

# ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF FOOD AS A COMMONS

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## Chapter 1

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### INTRODUCTION

The food commons are coming ...

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### The food commons are coming ...

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#### **Seeing with new eyes**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, only one vision has become hegemonic worldwide. The marginalization of any alternative to the single thought, also known as the end of history (Fukuyama, 1989; IUC, 2009), has quickly generated what is known as neoliberalism, the new form of hybridization between public sovereignty and private corporations that has come to dominate contemporary structures of global governance (Harvey, 2007). This arrangement, with a crucial role for the military industrial complex, has not only produced new forms of world disorders. It has also disrupted the fundamental understanding of modernity, that of a neat distinction between a public and a private sector. The new hybrid corporate power, the current form of capital accumulation, now runs the world within a logic of global sovereignty that defeats every form of democratic control. Every single aspect of human life has been attracted within this bio-political machinery so that the very human being is now commodified like every other aspect of nature. The most tangible manifestation of this process is in the domain of two of the fundamental building blocks of human life: water and food. These two essential components of life are now almost entirely transformed into commodities, leading to forms of domination and subordination that are difficult to overestimate. The consequences of the current extractive system are so deep as to produce a new geological era, the so-called Anthropocene (Crutzen, 2006; Purdy, 2015) or Capitalocene (Moore, 2017), which is likely to destroy the very conditions of life and human civilization (Brown, 2008; Capra and Mattei, 2015).

It is as a reaction to the massive abuses visited upon nature and community by the imperatives of reproduction of the dominant structure of power that the commons have re-emerged. This notion has the ambition to ground a counter-narrative and a political and institutional organization capable of shifting our pattern of development from an extractive and individual into a generative and collective mode. It is not, however, a new notion, as the commons have long constituted one way to organize and govern the relationship between society and nature resources (Sahlins, 1972; Mauss, 2002; De Moor, 2011; Ferrando and Vivero-Pol, 2017). The re-birth of the commons as an alternative, generative vision against neoliberal corporate plunder started with two heroic battles in the Global South. One emerged in 1994 in Chiapas (Mexico) with the Movimiento Zapatista as a reaction to the entry of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into force. It was ignited by the impossibility for local farmers to survive

with dignity in the global corporate food system (in its broader sense). The other arose in Cochabamba (Bolivia) in 2001, triggered by the need to defend water against corporate privatization by an American company with the support of the national government. In both cases, the commons were invoked to defend local communities against governments transformed into cronies of global corporate interests. Food and water, components of our very physical existence, have therefore been at the origins of the re-birth of the commons as a strategy of defence and (hopefully) of transformation: defence against ongoing commodification of commons still owned or governed collectively, and transformation to re-invent or design de novo forms to use, steward and share resources important for the community outside the market and state logic. Interestingly, however, while the notion of water as a commons is now widely recognized and has grounded many battles even in the Global North (Barlow and Clarke, 2017; Bieler, 2017), food as a commons has not been a conscious target of political battles and civic claims (Ferrando, 2016); indeed, it has not even been a paradigm of research (Vivero-Pol, 2017a).

Yet, we believe food can also be valued and governed as a commons and that approaching it under this intellectual framework offers important insights into a possible alternative vision coherent with the needs of reproduction of life rather than of capital. This book aims to open that discussion in the belief that we can obtain for food at least some of the (though partial) successes that we have been able to obtain with water.

### **Valuing food as a commodity is at odds with human history**

Capitalism has been thriving and reproducing a troublesome relationship with food and food systems. The contemporary food regime of corporations and financial investors is such that while many eat poorly and badly, others have access to all the food they desire: purchasing power is what separates the two. Moreover, industrial production and global distribution of food are major driving forces in pushing the environment beyond its planetary and ecological boundaries, mortgaging the livelihood of future generations. This scenario is characterized by extreme inequality and power imbalances. At its centre is the idea that food is an object for sale (a commodity) and the food system is nothing but an opportunity to extract private value. In such a context, achieving the universal right to adequate food (a legal entitlement), food and nutrition security (a global public good) or food justice and food sovereignty inevitably appears a long-term vision at best, a utopian goal at worst. It is therefore essential to broaden political imagination: to explore and practice alternative paradigms of food and visions of food systems capable of overcoming the normative, technical, political lock-ins the industrial food system has created (IPES-Food, 2016). The paradigm of food as a commons, as a way to value food and to govern its production and allocation, will unlock our imagination, encouraging us to design other types of policies and legal frameworks for the food system that have been so far disallowed because they were not aligned to the dominant narratives of capitalism (Wright, 2013).

The aim of this book is to investigate the multiple enclosures at the basis of the dominant industrial food regime and to explore how such enclosures could be challenged by re-describing and re-conceptualizing food as a commons. As in many other areas of people's livelihoods, enclosures, plunder and exclusions have occurred through legislation, pricing, patents, discourses and public violence (Mattei and Nader, 2008). As a consequence, the opportunities for the production, transformation and consumption of food as a commons have been marginalized and repressed. The social construction of food as a commodity, in fact, denies its non-economic attributes (as vital fuel for our bodies, as a human right, as a product of Nature, or as an element of our culture) in favour of an exclusive focus on its tradable features, such as its external appearance and packaging, taste, or shelf-life, but first and foremost, its price and calorie content.

Inevitably, this leads to neglect social and relational properties of food, alongside an emphasis on cheap calories and the dismissal of the ecological role of food systems in stewarding biodiversity and nature's inherent connection with society and the organization of the economy (Díaz et al., 2018; Moore, 2017).

From the scientific and industrial revolutions of the 18th century to the present day, capitalist thinking and its practices have increasingly transformed food – an essential element of life – into a private, mono-dimensional commodity for mass consumption in a globalized market. Over the last decade, however, there has been an increased recognition that this view of food as a commodity, as a social construct, can be challenged. Food can be re-conceptualized differently: it can be valued and governed as a commons, and it is constructed as such in a range of initiatives in all world regions.

A subversion of the food paradigm that sustains the current mainstream food system, when it happens, will shed light on the conflict between the hegemonic economic epistemology (an epistemology in which the commons lead to the “tragedy” of overexploitation, and in which private property and allocation through market mechanisms predominate) and the non-dominant alternatives (political, historical, legal and radical-activist approaches to the commons), which have been gaining legitimacy in recent decades.

