

Food production and food processing, nowadays, are economic activities in which local and global strategies are interconnected. Decisions on where and how to produce, and to what extent, are made on a global scale. They are more and more driven by the cost differentials of various factors such as labour and transportation, but also by target market characteristics including quality needs.

Even in agri-food systems it is possible to observe that many companies have organized their production in developing countries in order to be more competitive in the global market. The range of tasks that can be accomplished by delocalizing production activities has expanded to include core activities that are critical for company performance (such as research and innovation). This process generates positive and negative externalities that may affect the welfare of the local population as well the welfare of consumers and more generally the sustainability of local production systems.

On the other hand, local production systems are competing on the global market by producing specific quality goods or by producing innovative products.

In a globalized world, it is therefore possible to locate production activities in a limited geographical area and reach global markets. At the same time, these globalized production systems may reach niche and spatially concentrated markets. As a result, the agri-food system shows a striking coexistence of diverse organizational patterns. These food networks are extremely dynamic and are developing according to the (cultural and productive) characteristics of local production systems as well as the availability of resources (such as land and water), the production costs and the localization of target markets.

Although literature on local agri-food system (LAFS), is relevant, there are still unresolved issues concerning the factors that are influencing the dynamics of agri-food systems and what their effects, locally and globally, are. In particular, what are the dynamics of local production systems under the pressures of globalized food-chains with respect to environmental preservation, cultural identity, market equilibrium and in general socio-economic welfare? How is the process of construction / destruction of territorial links in the agri-food business shaping? At the same time, on the consumer side a dichotomy behavior exists where some consumers are attracted by “zero mile” products and others are adopting a non-seasonal consumption pattern. Some consumers are attracted by specific attributes, like geographic origin, while others are looking for the industrial brands as quality guarantee.

The implications of the different strategies regarding spatial dynamics within the global agri-food system could be better analyzed by adopting an interdisciplinary approach, where economics, geography, sociology, demography and agronomy can provide useful theoretical tools and innovative analytical outcomes.