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In **Revue internationale des études du développement** Volume 237, Issue 1, 2019, pages 115 to 136

ISBN 9791035102883

Available online at:

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<https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-revue-internationale-des-etudes-du-developpement-2019-1-page-115.htm>  
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How to cite this article:

Lidiane Fernandes da Luz, Renato Sergio Maluf, «Social participation in political spaces and the valuing of culture as empowering resources to promote access to quality food in Brazil», *Revue internationale des études du développement* 2019/1 (No 237) , p. 115-136

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# Social Participation in Political Spaces and the Valuing of Culture as Empowering Resources to Promote Access to Quality Food in Brazil

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## **KEYWORDS**

food provisioning, food systems, food politics, valuing of culture

## **ABSTRACT**

The locality of Juazeiro and other regions in the interior of Brazil have undergone profound transformations in recent years in relation to food production, distribution, and consumption. New consumer demands and new offers from increasingly complex food supply chains have brought dynamic interaction between different food systems to these localities. Through the analysis of political spaces where social actors engage in local food politics, conflicts, power relations, synergies, and hybridization can be observed, resulting from the interaction of food systems and influencing the population's access to quality food. We argue that social participation in political spaces and the valuing of culture, which are features of a local food movement that has emerged at the intersection of distinct food systems, are the main empowering resources to promote access to quality food in the locality of Juazeiro.



## Introduction

Food provisioning is a subject with a longstanding presence on the public agenda. It has become more relevant and acquired new challenges due to the complexity of medium and large cities and metropolitan areas. Criticism of dominant patterns of food production, distribution, and consumption stand out among the main components of the debate. Dealing with this requires that we surpass conventional analyses of food provisioning in order to consider the set of actors, processes, and activities that mediate production and access to food and, more specifically, “access to quality food.”<sup>1</sup>

This paper argues that distinct food systems interact intensely in medium-sized Brazilian cities, such as Juazeiro, where we collected the data for this research. Globalized dynamics spread across these regions promoting the homogenization of food habits at the same time that reactive actions counter them. Criticism is expressed through social movements that discuss social, environmental, and health issues related to food provisioning and diets. Nevertheless, local food culture remains informed by traditional practices, though under the influence of modern habits and new lifestyles (e.g., women entering the workforce). Furthermore, traditional practices could be in conflict with both movements. For example, an individual who rejects pesticides used by extensive monocultures might also promote the consumption of meat which is subject to environmental and health restrictions.

In relation to food systems approaches, a variety of categories, types, and scales is used by different authors to conceptualize and classify them: conventional and alternative (Goodman *et al.*, 2012); agroindustrial, domestic, “proximity,” and “differentiated quality” (Collona *et al.*, 2013); commercial, aesthetic, civic, and financial (Niederle, 2017); industrial, “niche markets,” interpersonal, and “intellectual resources” (Morgan *et al.*, 2008), global, national, and local (Maluf and Luz, 2018). In this paper, rather than going

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1 This means going beyond limited views confined to assessing food supply in terms of physical availability of goods and aspects related to agricultural commercialization (Maluf, 2009; 2015). Additionally, referencing food and nutrition sovereignty and security and the human right to food, access to quality food is here understood as the opportunity to obtain healthy and culturally appropriate food from food production and distribution models that are socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and that value diversity in its various manifestations (Maluf, 2007).

deeper into these categories, we will focus on the interactions among distinct systems at the local level, which means highlighting conflicts, synergies, power relations, and hybridisms that emanate from this coexistence. In Juazeiro like elsewhere, the agroindustrial system of fruticulture interacts with traditional family farming, supermarkets with farmer's markets, while consumers' preferences express distinct and even contrasting values. Besides, it is important to call attention to the assemblage of practices that characterizes food systems. This means including consumption practices together with models of production and distribution as parts of a given food system, as well as their interaction with other set of practices or food systems.