The framing of food as a commodity, the production of which responds to price signals and the allocation of which depends on purchasing power, is increasingly being challenged. Alternative framings have been proposed, often implicitly, by a range of grassroots movements and customary indigenous traditions all over the world. Small-scale farmers, peasants and fisherfolk, farmworkers, conscious eaters and regulators, food security activists, academics and human rights advocates, among others, are developing alternative food paradigms in multiple loci (urban and rural areas in the Global South and North) by defending the public nature of many food-producing resources such as seeds, water, land and agricultural knowledge. The de-commodification and commoning of food (and of the whole food system as the broader objective) will open up a transition towards a plurality of new food regimes. As a result, features other than exchange value shall be given greater recognition: food, under these competing paradigms, is re-conceptualized as essential to the satisfaction of a human need (nutrition + culture + community), with justice, democracy and the inherent recognition of the ecological limits and moral obligations as pivotal elements. Food systems will emerge in various forms, and the individual freedom to extract nature and maximize profits will be deemed incompatible with the common good of people and the planet (Patel and Moore, 2018).

This book aims to enrich the debate on food as a commons between and within disciplines, niches of resistance (transition towns, food sovereignty, de-growth, open knowledge, commons) and organizational scales (local food systems and national policies, South–South collaborations and international governance and agreements). It asks two questions: What would food policies look like, once we shift to the paradigm of food as a commons? And how do we get there?

### **The thriving commons as a civic counter-movement to the global food crises**

The commons are back ... if they were ever gone. The multiple crises the world has faced in the last decades have prompted scholars, policy makers and activists to seek solutions that enable us to live a satisfying, fair and sustainable life within planetary boundaries. The reappearance of the commons represents a promising transformative pathway to replace the neoliberal model. Historically, the commons have been associated with a record of resilience, collective governance and sustainability. They provide an inspirational narrative based on solid moral grounds. Commons thinking offers a counter-claim to the idea that society is and should be composed

of atomized individuals, acting as rational agents seeking to maximize their individual utility and competing against other individuals in order to thrive as a separate individual rather than as a member of an ecological collectivity.<sup>1</sup> However, the narrative of the commons was marginalized in the 20th century by the ascent of possessive individualism (Macpherson, 1971), rational choice (Schelling, 1984), the diffusion of the individualistic ethos and domination proper of colonialism, the objectification of nature, social Darwinism (Leonard, 2009) and the famous fable of the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968). Unlike these, the commons discourse recognizes that people shall live their lives as aware individuals deeply embedded in, and not acting against, social relationships and the environment. Moreover, individuals’ active participation is essential to realizing collective and personal goals, moving away from a purely individual rights-based, market-based and private-property worldview.

From a historical perspective, treating food as a pure commodity devoid of other important dimensions is an anomaly. For centuries, food was cultivated in common and considered a mythological or sacred item; it was allocated according to need, rather than on the basis of the ability to pay. In different times and geographies, food shaped civilizations and socio-economic transformations. Often, it was considered so important in terms of culture, religion and survival that its production and distribution were governed by non-market rules; production, distribution and consumption were collective activities, done in common rather than alone or within the nuclear family (Diamond, 1997; Fraser and Rimas, 2011; Montanori, 2006). Food-producing commons were ubiquitous in the world, and history records are full of commons-based food production systems ranging from the early Babylonian Empire (Renger, 1995), ancient India (Gopal, 1961), the Roman Empire (Jones, 1986), Medieval Europe (Linebaugh, 2008) and early modern Japan (Brown, 2011). Food was considered a commons as well as a public tool, with diverse and certainly evolving proprietary schemes ranging from a private good given for free to idle Temple priests, a resource levied by kings and feudal lords as well as a public tool used by Roman emperors, Mayan dignitaries and the British government to prevent disturbances and appease the revolting crowds (Jones, 1986; Schuftan, 2015; Kent, 2015). Food always carried many dimensions, and, except in recent history, it was never reduced to a tradeable priced good.

However, in the Western context, the idea of the commons was gradually abandoned: the enclosures movement, which started in England in the 16th century, and the abolition of the poor laws by the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 symbolize this shift (Polanyi, [1944] 2001). The commons re-entered the political and social agenda only in the 1980s, as a counter-movement to – as society’s self-defense against – the commodification process that accelerated in the last quarter of the 20th century (Appadurai, 1986). For decades, the commons have been dismissed as a failed system of governance and resource management (Bloemen and Hammerstein, 2015). They have now been gradually rehabilitated in the legal, political and economic domains, especially in the environmental and knowledge realms (Benkler, 2013; Capra and Mattei, 2015). Today, there is a growing recognition that the hegemonic market–state duet, with their capitalist system and individualistic ethos, is inadequate to tackle the global and multiple disruptions that living beings and the planet confront on a daily basis.

All over the world, socio-economic imaginations are regaining ground as alternative narratives and praxis to the hegemonic neoliberal version of capitalism (e.g., happiness, de-growth, *buen vivir*, resilience, transition, sharing economy, peer-production). Moreover, innovative commons-based initiatives are mushrooming, with examples ranging from the local level (e.g., the maintenance of communal forests owned by parishes in Galicia villages), to the national level (e.g., the path-breaking initiative promoted by the government of Ecuador to collectively design public policies that can support knowledge commons [Vila-Viñas and Barandiaran, 2015]), to the regional level (e.g., the first European Citizens’ Initiative, which demanded that water be

treated as a public good and commons [Bieler, 2017] or the European commoners establishing a European Commons Assembly). Some commoners organize to defend old commons from current modes of enclosure and commodification (e.g., land grabbing or privatization of municipal water services), while others are inventing new commons in the knowledge domain (Creative Commons Licenses, online services and digital content) and in the cities (food councils, commoning disused public squares and abandoned buildings, sharing meals with neighbours and the broader community). In all these cases, the theory and praxis of the commons (Quarta and Ferrando, 2015) operate as counter-hegemonic or alter-hegemonic, gathering around a diffused dissent and the desire for new forms of imagination (Vivero-Pol, 2017a).

### **The multiplicity of commons: different vocabularies, understandings and practices**

Before embarking on the reading of this volume, it is important to highlight that the commons continue to have different readings (Mattei, 2013), each with its different trajectories and implications. Legal, political, economic, cultural and ecological approaches talk about commons and inform knowledge and ideologies, which are then reflected in the creation of different schools of thought and vocabularies that examine, interpret and influence our understanding of the nature of the commons. As resources that are important for human beings, commons have “multiple personalities” (Wall, 2014) and therefore multiple phenomenologies (Mattei, 2012) and vocabularies to describe them. This is not an anomaly but rather a characteristic of societies already highlighted, among other theories, by legal pluralism (Engle-Merry, 1988) and institutional diversity (Ostrom, 1990). The plurality of definitions of the commons in the public and academic discourses renders it difficult to reach a consensus on which resources, situations and policy decisions are deemed to be considered as commons or for the common good. This situation affects food directly, with its consideration as a commons strongly contested in academic and political domains (Vivero-Pol, 2017b). One source of discrepancy of understanding the commons stems from the fact that collective ethical notions of what a commons is according to different communities (commons as a social construct) have developed in parallel with theoretical approaches proposed by influential thinkers (in particular among economists of the institutionalist branch) and with political decisions made by elites (experimenting with a political approach to commons).

