

Short food Commercialization Circuits: Analysis of experiences in the Valparaíso-Chile region

Circuitos Cortos de Comercialización alimentaria: Análisis de experiencias de la Región de Valparaíso, Chile

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Received: March 19, 2020

Accepted: June 17, 2020

Background

Short food Commercialization Circuits (SCC) are expressions of new ways of understanding the economy, its internal diversity, as well as the heterogeneous ways of building territorial relationships, beyond commercial and extractivist relationships. These have been identified and analyzed in previous studies, that have anticipated the relevance of these alternatives in the current socio-political context of change, at national level.

Aims

Identify and analyze the fundamental aspects in the commercialization processes of main modalities of SCC in the Region, from speeches made by key informants, producers and consumers.

Method & Procedures

The methodological design was mixed, complementing quantitative and qualitative techniques. First one was the in-depth individual interview, with diverse key actors. Second one, analysis of secondary material, from a detailed review of the databases of stores related to food commercialization, in the Valparaíso region. Finally, third one consisted of applying a non-participant observation guideline, based on a questionnaire.

Results & discussion

The research found, as a first synthesis, the recognition of four forms of SCC in the Valparaíso region. Public fairs are spaces managed directly by agroecological producers. There are differences between them due to their historicity, level of organization and connection with the State. Regarding common elements, all of them are located in public spaces and can be interpreted as initiatives to deselitize the consumption of agroecological products. Meanwhile, digital platforms are tools where a series of food and non-food products are available. Buyers acquires these kinds of products through a website. Platforms generally operate as conscious intermediaries between food production and consumption. Consumer cooperatives are experiences to organize a group of people, to make purchases of a series of food and non-food products, collectively and cooperatively. Finally, specialized stores are mostly dedicated to the commercialization of unprocessed food products, followed by non-fresh processed products. Meaning, they are not currently an alternative for the commercialization of fresh food (vegetables and fruits), unlike the other commercialization channels mentioned in this article. One of the common characteristics regarding SCC, is that agroecological producers use different forms of commercialization, expressed in different combinations. In general, it is a depoliticized consumption, detached from any political understanding of the territory. Another common dimension is the distance between the consumer and the producer. Here the differences between the different SCC are notorious. Finally, the SCC sometimes operate as spaces for the transmission of information and education, searching the consolidation of more responsible or critical consumer practices. Regarding its relationship with the State, a critical view is observed due to the lack of monitoring, the inability of the institutions to be able to adapt to the particular conditions of the territories, and the lack of honesty and recognition of local knowledge, installed in the production from generations.

Conclusion

There are noticeable differences in the analyzed SCC, which are expressed in their organizational models, historiographical routes, types of consumers they work with, relationship with the State, level of politicization of their practices and speeches, and ways of understanding and building the territory. Despite these differences, there is a common horizon that is to be able to democratize access to agroecological consumption (farmer fairs in the hills have taken a step in that direction), which is also a fundamental transit for the survival of this type of production, because its extension could have a positive impact on prices. But it is also a long-term education mechanism that affects the consumer, transforming part of its dynamics. The SCC are spaces that generate learning, associated with a closer relationship between food production and consumption. This direction of transformation is key to building a more stable and vigorous market, that can sustain over time an alternative food production offer, that allows to project a future of growth, expanding the positive impacts in the territories. Ultimately, the SCC are also interpreted in the speeches as spaces for the recovery of heritage and a culture strongly linked to the rural world, that in some cases have the support of some other state instance. Finally, one of the most complex challenges is to build learning and transformation processes in people linked to rural work. The reluctance to change, and the fear it produces due to its age peculiarities, makes it difficult to develop a production such as agroecological.

Keywords: agro ecology, collaborative work and networks, reciprocity

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Financial support: Proyectos Fondecyt Iniciación No. 11170232 y Fondecyt Regular No. 1190020.

How to cite this article: Saravia Ramos, P. (2020). Circuitos Cortos de Comercialización alimentaria: Análisis de experiencias de la Región de Valparaíso, Chile. *Psicoperspectivas*, 19(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5027/psicoperspectivas-vol19-issue2-fulltext-1914>



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