In Juazeiro, a territory which is undergoing profound changes in food production, distribution, and consumption as well as pronounced socioeconomic and environmental contrasts, social actors have been mobilizing to promote people's access to quality food through a variety of actions based on the valuing of local culture. The social articulation that brings governmental agencies and civil society organizations together allows for more complex and disputed food politics at the local level. One should also note that this local process of promoting access to quality food found support and continued interaction with the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and the Human Right to Food, established in Brazil in 2006.<sup>2</sup> However, despite a legal mandate that guarantees access to culturally appropriate and healthy food for all, this goal coexists with obesity and malnutrition, both determined by restrictions in access to quality food.

The interaction between different food systems in the locality of Juazeiro affects the attainment of the aforementioned objective in at least three of its components: a) conflicts between different systems of production regarding access to water and land, b) unequal power relations among social actors at different scales of food supply chains, and c) hybrids resulting from contrasting dynamics that give rise to new combinations of food practices which include processed and also ultra-processed foods. Nevertheless, possibilities of tackling some of these social issues have been explored by local actors

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2 Brazil has incorporated in its Federal Constitution since 2010 the Human Right to Food, and established a National Food and Nutrition Security Law (Law 11.346/2006). Both have the "access to quality food for all" as a fundamental principle. The Federal Law has social participation as the core of food policy making and implementing.

through an emphasis on the valuing of local culture and the participation in political spaces in order to promoting access to quality food. These synergies between coexisting food systems are being considered here as sources of social actors' empowerment in face of unbalanced power relations between unequal actors, affecting those who have less power. In this environment, social actors with different interests regarding local development projects are exploring possibilities of cooperation and a common path to build a food movement aimed at promoting access to quality food.

The research on which this paper is based aims to analyze interactions of food systems that coexist in food provisioning of the locality of Juazeiro through the analysis of political spaces. The influence of these interactions on the access to quality food will be discussed by identifying conflicts and power relations among social actors, relationships of complementarity, convergent practices, possibilities of cooperation, and hybridism between food systems. More detailed attention is given to how these interactions may be taken as processes that influence the development of food politics locally. The lens of food politics is used to address social participation in political spaces, actor empowerment processes, local implementation of public policies, and the valuing of local culture that are creating a new array of possibilities for accessing quality food. Nonetheless, the valuing of culture is a dynamic process that could either restrict the access to quality food to an exclusive group of people or promote this access to the majority of people through social participation and political engagement in a food movement.

## **1. Study Locality and Methodological References**

The field research has been done in the locality of Juazeiro, an important urban center in the "Sertão do São Francisco Territory," in the semi-arid area of the state of Bahia, in the Northeast Region of Brazil. This area is full of biodiversity, culture, and political struggles which must be considered in analyzing food provisioning through food systems interactions. We chose Juazeiro for this study because it captures several dynamics, such as recent transformations in food supply due to integration into national and international circuits, the implementation of distribution networks (supermarket chains), and the strengthening of existing wholesale equipment,

along with the advance of capitalized agriculture. All this is in sharp contrast to a local context where a strong cultural heritage related to food, proximity circuits, and small farmers is still relevant. As for the coexistence and interactions between food systems, this will be addressed in the spheres of consumption, agrifood production, and, most importantly, political spaces.

A methodological note is required to clarify that, for research purposes, locality is an urban area (in this case, the city of Juazeiro), taken as the initial reference to define the unity of observation which includes urban and rural areas of municipalities that share cultural features and food provisioning sources within that locality.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in most cases, “locality” corresponds to medium- to large-sized urban centers (cities) from which the focus of observation is extended to the relevant territorial scope, which is specific to each case, in order to understand the dynamics of food provisioning. This implies considering food flows and socioeconomic dynamics that surpass spatial delimitations as defined by policy or administrative criteria. Similarly, localities are references for characterizing small-scale food systems and addressing food politics and the confrontation of strategic options that also occur at the local level, albeit in articulation with national and international spheres.

