



EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Title: *Food (policy) for thoughts: Drift on food policies?*

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Abstract:

Our research focuses on discovering and understanding the side effects of the incentive policies on organic agribusiness in the Valencian region. To do so we depart from a descriptive analysis of the organic sector in the region of Comunitat Valenciana (Spain) using the authorized regional certifier, “Comité d'Agricultura Ecològica de la Comunitat Valencia” (CAECV) and data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA). The main aim is to try to detect possible Localized Agrifood Systems (LAS) together with analysing the policies applied to organic agribusiness. By analysing the activity of the CAECV, the aim of this research is to provide data and answer relevant questions from the sector and its stakeholders on the extent to which it is fulfilling its objectives and how public policies contribute or can contribute to generating an ideal environment for its consolidation.

Over the last decades, social and academic interest in the sustainability has grown significantly, and consequently, policy actions were multiplied, in the so-called sustainable intensification (Petersen & Snapp, 2015). Particularly, the agri-food is the one that has received most of the resources from national and supranational institutions and efforts in pursuit of this goal (Garnett et al., 2013). In fact, a myriad of political actions have been undertaken to develop the Sustainable Food System (SFS), as a collaborative food network (Ericksen, 2008; Garnett et al., 2013).



In that sense, the EU has not stopped in its policy efforts towards organic activity and is preparing the entry into force of a new and extended regulation for 2022 (The European parliament and of the council, 2018). At the same time, in recent years, food policies have returned to urban planning and local policymaking, through external stakeholders that act as drivers for the local implication in the food policies. Coherently with the current knowledge that cities must be one of the targets of sustainability, the administrations of large cities have created international forums where to expose, share and generate new policies in this sense, that also use as political loudspeaker.

In spite, or perhaps, due to, the proliferation of the food arrangements, most of them have frequently been developed in an ad hoc fashion and contain a mix multiple and heterogeneous policy instruments (Evers, 2005; Gunningham & Sinclair, 2019; Wison, 2000). In fact, they can generate certain duplicities or overlaps with other actions in which these territories coexist, which can modify or pervert the effect of the policy in question.

These and other concerns have already discussed are more and more discussed by previous research (Howlett & Rayner, 2007). For instance, some authors suggested the incoherence between different policy domains related to these food sectors (Biesbroek & Candel, 2020; Brooks, 2014; Matthews, 2008). In addition, the concept of policy drift is used to describe as consequential policy changes often happen in the absence of reform and how inaction can gradually diminish the effectiveness of social programs over time (Béland et al., 2016). In consequence, following Galli et al. (2020), we claim that the complexity of existing (food) policies must be built on new (or revisited) bases. In any case, much more research in this direction is required.

According to the academic research, from multiple perspectives, in Europe the agro-industrial sector has been affected by an enormous amount of policies trying to maintain that historical and strategic sector. Despite this, the sectoral stakeholders complain in various forums about the languishing support and policies, while on the other hand, the reality that more than the 31% of the 2022 EU budget is going to the CAP (53.1 billion €) being the first EU budget item not only for this year, but historically. What causes this contrast? How can there be such a broad criticism of the lack of political and economic resources when, on the other hand, the largest EU



budget line is earmarked for this purpose (among other national and regional initiatives)?

This research aims to shed some light on this situation by analysing the policies applied to the organic agribusiness sector in EU, a relatively new policy field that receives its newest reform in 2018 and entering in force by 2022 due the COVID-19 pandemic effects.

Could be that this policy that, expressed by different national and regional governments, wants also to contribute to rural development contributes more to sustainable urban development than to sustainable rural development? Could it be that the main beneficiaries of these subsidies and policies are large landowners and companies and not small rural producers and processors?

To answer these questions, we are going to try to transfer some well-defined concepts accepted by the literature in the field of the study of welfare policies, to the field of the study of food policies, checking whether they suffer from the same situations, which, despite having a more or less fixed and stable general structure, suffer from Retrenchment.

In order to carry out this research, we will first define, according to the literature, the concepts that make up this retrenchment: drift, conversion, and layering. Accompanying the definitions with examples used to further illustrate these concepts, to finally see their alignment with the situation of organic food policies. To do so, we are going to collect data on the application of organic food policies in the Valencian region comparing the affections between rural vs. urban and small landowners and small companies vs. large landowners and big companies.

An in-depth documentary review has been carried out on organic production in the Valencian Community, the first Valencian organic production plan “Pla valencià de producció ecològica” (PVPE), the actors involved in the sector and the policies involved in the transformation of the socio-economic and productive model carries out for the various regional government “Conselleries” (authorities and other administrative bodies responsible for the different competencies of the regional government).



By doing so, we will be able to understand and visualise the beneficiaries of these policies and actions, in order to finally see if this situation fits the definition of the concepts used in the welfare literature.

For many experts, the local level is the adequate scope for food policy as many of the dysfunctions of the traditional food systems appears at the local level (Brinkley, 2013; Koc & Dahlberg, 1999; Morgan, 2006; Sonnino, 2016; Wiskerke, 2009). For instance, through international events as Milano Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP), European regions and cities have become more active in setting up food policies at the local level (Filippini et al., 2019; Ilieva, 2016; Milan Urban Food Policy Pact & Framework for Action, 2015).

However, in our opinion, this enthusiasm generates an enormous quantity of disconnected and atomised initiatives (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016) that, while not (necessarily) competing for the same resources, can be inefficient if different activities do not communicate with each other seek to act on the same objective, generating high levels of redundancy between initiatives and policy actions. Particularly due to the complexity to manage the multilevel policy programs. Among others, these ad hoc fashion initiatives can generate incoherence between different policy domains related to these food sectors (Biesbroek & Candel, 2020; Brooks, 2014; Matthews, 2008) and also the absence of reforms in the system (policy drift) that can more and more reduces the effectiveness of programs over time (Béland et al., 2016).

Our expected results are, on the one hand, a clear bias of organic food policies in favour of large cities, providing important evidence of a clear tension between rurality and urbanity. on the other hand, an imbalance in access to policies, aid and actions between large companies and landowners as opposed to small farmers and small enterprises, which would demonstrate the non-alignment of the objective of the policy with the reality of its effects.

In fact, in previous research we found up to 77 different actors were found in the documental review, participating in one way or another in the policies/activities under the I PVPE, and other plans created by the city councils or private initiatives. Locating the activities analysed on a map, in order to better understand the sources and locations of application (Figure 5) and classifying the actors involved into 4 groups. (1)

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Administration group, it contains different government organisms (local governments, regional governments, public companies, and so on. (2) Private business group, that includes private initiatives, and representatives as well. (3) the Civil Society, here, we have included NGOs, trade unions, neighbourhood associations, etc. and (4) Others, including entities such as: schools, universities, public or private think tanks and so on.

These results will lead us to understand if there is a possibility to apply the concepts of “retrenchment” forms such as policy drift due the emergence of a new risk not contemplated in the creation of the food policy in question. Consequently, by analysing and unravelling a real case, this research potentially makes a contribution to specific literature on food policy evaluation and also proposes some relevant prescriptions for policy makers and practitioners at regional and local levels for the case study. Bringing the possibility to extend our research to a comparative scale with other regions in a near future.

Keywords: *food policies, policy drift, sustainable food systems, agricultural economics, policy analysis*

JEL codes: O18, P48, R11, R58



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