Different academic disciplines have addressed the commons by relying on the epistemologies (cognitive tools and accumulated knowledge) that characterize each, be that economics, law, history or political science. These epistemologies have been blended with dominant ideologies and politics, as academia is often influenced by the ruling elites (Wallerstein, 2016). Other versions of the commons emerge from grassroots activists, the “commoners” who develop a range of practices questioning, mostly implicitly, the dominant understanding of food as a commodity. These varied approaches to a complex, place-based and multi-faceted theme have shaped the different meanings and implications of the commons that we have at present. These understandings have evolved into an interdisciplinary approach (Laerhoven and Berge, 2011) that now seeks to expand beyond the academic walls to incorporate the meanings of commoners, combining different sources of knowledge in a transdisciplinary perspective (Dedeurwaerdere, 2014). However, various definitions of the commons still co-exist: the debate today is not only between an individualistic approach, in which the allocation of goods occurs through a combination of the state and the market, and an approach that makes room for the commons; it is also a debate within the community of scholars and activists who rely on the commons as to how to define the commons, how to govern them and which political implications follow from this counter-hegemonic paradigm (Benkler, 2013; Hess and Ostrom, 2007).

Therefore, with such a rich array of proponents and practitioners, the academic theory of the commons cannot be considered uniform, coherent or consolidated. However, diversity should not be perceived as a threat. On the contrary, the existence of colliding theoretical approaches underlines tensions and fault-lines, revealing the different epistemic regards to resources and practices that are essential to human societies and individuals.

## **The different meanings of the commons to economists and policy makers**

### ***Commons as public goods***

In its most widespread and general meaning, a common good describes a specific resource that is shared with and benefits all or most members of a given community. Commons, owned in common or shared within the community, satisfy needs that go unmet by either markets or institutions. However, in the economic and political parlance, commons are identified (and named) as public goods in some cases or as common-pool resources in others. On the one hand, political scholars define public goods as those material and immaterial goods deemed to be desirable by the public (Hampson and Hay, 2004) because of the utilities they generate in favour of the society (Ver Eecke, 1999). Although their nature as public good does not automatically imply their open accessibility to all, goods like water, pollination, soil fertility and sunlight are often considered commons and public goods as they are fundamental to the idea that life is not for sale (Shiva, 2005; Patel, 2007). On the other hand, the notion of commons (or common-pool resources, as termed by Elinor Ostrom) is different from public goods in neoclassical economics parlance. The term commons is often utilized to define a large set of human and natural systems that is

sufficiently large that it is difficult, but not impossible, to define recognized users and exclude other users altogether. Further, each person's use of such resources subtracts benefits that others might enjoy. Fisheries and forests are two common-pool resources that are of great concern in this era of major ecological challenges. Others include irrigation systems, groundwater basins, pastures and grazing systems, lakes, oceans, and the Earth's atmosphere.

*(Ostrom, 2009)*

Throughout the world, natural fisheries, common grazing pastures, forests and biodiversity are examples of open-access resources prone to the tragedy of the commons, a fable that was proposed by Garrett Hardin (1968) and gained ample support at the end of 20th century. However, Hardin's generalized postulates were not based on sufficient evidence. When such evidences were gathered and analyzed by Elinor Ostrom (1990), the weaknesses and inconsistencies of the tragedy were exposed and debunked, leading Hardin to recognize the limits of his approach (Hardin, 1994). Unfortunately, however, Hardin's tragedy, with all its limits of reductionism, proved to be of exceptional predictive power if the commons idea is opened enough to include our whole world. Global corporations today roam it to satisfy the unlimited short-term profit motive that is codified in their DNA, the corporate charter. They act exactly like the self-interested farmers in Hardin's parable, enjoying a space of *no law* because the national legal systems are (captured and) ill-equipped to limit corporate power and its exceptional volatility. Land grabbing, water privatization and many other issues directly connected to food plunder cannot be understood outside of such clear perception (Ferrando, 2017). Ostrom's critique of Hardin, by theoretically denying the tragedy, may in practice shield the corporate entities that as a matter of fact cause it in the global arena. This is perhaps the main reason why the commons



should not be approached as a positive object that can be defined ontologically. The political dimension cannot be overlooked. This is why the economic approach, as that of other social sciences, provides little understanding and no political agency. A true genuinely phenomenological social theory capable of developing a *total critique* is needed (Unger and Crawford, 1996).

Although the literature on public goods and common-pool resources is extensive and diverse, such literature typically relies on the standard economic definition of public goods, which is based on the two ontological characteristics of non-rivalry and non-excludability (Samuelson, 1954; Buchanan, 1965; Musgrave, 1959). A public good is a good that is both non-excludable and non-rivalrous, in that individuals cannot be effectively excluded from its use and use by one individual does not reduce availability to others. A pure public good is an extreme case of a positive externality. There is, in general, no profit motivation to lead private firms to supply a socially efficient quantity of such goods (in other terms, markets undersupply such goods). In many cases, markets for public goods will not even exist (i.e., clean air). Private goods, however, cannot be enjoyed simultaneously by many people, and individuals can be prevented from using them either by physical means or by property rights (including intellectual property rights such as patents). Pure public goods provided by the government are usually financed from tax revenues. Different funding options result in different economic outcomes in terms of the distribution of the cost burden between taxpayers and users of the good or service.

### ***Commons: a political construct to govern resources or to radically transform the system?***

Because of their non-excludable character, public goods result in a collective action problem: all those who benefit from the provision of a local public good find it costly to contribute and would prefer others to pay for the good instead. If everyone follows the selfish dominant strategy, hoping to freely ride on the contributions of others, then the good is not provided or is underprovided. Yet, everyone would be better off if everyone contributed. Institutions allow for the overcoming of such collective action problems by imposing compliance with formal or informal rules with the aim of producing socially optimal outcomes (Ostrom, 2005). Another problem that has gained particular relevance in the recent period is that “public” no longer means the communities who manage their local resources but rather the central governing authority that controls these resources. In theory, public still means people; in practice, public means government decoupled from the people’s social/ecological rights to their common goods (Quilligan, 2012).