The approach to analyzing food systems interactions in the context of localities’ food provisioning benefits from contributions of Goodman *et al.*, (2012) and Morgan *et al.*, (2006) on the permeability of different systems and the corresponding connections and hybridism. This approach expands scope from conventional focus on *food policies* to a broader view on *food politics*, which implies highlighting the actors involved and their practices, as well as considering the openness of processes related to food and particularly to food provisioning. These practices emanate conflicts, power relations, and synergies among actors that reflect the characteristics of different food systems in a continuous process of interaction, here observed within the scope of political spaces.

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3 This procedure ultimately included ten municipalities that are part of the Sertão do São Francisco Territory; territory is an administrative subdivision of the state of Bahia used for public policy purposes.

Political spaces comprise a variety of events where food politics are built at the local level, i.e., where social actors, through their organizations and networks, mobilize resources and assume certain discourses and positions regarding food (Comerford *et al.*, 2014). In the locality of Juazeiro, these spaces take the forms of policy councils, festivals, fairs, farmers' markets, workshops, meetings, virtual spaces, social movements, and public programs.<sup>4</sup> Data collection in these events started in February 2016, with a brief visit to become familiarized with the territory, and later continued with three months of fieldwork (April-June 2017). A total of 36 events or "political spaces" were registered by the authors of this article. During these events, lasting approximately three to four days each, we collected relevant data about food provisioning. Through observation of these events and interviews with their organizers we could more profoundly understand food policies, social movements, development projects, market strategies, food supply dynamics, and consumption practices that are in dispute in the locality's political spaces.

The analyses of our fieldwork data were carried out from August 2017 to March 2018 with a total of 33 interviews and notes from observations. We classified the political spaces registered into seven categories based on some common features, as shown in Table 1. Theoretical principles for categorizing political spaces came from the work of Comerford *et al.*, (2014), in conjunction with the findings of Freudenberg *et al.*, (2011), who suggest classifying different events in the context of an emerging food movement in New York City.<sup>5</sup> By looking at these spaces we aimed to identify conflicts, power relations, hybridism, and possibilities of cooperation between food systems that took place therein. Although the methods described above have been developed in previous fieldwork in the locality of Juazeiro, they

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- 4 The concept of political spaces, also called hybrid spaces, according to Comerford *et al.*, (2014), refers to formal gatherings, protests, informal conversations, and festive, intimate, or public events, since politics are built daily and continuously in diverse formal or informal spaces. Accepting the author's proposal, we consider different events that take place in the locality of Juazeiro together in order to analyze the interactions between food systems.
  - 5 The article presents recent changes in food policies and environments in New York City, the heterogeneity within the food movement organizations, and the possibilities of creating common goals to improve the population's nutrition and health.

are assumed to be applicable to any medium-sized city in the interior<sup>6</sup> of Brazil. These localities share features such as the maintenance of local food culture and the complexity of new food supply chains that made them a potential locus of interactions between food systems.

## **2. Using Systemic and Relational Approaches to Analyze Food Provisioning Through Interactions Between Food Systems in Political Spaces**

The approach to food provisioning adopted in this article reinforces the convenience of using the systemic approach to the notion of food systems, widely used in this area, but with equally diverse meanings (Malassis, 1996; Fine *et al.*, 1996; Morgan *et al.*, (2006); Rastoin and Gherzi, 2010; Collona *et al.*, 2013). In accordance with Burlandy *et al.*, (2006), systems are characterized by a complex set of interrelationships among elements that evolve with contradictions, thus involving conflicts and imbalances in the respective system's flows of interdependence and coordination mechanisms. Furthermore, premises about the nature of human action and the politics of food lead us to understand systems as being open to various possibilities or solutions.

