumers, engaging with people from disadvantaged or isolated sections of the population in housing estates, cafés, hospital day centers, community gardens, and allotments (Subject Two/RP, 2008).

Second, as well as its distinctive spatiality, the ethical foodscape has its own temporalities. New developments in urban studies approach the contemporary city as a space constituted through the coexistence of multiple publics, cultures, and histories (Sandercock, 2003). As well as a material infrastructure, cities also have a temporal infrastructure, a fabric made of flows and rhythms of different scales, as people, matter, energy, and signs move around the city (Amin & Thrift, 2002). Such rhythms cohere the wider city as a living entity, and equally they hold together the ethical foodscape as people engage in temporally and spatially specific practices in relation to food as part of the city's social metabolism (Fischer-Kowlaski & Haberl, 2007). The foodscape pulses to a complex overlay of rhythms at daily, weekly, annual, or other timescales, and is grounded in the internal temporalities of work, free time, domestic provisioning, biological growth, and seasonal change.

Third, in the ethical foodscape the economy is re-embedded in the social. Even in retail spaces, customers typically get involved in a diversity of relations and practices that go beyond the narrow understanding of the economic. They thus contribute to the reconfiguration of the marketplace as a diverse economic space embedded in multiple social relations and interactions. In a sense, the marketplace is returned to the idea of the Greek *agora*, the situated market, which is simultaneously a space for diverse forms of sociality—personal relations, the reproduction of community, the exchange of knowledge and opinion—and for political action. More widely, social relations across Manchester's ethical foodscape are characterized by high levels of social cooperation, solidarity, and trust, and often have characteristics of a "gift" economy, in which goods or services are regularly given without expectation of reward. Voluntary labor is a common feature across the ethical foodscape, ranging from "WWOOFers"[1] working as volunteers on organic farms or smallholdings, to mental health service users working on allotments and in kitchens and restaurants. In narrow economic terms, the dependency of many AAFNs on voluntary work renders them economically unsustainable, since their income does not cover the cost of the necessary labor. However, viewed as part of an economy that is re-embedded in social life, these initiatives achieve a different kind of sustainability due to their role in the reproduction of social life itself (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

Fourth, the practices of the ethical foodscape produce diverse forms of "value," above and beyond narrow economic measures (Graeber, 2001). They do not simply reproduce social relations, but also exhibit a normative surplus in their relation to the desire for a just and sustainable food system. This is evident in the interactions between workers, with many initiatives organized through democratic forms of common ownership and management, and high levels of solidarity and cooperation between initiatives. It is also manifest in the relationships between producers and consumers, with personalized exchange relations between the retailers and consumers, and commodities often sold at nonmarket "just prices" to disadvantaged populations (as in Thompson, 1971). Ideas of justice are also embedded in the purchasing practices of individuals and organizations—which balance concern to support local producers and reduce "food miles" and also to engage in fair trade with the global South (Morgan, 2010)—and in the role that many initiatives play in the inclusion of "unemployed" or "economically inactive" parts of the population (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Both producers and consumers in the AAFNs are also engaged in producing and reproducing *sign* value by attaching ethical meanings and narratives to the objects, spaces, and practices of the ethical foodscape (Goodman, 2004).

Fifth, the practices of the ethical foodscape reverse the tendency in high modernity toward deskilling and alienation in relation to food practices and other areas of everyday life (Giddens, 1990). As an aspect of their practical "dwelling" in the moral taskscape around food, producers and consumers engage in an array of practical operations and tasks. They draw on, extend, and share their knowledge about the practicalities, ethics, and politics of agrofood production, distribution, and consumption in resistance to the knowledge-expropriating mechanisms of the conventional food system. In many cases (e.g., Herbie, HeLF, Unicorn, community food-growing projects), consumers develop growing and cooking skills as an outcome of everyday encounters with nature; they discuss personal experiences and exchange knowledge about species and varieties of plants, fruits and vegetables, and techniques of food preparation. In this way, they uncover lost knowledge and skills, which can best be understood as "not an attribute of an individual body in isolation but of the whole system of relations" constituted by their presence in these environments (Ingold, 2000). These skills not only express the concern to construct and control one's own body that is so characteristic of late modernity, but also enact a "life politics" that involves an ethic of solidarity and care in relation to proximal and distant human and nonhuman others (Giddens, 1991).

Conclusion

The study of urban AFFNs, we suggest, can provide useful clues about how to think about sustainability in a social way. The first step in this argument is the claim that AAFNs exhibit social sustainability to a significant extent, and we have tried to show that this is the case in Manchester's ethical foodscape. The alternative agrofood initiatives that we focused on manifested various combinations of the following: relations of solidarity and justice with proximate and distant others, regard for land and for the global environment, concern for social inclusion, interest in the well-being of the disadvantaged, and the reskilling of everyday life—which encourage us to speak in the language of the "moral economy." Of course, it is important not to overstate the extent to which "actually existing" AAFNs can deliver all aspects of social sustainability as described in the literature discussed

[1] WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) is an organization that gives individuals the opportunity to volunteer on organic farms and smallholdings.

above. These initiatives are often dominated by the new middle class, and serve little more than a niche market. The new networks are still relatively weak and suffer from a policy bias toward the conventional agrofood system. The AAFNs also have their own socioeconomic inequalities and problematic power relations, especially in rural areas and the developing world, with examples of unequal distribution and inequitable access to quality food, poor working conditions for farm laborers, and exclusion from decision-making processes (see Allen et al. 1991; Allen & Wilson, 2008; Brown & Getz, 2008; Getz et al. 2008). However, as we have tried to show, urban AAFNs do have a potential to deliver social sustainability in many different ways, in settings that are often very challenging.

We have also argued that the social sustainability of AFFNs becomes most clear when it is not understood as a separate, third pillar. We proposed a *sociomaterial turn* in the study of sustainability, one that understands "the economic" as embedded in social relations, and "the social" as including relations between humans and the material world, and that dissolves any hard boundaries between the economic, the environmental, and the social. Such a move, we suggest, implies that understanding the social character of sustainability does not involve isolating a distinct aspect, a domain of disembodied social relations and norms, but instead requires us to approach sustainability as a whole in a different way—as a lived, embodied form of life, with its own spatial organization and temporal rhythms. Applied to the study of AFFNs in Manchester, this approach reveals a heterogeneous set of sociomaterial practices combining diverse skills and moral judgments around contemporary agrofood processes, organized in spatially situated performances across the urban ethical foodscape, and involving a complex set of movements of food, people, knowledge, and ideas across the city.

This kind of approach, we would suggest, has wider implications for the study of social sustainability. It implies that sustainability should be conceived in relation to a far more diverse economic landscape (Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2006), where the meanings of practices of production, exchange, and consumption are not exhausted by the formal language of economics, and where other economies are possible, embedded in a wider range of social relations and wider conceptions of value than those of the market (Polanyi, 1957; Laclau, 1990). To put it another way, we have to place sustainability back into the "current of sociality," so that we can appreciate the way that sustainability initiatives, such as urban AFFNs, both sustain the social and are sustained by it. Similarly, our approach implies that thinking about the environment has to be opened up to the wide range of ideas and practices through which nature, spaces, and landscapes are experienced, used, and understood (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Franklin, 2001; Szerszynski, 2005), and to start to think of society as a living, metabolic phenomenon, one that involves the exchange of energy and matter between humans and their environment. Then, sustainability would be revealed as nothing other than the self-reproductive power of the social itself, properly conceived.

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