Very often, public goods and commons are used as interchangeable terms, the former mostly used in the economic and political realms and the latter predominant in the social and environmental sciences domains. However, in both economic and political terms, food could be considered as an essential resource that requires management as a social mandate in order to guarantee the right to food for all: due to its vital role in allowing people to lead active and healthy lives, its access cannot be made conditional on purchasing power (De Schutter and Pistor, 2015). As such, considering and governing food as a commons would simply mean recognizing food for what it is. Some authors, like Giacomo Pettenati et al. (this volume), have also gone as far as claiming that the uniqueness of food is such that the whole food system should be re-imagined as a commons. Others, like Cristian Timmermann (this volume), have also suggested the condition of food and nutrition security (FNS) should be considered a global commons or a global public good as it is beneficial for the community, the nations and the planet in general. FNS as a state of affairs is not rivalrous (my own food and nutrition security does not prevent you from having yours), but it is definitely excludable (as we can see at present, with over 800 million people with no food security at all), although ethically abominable.



The transformative and imaginative potential of the commons has been synthesized by the idea of the commons as a political tool and horizon. Such understanding of the commons is currently adopted by two different intellectual streams, which differ from each other on the basis of the primary subject of analysis: the resource or the governing community.

Those who focus on the properties of the resource recognize that rivalry and excludability can be molded by societal norms and technology but at the same time accept that commons are defined by these two features (Kaul et al., 1999; Kaul et al., 2003). Actually, it is not rare to find scholars using the terms public goods and commons interchangeably, especially when dealing with global public goods and global commons (Buck, 1998; Brousseau et al., 2012). For this stream, global commons are resources that provide benefits that are strongly universal in terms of countries, or whose benefits extend to all population groups and generations (Hjorth Agerskov, 2005); they have been the building blocks of different civilizations (Wolf, 2012). Examples range from clean air, weather data collection or internet, to stable currencies or standardized norms (e.g., ISO system). This understanding of global commons requires little more than forms of intergovernmental cooperation, voluntary guidelines to corporate actors and minor adjustments in policies and international law. Moreover, the transformative power of collective arrangements by people or communities outside the market and state duopoly is not contemplated here. Resource-based commons can co-exist with neoliberal markets, given their focus on non-appropriable resources (those termed as market failures) and the benefits they provide. That explains why global commons—global public goods have been increasingly embraced by the “institutional mainstream”, as they can easily fit the dominant narrative of capitalism (Birdsall and Diofasi, 2015). In the European Commission, global public goods are now the subject of a thematic programme of the Development Cooperation Instrument.

For scholars and activists in the second stream, commons are not about the nature of a good but rather the way in which societies organize around essential goods that are produced, reproduced and managed collectively (Workshop on Governing Knowledge Commons, 2014). By commons, they do not mean things (rivers, forests, land, etc.), information or knowledge content or places defined by their material properties. They mean a way of doing things together in order to strengthen democratic self-determination. In this view, commons are self-regulated social arrangements to govern material and immaterial resources deemed essential for all and are place- and time-restricted and vary according to different societies, circumstances and technological developments. Commons can be distinguished from non-commons by the institutionalized sharing of resources among members of a community (Madison et al., 2010), what is often known as “commoning”. It is “commoning” together that confers on a material, or non-material, common resource its commons consideration (Dardot and Laval, 2014). Commoning is about human/nature relationships (Bollier and Helfrich, 2015), and therefore the human-made consideration of what a commons is requires a specification for each place in our own time (Friedmann, 2015).

Commoning, as a form of governance, differs from the market allocation mechanism based on individual profit maximization and state governance based on command and control. It demands new institutions, goal setting and forms of interaction, thereby forming the bedrock to support a new moral narrative, a new transition pathway, a new economic model and a new relationship with nature and the planet Earth. Commons are a system of decision-making, collective ownership and value-based purposes that challenge the for-profit ethos of the market and the state’s pretense to a monopoly on the definition of the common good and to acting “*parens patriae*” in the name of the whole polity. Commons are not about maximizing individual utilities, selfish individualism or legitimizing the use of force but rather collective decisions, institutions, property and shared goals to maximize everybody’s wellbeing.

Transformative-wise, those two streams present diverging characteristics: the resource-based scholars see the commons as self-regulated forms of governance that can co-exist with current forms of free-market and capital accumulation of private-property regimes and absolute sovereign states (e.g., see a critique of the approaches defended by neo-institutionalists or neo-hardiniens in Caffentzis, 2012). Conversely, the governance-based proponents conceive of the commons as a transformative narrative, rooted in history but innovative enough to challenge the hegemonic duopoly formed by the neoliberal market and the state (Dardot and Laval, 2014; Wall, 2014; Capra and Mattei, 2015) This stream directly collides with the basic foundations of capitalism, such as the primacy of individual property over other rights, the sovereignty of the individual consumer over collective wellbeing, the lack of limits to resource accumulation and competition as the main driver of progress rather than cooperation (McCarthy, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2009; Jeffrey et al., 2012; Verhaegen, 2015). Commons hold different values, goals, narratives, ethical principles and functioning from the capitalist market. From the very moment that we accept that the community has an instituting power to create a commons (resource, property regime, governing institution and purpose), we accept that the community is bestowed with legal and political powers to regulate the resources important to it, making commoning transformational and counter-hegemonic, since the state aims to retain those instituting powers to issue policies and enact laws and the market aims to retain its supremacy to allocate and govern scarce resources.

### **The charter to navigate the chapters**

This book presents a different normative view of food, as a commons instead of a commodity, based on the recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of food and its essential role for humans, as well as on the praxis carried out by customary food practices, rural or indigenous, and contemporary civic food actions, urban or consumer-driven. The different understandings of food as a commons are place- and time-situated, with meanings and governing institutions created specifically by each polity, and thus there is no one interpretation of that concept. They converge, however, in their refusal to treat food exclusively as a monetized commodity. Far from being concerned about the lack of homogeneity, the editors value those discrepancies positively as there cannot be just one monolithic narrative about the polysemic concepts of food and commons.

With their diversity of approaches and their multiplicity of angles, the various chapters enrich the debate on food as a commons between and within disciplines, niches of resistance (transition towns, food sovereignty, de-growth, open knowledge, commons) and organizational scales (local food, national policies, South-South collaborations and international governance and agreements), exploring the different dimensions that reframe food as a commons and deploying a wide array of practical initiatives in rural and urban settings, in the Global South and the Global North, that actually materialize this narrative.