Accordingly, focusing on food systems requires going beyond the links among activities related to food production, distribution, and consumption, on which most analyses of agrifood or agroindustrial chains focus, in order to adopt a multi-scale approach and shed light on actors, processes, and tensions. In fact, national and international integrative dynamics allow us to identify the existence of a national food system and even a world food system in several important dimensions of a food supply. Nevertheless, circuits or flows of smaller spatial amplitude coexist with such dynamics, being more prone to the circulation of food goods that are less processed and are expressions of countries' socio-environmental and cultural diversities. The various combinations resulting from this coexistence oblige researchers to treat various food systems as intertwined rather than as a single food system.

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6 Interior, in this paper, is understood as the inner regions of Brazil, which are distant from the coast. The interior includes rural and urban areas.

General characteristics of the national or global food system are (re) appropriated by local actors and, along with local dynamics, participate in the design of food systems with characteristics specific to each socio-spatial context. Therefore, each locality emerges as a unique system resulting from interrelationships and hybridism between different systems (Maluf and Luz, 2018). The transfiguration of the homogenizing factor becomes, therefore, a source of more heterogeneity at the local level, implying a revision of the perspective of valuing local food systems, which by themselves do not necessarily guarantee fairer, egalitarian, or healthy food production (Goodman *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the authors (*idem*) propose that the proliferation of hybrid expressions in the local food supply, an outcome of interfaces between the so-called conventional and alternative systems, must be considered as an alternative to achieve the goals cited above.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, one group may utilize other groups' strategies, such as supermarkets that try to get closer to consumers and local producers, or traditional local food chains that end up reaching national and international markets. Therefore, it is difficult to establish clear boundaries between alternative and conventional food systems. Instead, in a world of multiple hybrid expressions, rather than a fully differentiated set of actions and initiatives, only individual "situations" and "particular characteristics" could be taken as "alternatives." These features result from the coexistence and self-influencing of both the globalization of taste and the growing concern with the quality of food, which were initially perceived as characteristics of opposing food systems (Goodman *et al.*, 2012). Thus, it is necessary to set up a relational approach (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005) that can both challenge the boundaries between objects of research and consider the relationships between coexisting food systems while taking the lived experience that shapes people's understanding of food into account (Carolan, 2011).

This approach makes it possible to design contextualized and feasible food provisioning strategies that can promote "access to quality" in localities without generating more food distinctions and inequalities (Friedman, 2000; Goodman *et al.*, 2012). Alternative food networks are often restricted to elitist

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7 The focus on localized agrifood systems was among the precursors of the approach presented here, though some differences in the very use of the notion of system which are out of the scope of this paper. See Requier-Desjardins (2002).

consumption of products with differentiated qualities, which are often inaccessible to the majority of the population. This dynamic reproduces the power of corporate actors that reinforce the hierarchy and stratification of contemporary food systems. At the same time, the importance of conventional production is reaffirmed in the supply of cheap food, which is accessible to the vast majority of people (Busch, 2010; Reardon *et al.*, 2004). However, to ensure “access to quality food,” analyses of food provisioning strategies must account for social, environmental, and human health costs implicit in the dominant food production and consumption system.

Tensions resulting from the coexistence of conventional and alternative systems are expressed in the inequitable access to public resources and food policies at national and territorial levels. This game of distinct interests among social actors is expressed in different institutionalized and non-institutionalized spaces, which Comerford *et al.*, (2014) identify as “political spaces.” According to the authors, these spaces require more attention and analysis than they have been given in the past. This is because of power relations, discourses, and constructions of truths, emotions, and symbolism that are implicit in the different practices of their participants. For the authors (*idem*), these are spaces of project production and public policies evaluation, as well as spaces of disputes and alliances between social actors, which involve multiple negotiations and relationships.

In spite of the significant dynamism of national and local social organizations in political spaces, there is a huge discrepancy of power resources between actors in place, interspersed with significant counter-hegemonic resistance strategies. Additionally, a reflexive approach is required to develop a multidimensional analysis of food supply dynamics in order to consider power relations as relational. Given that all social relations are power relations (Morgan *et al.*, 2006), we suggest searching for possibilities that could even come from conflict-filled experiences. Reflexive local food politics would consider both the struggles of contested knowledge and the struggles to form political alliances, with these arenas being able to influence each other (Goodman *et al.*, 2012).

The next section presents the outcomes of the research carried out in the locality of Juazeiro. Our intention is to reopen the debate on access to

quality food while contributing to food provisioning strategies and policies guided by the principles of Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security and the Human Right to Food. In this sense, considering the context of Brazil's well-documented social inequality, along with the issues of poverty and food insecurity, emphasis is placed on factors that influence access to quality food in Brazilian localities.

### **3. Building Food Politics Locally: Social Participation and the Valuing of Culture as Empowering Resources**

Table 1 was elaborated from fieldwork carried out in political spaces in the locality of Juazeiro, including direct participation in most of the mentioned events, as well as interviews with event organizers. Events were grouped into seven categories (first column) and some main features of each were highlighted. These descriptions reveal food system interactions in food production, distribution, consumption, and public policies. The second column shows the number of events registered in each category, with a total of thirty-six political spaces included in this research. The third, "interactions," brings conflictive and complementary principles and practices together, considering a relational approach to analyzing power relationships derived from social actors' interests. In this view, possibilities of cooperation between coexisting food systems can come from conflicting interests. The last column presents hybridism, which indicates that the situation observed in the locality of Juazeiro suggests actors' local (re)appropriation of intertwined food systems.

We call attention to some examples of events in each category shown below: the first includes events as traditional festivities, religious celebrations, festivals to promote family farming and local food, and fairs that celebrate the economic success of monocultures and the exportation of fruits; the second gathers different types of food markets such as traditional markets that sell fresh local meat, organic markets, markets that sell "new" products such as vegan and gluten free food, markets that sell food from local family farming, and the Food Supply Central, which has products from small and large food supply chains; the third includes spaces such as Food and Nutrition Security Councils and the Rural Development Collegiate; the fourth comprises events such as a three-day hike in the middle of Caatinga biome

**Table 1: Political Spaces and Food Systems Interactions in the Locality of Juazeiro**

Political spaces – general categories	Number of events	Food Systems Interactions	Hybrids
1. Festivals, fairs, and traditional parties (annual or biannual)	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Popular and specialized knowledge</li> <li>– Traditional and modern practices</li> <li>– Food quality based on traditional and sanitary values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Gourmetization of traditional food and food from agrobiodiversity</li> <li>– Hybrid menus with traditional recipes made from industrialized ingredients</li> </ul>
2. Markets (daily or weekly)	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Food quality based on family farming origin and traditional, aesthetical, and ethical values</li> <li>– Local, national, and global food supply dynamics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Local traditional food chains exporting to European countries</li> </ul>
3. Institutionalized spaces	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Food quality based on traditional and sanitary values</li> <li>– Popular and specialized knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Spaces organized at national, state, and municipal levels, with articulations between these levels</li> </ul>
4. Participative meetings and field experiences	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Quality based on family farming origin, traditional mode of production, and ethical values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Market strategies for agroecological products.</li> </ul>
5. Virtual spaces	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Valuing of territory and its products from gastronomic, health, ecological, and economic development perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Gourmetization of traditional food and food from agrobiodiversity</li> </ul>
6. Continuous actions of tourism and cuisine	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Valuing of territory and its products from the perspective of gastronomy, tradition, and economic development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Gourmetization of traditional food and food from agrobiodiversity</li> <li>– Capitalization of territory and local culture through touristic attractions</li> </ul>
7. Public Policies and Programs	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Food quality based on social, culturally appropriate, and productive values</li> <li>– Development projects based on social, environmental, and economic values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Market strategies for cultural and environmental protection</li> </ul>

Source: Luz and Maluf, 2019.

to experience local history, environment, and culture and seminars about agroecology and sustainable ways of living in semiarid areas; the fifth gathers all internet pages used by organizations to promote their activities and sell their products; the sixth highlights activities developed by the Slow Food Movement, traditional communities land regularization movement, winery tours and wine tastings in the locality of Juazeiro; the seventh addresses the Food Acquisition Program, the National School Feeding Program, the Food and Nutrition Security Policy, the Territory Development Policy, the Coexistence with Semiarid Areas Program, and the Irrigation Program.