It is not our intention to provide an academic definition of what we consider “food as a commons” (although some authors in this book have already provided their own understandings). In that sense, we defend those understandings of “food as a commons” that are related to food democracy, food justice, food sovereignty or right to food practices. Said otherwise, we believe that valuing food as a commons informs the idea that communities should invent new ways of guaranteeing access to adequate and preferred food for all by setting up social innovations of various sorts, “de-commodifying” food and creating in the process a sort of “socio-diversity” of food alternatives that create multiple food systems that value food differently. And yet, all those alternatives oppose and deny the mono-dimensional valuation of food as a for-profit commodity.

For us, it is essential to understand that the concept of commons is socially and environmentally relational and cannot thus be understood without the particular value-based relations between the community and nature and within the community itself (Bollier, 2016; Verhaegen, 2015). Commons encompass networking, bond-creation, social learning among citizens, empowerment, caring and emancipatory meanings through community praxis. Actually, as historian Peter Linebaugh (2008) said, the concept of commons is best understood as a verb, and commoning can be understood as a means to rediscover the embeddedness of the individual in society and nature (Clausen, 2016). As a matter of fact, people, communities, activists, scholars and practitioners all over the world engage with commons on a daily basis. They live in both urban and rural settings and they protect, produce and imagine conceptions of the world that go beyond the dominant paradigm of privatization and exclusion (Walljasper, 2010). In that sense, we agree that “each commons is also somebody else’s commons” (Shiva, 2005) and that in the web of life what is connected to a certain community is always connected to others (both human and non-human) beyond that community.

The choice of the chapters and the authors was not an easy task. It was certainly influenced by our networks and positioning as academics from the Global North. For this reason, there is no pretension of exhaustivity, but rather the desire to see analogous projects thriving elsewhere. Furthermore, chapters do not represent all the existing debates around food and food systems as a commons, and they are inherently contextual and inspired by the histories and experiences of their authors. We are aware that much more can and must be said about the intellectual, practical and methodological shift that is brought by the de-commodification of food. We hope that this collection can help to open up spaces and carve cracks in the mainstream, presenting other ways of engaging with food and food systems.

### ***Rebranding food and alternative narratives of transition***

The first part of the book sets the stage. Its five chapters directly challenge the commodity-based nature of the mainstream narrative around food and food systems and invite the readers to imagine alternative scenarios. Here, the authors explore different theoretical approaches to normative views of food, as a commons or as a public good, that reject the absolute commodification of food, understood as the hegemonic cultural narrative that impinges the mainstream food system and the productivist paradigm. Those approaches are based on the multiple dimensions of food; the non-Christian cosmologies; the de-commodification of food by also de-commodifying the components that produce that food; the open-source, peer-to-peer ethos and the sharing economy; and the emergent political construction of global public goods.

In the opening piece, José Luis Vivero-Pol departs from the multiple understandings of food to underline the reductionism resulting from the consideration of food as a commodity: such a framing, he argues, obscures other non-economic dimensions of food quite relevant to humans. For him, it is not enough to say that food is not a commodity, but it is essential to discuss its role as life enabler, natural resource, human right, cultural determinant, tradeable good and public good. All these dimensions must be taken into consideration if we are to radically shift the terms of the debate around food as a commons, but none of them is visible when we accept the mono-dimensional valuation of food as a commodity.

In the second contribution, Giacomo Pettenati, Alessia Toldo and Tomaso Ferrando engage in a dialogue with the idea of food as a commons presented in the introductory chapter but offer an additional provocative twist. In their opinion, it is not enough to focus on food as the product of the food system. On the contrary, the de-commodifying power of the commons must redesign the entirety of the food system and, as such, redefine each single element that

composes it. In their eyes, food cannot be dissociated from the deeper and broader socio-economic–ecological food system that generates it. Therefore, land, seeds, gender, energy, labour, landscape, the convivial act of eating, food waste and all other components of the food system must be re-thought, re-imagined and practiced according to the radical and ecological paradigm of commoning and the commons. Otherwise, no real transformation can be achieved.

On a similar line, Marina Chang's chapter refines the idea of food system as a commons and enriches it with insights from critical feminism and non-Western traditions. In her chapter, she constructs a holistic, interconnected and intersectional idea of care as the core of growing a commons food regime in order to create synergistic outcomes in a world held together by an array of disciplines, organizations, institutions, movements and forms of discursive power, and at a multitude of sites across the social domain. Growing a care-based commons food regime, she concludes, is like entering a new epoch of history: the pattern is not written, but we make history by living, experiencing, generating, reproducing and protecting the food commons towards ecological and just food systems.

In their chapter, Alex Pazaitis and Michel Bauwens converge on food through their thinking about prefigurative social order, technological innovation and commons-based peer production. In the context of a productive civil society of contributors with an ethical market economy and an enabling partner state, they claim, a set of policies that target the empowerment of social production may lead to an open-source agricultural revolution. Through the construction of an integrated ecosystem and the enactment of specific policies that favour the transition, the different dynamics of Commons-Based Peer Production and the emerging political economy could thus be brought together and facilitate the construction of a commons-based sustainable agricultural system. Contrary to the mainstream food system in which resource accumulation, heavy subsidies for unsustainable and unhealthy practices and exploitation for profit without including the true account of food becomes the norm, a commons-based food system revolves around collective governance, rational utilization of natural resources (considering the livelihood of future generations) and a fair distribution of revenues and food products.

In the last contribution of the first section, Cristian Timmermann closes the circle of narratives of transition by focusing on food security as one of the most debated and – often – abused concepts in the domain of food systems studies. For Timmermann, food security brings a number of benefits to humanity from which nobody can be excluded and which can be simultaneously enjoyed by all. As such, an innovative understanding of food as a commons must be accompanied by an innovative understanding of food security as a public good that can be deployed to assess policies and decisions affecting food production, distribution and access. The author offers a five-fold theory of food security as a public good based on normative rationale and political implications, unfolding one of the multiple dimensions of food (as posited by Vivero-Pol in this volume). He also highlights the advantages of a shifting paradigm with regards to not only food but also the broader intellectual and policy framework.

### ***Exploring the multiple dimensions of food***

The second part of the book explores the multiple dimensions of food and how they have been constructed through continuous interaction with and clashes between nature, authority, market, history and communities. Recasting food as a commons enables us to better value and protect the multi-dimensionality of food and thereby to reverse the mono-dimensional approach to food as a commodity that still prevails. The various dimensions of food explored in these chapters in no way preclude or restrain other dimensions of food that could go beyond the ones presented here. Actually, Cristina Tirado (this volume) already proposes a seventh dimension

of food as a medicine to be added to the six dimensions mentioned by Jose Luis Vivero-Pol (this volume).

In Chapter 7, John O'Neill approaches these interactions through the lenses of the conflict between conceptions of food as a vital human need and food as a commodity. In response to the consolidation of the "new" moral economy of the market and the paradigm of food as a commodity, egalitarian forms of mutual aid were developed and grounded in the acknowledgement of mutual dependence and common neediness. He explores how the first theorists of the market economy obscured the claims of need and replaced mutual dependence with individual competition. Today, although often invisible, the practices of mutual aid in working-class communities and the arguments for universal social protection remind us of the possibility of other readings of food that are rooted in the acknowledgment of the vulnerability that characterizes states of dependency as those that every human has with regard to food: we all need to eat food every day.

In Chapter 8, George Kent infuses his studies on community-based food systems with the notion of food as a commons and highlights the benefits that can be derived if we organize communities in ways that facilitate positive social interaction, minimize exploitation and indifference, and encourage caring for the others, whether your relatives, neighbours or more distant humans. By setting up community-level food projects and treating food as a commons, he claims, food systems can facilitate people's working and playing together and, in that way, support their caring about one another's wellbeing. In a world made up of strong local communities with strong local food systems, we can grow a global food system that works well for both living beings and the planet. His approach is certainly bottom-up, departing from local communities, and then networking with other similar caring niches. However, this can only occur once we realize that the food system is not a terrarium that can be objectified and studied but rather a complex set of socio-ecological relations in permanent flux that shapes communities and the space around them, at the same time that it is shaped in turn by these communities.

Departing from the recent initiatives of infant and young child feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E) and the SafelyFed scheme of communal support for breastfeeding mothers in situations of need, Penny Van Esterik offers in Chapter 9 a reflection on food as a cultural core. In a society that tends to donate industrial infant formula, purchases breastmilk for profit and proposes individualistic solutions to infant food security, she claims, the creation of collective spaces for mothers and the satisfaction of their needs represents a paradigm change that has significant implications on both society and individuals. More importantly, the discourse of food as a commodity makes culture in the global food system invisible and devalues nurturing practices such as postpartum care, home cooking, regional food preservation techniques, gardening, food sharing through feasting and commensality. Whatever has a value but is not priced by the market gets obscured. On the contrary, food and food systems as a commons make culture and diversity visible, away from standardization and homogenization. Van Esterik makes a call for ethnographies of community-based food commons, which would make visible how the commons work in different cultural settings and the link between food and societies.

Finally, Noah Zerbe's contribution in Chapter 10 provides the reader with a genealogy of the idea of food as a commodity, another food dimension worth exploring because it became hegemonic in the global food system of the 21st century. In order to better understand the need for transition and where the possibilities lie, Zerbe traces the commodification of food in political and economic terms from the colonial food regime, through the rise of the United States, and then to the consolidation of the current neoliberal food regime. Through a combination of legal, political and economic elements, he shows how the strengthening and global expansion of neoliberal capitalism, with its associated narratives of enclosing the commons, absolute proprietary rights, individualism and the moral supremacy of market rules over other allocation

mechanisms, has fundamentally modified the global food regime, resulting in the transformation of food from a vital component of life into an instrument for speculative investment and profit maximization. In the industrial, neoliberal food system, food is produced to earn profit and not to feed people adequately. It is only by knowing the premises and processes that shaped the narrative behind the dominant food regime, he claims, that alternative imaginations and new forms of resistance can be organized.

### ***Food-related elements considered as commons***

Policy makers and academics are moving from the stringent and binary division of the world into public and private goods to a looser but more practical definition of the circumstances that take into consideration utility rather than ownership, as highlighted by the example of the so-called global commons, which would remain undersupplied in the absence of robust cooperation mechanisms. This move is nothing but a reflection of the multiple experiences on the ground by grassroots organizations, civic collective actions and customary societies that value food in its multiple dimensions and not just based on its market price. Regarding food and its system of production, some material and non-material elements are already considered, although only to a certain extent and in certain contexts, to fall beyond the public/private division and are associated with the ideas of commons, while the status of others is contested (genetic resources, wild foods and water) or generally regarded as private goods (agro-chemical inputs, labour, etc.). This section presents immaterial knowledge commons (traditional agricultural knowledge, public science and gastronomy) that are considered and practiced as a commons in current food systems. Moreover, two material food producing inputs, the normative valuation of which is quite contested by the neoliberal hegemonic narrative, namely genetic resources and water, are also discussed in detail, with cases studies on South Africa, Germany and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The aim of this part is to contribute to an expansive understanding of food as a commons that departs from the reductionist idea of food as an object and connects multiple layers and scales.

The first chapter in this part is authored by Victoria Reyes-García, Petra Benyei and Laura Calvet-Mir, three experts of traditional agricultural knowledge (TAK). Their contribution engages with the idea that TAK can be governed as a commons. They understand commons as resources used by a group of people who have self-designed a set of rules to manage the social dilemmas derived from their collective use. Knowledge commons in this case illustrate well the political construction of commons, regardless of the nature of the resource, by people's instituting power. To illustrate the governance of TAK under the commons framework, they present two case studies in which TAK is shared by communities of users who operate at different scales, local and global (through a web-based platform). Valuing TAK as a commons, they conclude, is not just an intellectual exercise but a political stand against the commodification of knowledge by close intellectual property rights (e.g., seed patents).

Chapter 12, by Molly Anderson, further explores the links between food, knowledge and commons. She challenges the ongoing privatization of food and agriculture scientific knowledge, highlighting the fact that the private sector has been assuming a greater proportion of research funding and, as a consequence, is taking advantage of the strengthening of intellectual property rights to recoup its investments. The chapter explores those mechanisms as ways to commodify knowledge. These trends, she claims, are dangerous because they limit the quality and scope of scientific knowledge about food and agriculture, which not only rests upon millennia of uncompensated public participation but also helps the public to adapt to changing environmental conditions, caused in large part by private sector activities and externalization of



costs. However, she concludes, these trends are not inevitable, and shifts in public policies and investment can build on existing models of knowledge commons to allow scientific knowledge of food and agriculture to be recognized and governed as a global public good.

A third food-related element discussed in this section is gastronomy, as the way in which food is combined and presented as an object of aesthetic and culinary consumption. In light of the increased spectacularization of food, Christian Barrère posits in Chapter 13 that modern Western societies present themselves as democratic and, along those lines, pretend to export worldwide their model of gastronomy, even in countries that have mainly been characterized by very different gastronomic trajectories. However, the combination between gastronomy and commodification makes contemporary highly marketed gastronomy anything but democratic. On the contrary, it is based on an aristocratic framework that under-values popular gastronomies and celebrates sophistication of recipes, scarcity and high value of foodstuffs, richness of setting, etc. It is thus time to imagine a new pathway for multiple gastronomies that breaks with joint market–elitist gastronomy and recognize the popular, open-knowledge and shared bases of gastronomy and cuisine. A possible solution, Barrère concludes, may reside in the mix of recipes and cultures that accompanies multi-culturalism and cross-boundaries dialogues. Circulation and coexistence of popular gastronomies, as much as the people who create them, become therefore the pillars on which to build a new model of gastronomy, more democratic, ecological and pluralist.