An element common to the events presented in Table 1 is the participation of different agricultures or models of production in the locality of Juazeiro. The local landscape is a mosaic of areas cultivated by traditional farmers, who raise goats and sheep in association with the cultivation of cassava and beans, a family farming production adapted to the environment of the Caatinga biome.<sup>8</sup> This production system coexists with large-scale irrigated fruticulture for exportation, meaning different development projects for the region that compete for natural and cultural resources. These strategies, institutionalized in distinct development policies (e.g. Coexistence with Semiarid and Irrigation Policy), compete with one another for access to water, land, and labor.

The maintenance of the Caatinga biome through sustainable agricultural practices and the economic development through monocultures that demand many external resources are some of the principles and practices in dispute. However, they also appear to be complementary if we consider that family farmers obtain extra income by working at large-scale farms during the harvest periods of irrigated fruticulture. The money they earn from this work can, at least in part, be invested in their own farms. Additionally, many family farmers benefit from the “water surplus” of irrigated fruticulture for use on their properties. In this context, although considering the dominant groups’ power to impose their values and beliefs, as pointed out by Setiloane (2016),

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8 Caatinga refers both to the biome and to vegetation typical to the semiarid region, which occurs in some areas in the interior of Brazil, including the one where Juazeiro is located. Food production adapted to the Caatinga, that is, to the soil type and to the rainfall regime (concentrated at a certain time of the year, followed by long periods of drought), also includes gathering native fruits.

we view power as something that moves among the actors (Morgan *et al.*, 2006), and that, in this sense, gives them greater agency capacity.

For Goodman *et al.*, (2012), despite conflicting relationships among different actors and a constant tension between cooperation and competition, actors' positions are not unchanging. Their capacity of agency can influence institutional regulations, delegitimizing them, and empowering actors who are defending new ideas. Strengthening the possibilities of cooperation between food systems should start from the basis of food provisioning, i.e., the modes of producing local food. Although we recognize that this aspect of food provisioning allows for less flexibility in power relations between social actors, on the ground they seem to find subtle forms of cooperation that can be essential to diversifying their production and diets.

Table 1 presents general categories for several events such as farmers' markets, festivals, and local councils, taken here as political spaces. The coexistence of distinct principles and practices that can be referred to as different food systems are present in each political space registered, showing the resistance of some practices and the strength of some actors despite power relations toward hegemonic forces. Through interactions between food systems, some traditional festivities have become very commercial; local festivals promote modern technology and also old techniques; business markets are investing in family farming participation; tours of the Caatinga and consumption of its products are becoming touristic activities; gourmet events promote local food and agrobiodiversity, and local markets incorporate vegan and gluten free products. In this context, the market strategies of producers' organizations in Juazeiro include local school meals and farmers markets, as well as commercialization of products to supermarket chains in Brazil's largest cities and exportation to European countries. For this organization, there is apparently no conflict between a market strategy that includes its products in a global value chain and, at the same time, recovers the activity of preparing artisanal flour from cassava roots, both part of its strategy to preserve local culture and environment.