In Chapter 14, Christine Frison and Brendan Coolsaet enrich the conversation with a discussion of the possibility of governing plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture as commons. With the help of two case studies, the Global Seed Commons established under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the reintroduction and “commonification” of a traditional pig breed by a local community enterprise in Schwäbisch Hall, Germany, the authors conclude that innovative legal frameworks and governance arrangements inspired by the philosophy of the commons can facilitate access to and sharing of genetic resources for food and agriculture, hence helping to ensure the transition towards more ecological and just agri-food systems.

With their chapter on water, food and climate commoning in South Africa, Patrick Bond and Mary Galvin push the reader to think about food in close connection with water, climate change and bottom-up forms of organization, tensions and resistance. Using the case of South Africa’s most deprived urban areas as an example, the authors show that commoning is not simply a matter of technicist collective resource management but rather a political ideology in which socio-ecological contradictions inevitably emerge. In particular, the illegal reconnection of water pipes by poor households and the support to those unable to pay for water that took place in South Africa during the period of the most intense drought, combined with pressure to commercialize water resources and its accompanying social contestation, lead them to reflect on the strong potential for commoning as a catalyst of self-regulated collective action, social contestation and the making of new rules from bottom up.

### ***Commoning from below: current examples of commons-based food systems***

Although the almost complete commodification of food has pervaded most national food systems and the global dynamics, there are still numerous examples where the underlying narrative about food is not based in its commodity properties or the value-in-exchange only. Those examples range from customary indigenous food systems that are resisting the privatization waves of the globalizing neoliberal doctrine to the contemporary civic movements that are trying to regain control of decision-making in local, urban and regional food systems. In this book, we have called those examples “commoning from below”, i.e., contemporary examples of food



systems that are based on a non-commodified understanding of food. These national examples prove the existence of narratives of food transition other than the productivist discourse of commodified food, and how these narratives are being constructed and revised by a dialectical process between governmental policies and civic collective actions. The examples from Cuba, Canada, Ireland and Hungary show that, like any other social process, this commoning from below is not exempted from power tensions, inequalities and flaws. Although limited and at times contradictory, the four experiences reveal that alternative considerations of food are possible and already practiced, although in some cases with less transformative implications than imagined. Nevertheless, all of them share two important features: the valuation of the multiple meanings of food to people and the questioning of the balance of power in the food system, where the market and the state are no longer seen as the two only actors. People organizing themselves to produce, transform and consume food outside of market-driven and state-driven structures emerge as the third pillar of a tricentric food system where healthy and fair food is guaranteed to every human being. Throughout the world, rural and urban communities are constructing and performing forms of social innovation where food is not only an object of consumption but is recognized in its multiple dimensions.

Peter M. Rosset and Valentín Val take the readers to Cuba in Chapter 16. They present the way in which the “campesino a campesino” agro-ecological movement may be strengthened by the adoption of the methodology of and assumptions about food as a commons. They analyze the horizontal, peasant-to-peasant learning and sharing methodology through the lenses of its communal and collective visions of food. Their conclusion, which opens to dialogue and recognition of the common struggles of food sovereignty and “food-as-a-commons” movements, is that a commons-based vision of food and the food systems are more effective at achieving food sovereignty than conventional practices based on more individual and capitalist views of food.

In Chapter 17, Hugo Martorell and Peter Andrée change geography and approach to present the case of the national food policy in Canada. In their account, we discover that networks and coalitions of civil society organizations are actively working towards integrating values of food as a commons and a public good, with a focus on strengthening their role in food governance, from local urban policy councils to national institutions. They thus draw on some of the experiences of the commoning of food governance that have been instituted in different provinces and territories and reason on the opportunities and tensions that emerge when a polycentric and self-organized commons-based governance is combined with the role of public authorities as facilitators. In their conclusions, they propose that a Canadian food policy should build on provincial and territorial food security networks and existing governance arrangements in order to increase the population’s access to healthy food. However, scaling these diverse arrangements at a federal level would bring into play ideological and operational tensions and new challenges to be addressed.

Then, we move to Ireland and a different topic in Chapter 18. Tara Kenny and Colin Sage deal with a theme of extreme topicality and relevance for both public and private actors involved in the food system in Europe: the commodification of food surplus as charitable provision. Through the analysis of some initiatives undertaken in Ireland, the authors discuss the implications and hurdles that charitable food provisioning may interpose to the transition towards a commons-based food system. Without dismissing the importance of feeding people and addressing hunger at a time of austerity, the authors highlight the intrinsic inequality and unsustainability that characterize a system based on excesses and volatile solutions to hunger, using the left-overs of an industrialized food system. A radical transition, they conclude, would rather require moving beyond the current two-tiered food system and its schizophrenia. The paradigm of commons and its focus on multi-dimensional, multi-stakeholder, local and resilience-enhancing systems would thus represent an ally in this shift.

In Chapter 19, the final chapter of this part, Bálint Balázs describes the thriving community-based food self-provisioning in Central and Eastern European countries as socially inclusive practices that involve all strata of society and are deeply rooted in customary traditions. Based primarily on bartering and gifting relations between families, relatives and neighbours, these emerging food systems build and strengthen communities, at the same time saving money and empowering households by not just playing the consumer's role but also self-producing part of its food needs. These practices are based on inherited traditions and have become an important non-market source of local food that reflects the principles of sustainability and preferred local gastronomies (two dimensions of food not always valued in monetary terms). The "re-commonification" of food systems in Central and Eastern European countries, Balázs concludes, has a solid foundation and promising future, as it is propelling high proportions of the population along a sustainable pathway towards new food regimes.

### ***Dialogue of alternative narratives of transition***

The 2008 and 2011 food price peaks were two important events that positioned food at the very top of political agendas at national and international levels. Concerns about the food supply required to feed a growing population with diminishing natural resources under highly unpredictable climatic conditions have triggered thousands of events, debates, innovative actions and policies aimed at securing more and better food for all. Yet, hunger is still prevalent and obesity is rampant, in both the Global North and the Global South. How to transit from our unsustainable and unfair industrial food system towards a better one for the people and the planet is nowadays a major topic for politicians and citizens alike.

The fifth part of this volume engages with alternative scenarios and imaginations and explores the convergences, current and potential synergies and elements of tension and possible conflict between the food commons narrative and other relevant counter- and alter-hegemonic narratives that currently confront the industrial food system, such as the food sovereignty movement, the urban food initiatives, the anti-land grabbing constituency or the climate and health constituencies, since the multiple crises (i.e., food, climate, biodiversity, health, energy) seem to be strongly interconnected. Since the food system is the most important transformer on Earth, the way we regard food is linked to possible solutions to all other planetary crises. The aim here is to stress the links between competing narratives about food and existing struggles and attempts to imagine just and ecological food systems. The editors' hope is that the vocabulary and imaginary of food as a commons will help strengthen the actions of movements and individuals who are already deploying intellectual and practical tools to challenge the contradictions and socio-environmental injustices of the dominant food system. That is why this dialogue of alternatives of transition is deemed so relevant: only through a convergence of constituencies, recognizing the diversity of approaches but the unicity of goals, can the mainstream food system, which is both unsustainable and unfair, be changed into an alternative system that guarantees food for all within the planet's boundaries. Of all the possible interlocutors, we have chosen three. However, we believe that this volume, as much as the rationale of commons and commoning, must be seen as a continuous and dynamic process that is constantly enriched, redefined and strengthened by dialogues with other collectives and constituencies combating the inequalities of the current dominant industrial food system.

The first dialogue, contained in Chapter 20, is to do with food justice and food sovereignty. There, Eric Holt-Giménez and Ilja van Lammeren engage with the question of whether food as a commons can advance food sovereignty. In their response, the authors recognize that the link between a global call for food commons and the struggle for food sovereignty may seem

straightforward. However, they conclude this is true only when they are superficially analyzed and that both concepts are highly complicated on the ground. In their conclusions, they suggest that a nuanced approach to understanding the commons as a contested terrain of struggle is needed to help determine whether and to what extent a food commons as a strategy for food sovereignty can serve not only as a utopic beacon but also as an effective form of transformative resistance. It is thus up to the advocates of food and food systems as a commons to think about the practical and political implications that the paradigmatic shift may produce. As editors, we welcome the invitation and look forward to building collectively a better understanding of the concrete opportunities and limits that lie behind the ideas proposed in this volume, and to engaging with food sovereignty activists and scholars on how to further develop the links between both narratives.

Then, in Chapter 21, Chris Maughan and Tomaso Ferrando look at ongoing struggles for land as a commons in the United Kingdom and Italy to make the case that the fight for food as a commons cannot be detached from the struggle for a de-commodification of all the elements that compose food systems. In this contribution, they explore concrete examples in which the paradigm of the commons has been utilized to support the struggle for land and soil as key components in the creation of ecological and democratic food systems. In their analysis, civil society-led processes that aim to regain land for the collectivity may thus provide important connective tissue between the radical outliers of food commoning and broad-based support for food systems that nourish the collective, rather than enriching the few.

In the third conversation (Chapter 22), Maria Fonte and Ivan Cucco use the aspirational paradigm of the commons to engage with the potential and limits of local food systems. On the one hand, localism can help with transitioning towards a more equitable, ethical and sustainable agro-food system. However, the idea of localism can also support protectionism and neo-ruralist ideologies that reinforce bounded, defensive and spatial strategies. A true emancipation, they claim, can only take place when food ceases to be perceived as a commodity and is understood in its multi-dimensional value, namely natural and economic resource, right, culture and place-based identity. In their reading, food as a commons plays a crucial political role in the construction of a real utopian project to achieve an aspirational and inspirational fair and sustainable food system. Re-thought and re-imagined, food regains its multi-dimensional value and becomes the basis of heterogeneous ecosystems and communities of people and nature, in which social justice and democratic powers may prevail and where a non-capitalist or post-capitalist economy is achievable.

In the final contribution of this part (Chapter 23), Cristina Tirado-von der Pahlen explores how climate change impacts the multiple dimensions of food, proposing a new conceptual health-related dimension to add to the theoretical approach to food dimensions presented in this volume: food can also be valued as a medicine. Moreover, departing from the consequences of climate change effects over human health, nutrition and food security, she highlights the relevant role the industrial food system has in global warming and the obesity pandemic that is ravaging all countries, either in high-income Western nations or the impoverished Global South. The current way of producing and consuming food, including food waste and high meat consumption, is the biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and is also the biggest user of water resources, biodiversity destruction and soil pollution. As the main goal of the global food system shall be to nourish everybody adequately, respecting the limits of natural renewable resources and stewarding the food-producing resources, there is a need to shift the normative consideration of food from an only-for-profit good to a sustainable resource that delivers healthy diets for all without mortgaging the planet. At the end of the chapter, Cristina proposes multiple leverages to transit from the current unsustainable and unhealthy food system towards a food commons system, establishing a dialogue between the most progressive policy and legal ideas from the academic mainstream with the most palatable proposals from the commoners' side.

## Un-common exploration of food commons

Through history, with differences in time and space, food has been transformed from the common concern of a community into the individualized concern of human consumers. This is a process of transformation of commons into capital that was already studied by Karl Polanyi. In his book, *The Great Transformation* ([1944], 2001), Polanyi analyzed the commodification of three former commons, namely labour, money and land, and identified “disembedded” capitalism as the root cause of the tensions between markets and democracy. This decoupling generated, through plunder and exploitation, a deeply internalized “extractive” vision of the legal order (Capra and Mattei, 2015; De Schutter and Pistor, 2015). Polanyi then proposed a pathway to “re-embed” markets within society. In the last thirty years, neoliberalism has all but precluded every alternative to a few global extractive giants entrusted with feeding the world with obscene profits and completely anti-ecological practices. Reversing this trend is a matter of survival of life on its planet and must become perhaps the single most important matter of discussion in public conversation in the decades to come.

Yet it is not. The chapters included in this collection are all efforts to think collectively about this fundamental question: How should we change the system in order to transform the excessive accumulation of capital into revamped, sustainable commons (Mattei and Quarta, 2018)? The scholarly community has the duty and responsibility to develop better alternatives to the current disasters and not to consider natural or normal the situation we have inherited. Political choices are open, and we believe the contributors of this collection have offered some important materials to inform them.

## Note

- 1 This idea is epitomized by the Latin sentence “*Homo homini lupus*”, created by Plautus (254–184 BC) and rendered popular by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). The opposite narrative of cooperation, collectivism and solidarity is, however, defended by authors such as de Waal (2006, 3), Bowles and Gintis (2013) or Kropotkin (1902).

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