In this context, one possibility of convergence between different food systems in interaction in the recorded political spaces is the valuing of local culture. This perspective and social actors' participation itself are the

most significant features that lead us to take these events or political spaces together as a “food movement” in the locality of Juazeiro.<sup>9</sup> As local culture, we intend to invoke elements such as music, cooking, poetry, literature, and arts in general, in their relationship to the historical process of the locality of Juazeiro, the Caatinga biome, and the semiarid climate. Cultural resources are mobilized by actors with different interests, worldviews, and power. Therefore, culture appreciation is impregnated with distinct expectations for the territory’s development and the use of its resources. Nevertheless, a food movement that has the valuing of culture as its main principle seems to be a powerful tool in this locality to redirect influences toward access to quality food by all its population.

However, the valuing of traditional food in local markets, for example, seems to facilitate the access by a small group of consumers who “can pay more for the quality product.” This situation is accompanied by a decrease in their consumption by farmers, who access cheaper products in large supermarket chains. There are cases of farmers that sell all their products that could be taken as quality food and buy “conventional” products in the supermarkets for their own consumption. In this context, we observe in the descriptions in Table 1 a tendency towards the gourmetization of traditional dishes and the creation of new products from local agrobiodiversity in order to promote the tourism and local business. Thus, we identify a process of consumption elitization regarding quality food, highlighting those which represent the local culture, that is, food traditionally consumed in the locality of Juazeiro. In this sense, one could question if this food movement through cultural appreciation is promoting access to quality food and for whom, in a context in which globalized practices guarantee quantity but not quality and more localized initiatives guarantee quality but create access inequalities.

The valuing of culture as a resource for promoting access to quality food depends on quality concept meanings, which can be related to the origin (e.g. local, family farming) and modes of production (e.g. irrigated,

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9 According to Freudenberg *et al.*, (2011), a food movement is a heterogeneous process constituted by numerous social spaces where a variety of resources are exchanged. According to the author, within each sector and across sectors in a food movement, there are a lot of tensions and power dynamics at play. A food movement also tends to share values such as social justice and cultural alternatives to mainstream practices.

organic, traditional), to ethical and aesthetical values, and to sanitary and nutritional aspects. Table 1 presents coexisting concepts for food quality used by distinct social actors with different interests. The valuing of the territory and its products also takes place from distinct perspectives, which involves different knowledge and opposing discourses in defense of the environment, social issues, or economic development. According to Giddens (1991), the appropriation of this knowledge (and the discourses and practices that reveal it) does not occur in a homogeneous way, but often in the direction of those in a “position of power” and able to use it for their own interests.

Although considering this view, we adopt a position closer to that of Goodman *et al.*, (2012) and Morgan *et al.*, (2006), who open the possibility of a continuous redefinition of local identities and exchanges in power balance between actors. This relational perspective of power allows us to take the valuing of culture as an empowering resource in promoting access to quality food in the locality of Juazeiro. Despite the different discourses and strategies used by actors with distinct interests, the food movement itself allows for a constant debate about the rules in play. In this case, the empowerment of social actors, regarding the possibility of participation in political spaces, allows them to mobilize their own cultural resources in a constantly renewed and contextualized perspective.

In dishes prepared and served during the events recorded, it was noticed that menus are influenced by a mixture of local food culture and global standards of food habits. As a result, we have hybrids menus such as old traditional recipes prepared with processed ingredients (Table 1). In this context, it is important to emphasize that the element “culture” follows food systems transformations, i.e., the demands of new residents and the virtual networks that allow daily access to new information. Thus, food systems and food culture are nowadays informed by a variety of forms of knowledge, expressed in traditional practices, based on preserving or recovering popular knowledge and modern techniques, which use different levels of technological development and specialized knowledge.

The dispute between knowledge and discourses reveals the heterogeneity even inside the so-called alternative food practices and leads to the idea of a certain disarticulation between these practices that, for some authors,

weakens the possibility of being constituted as a movement (Freudenberg *et al.*, 2011). For example, regarding the composition of hybrid menus, in the context of Juazeiro's food movement, there are versions which are 1) reduced in fat, informed by a knowledge about health and obesity in the locality; 2) traditional, cherishing the reproduction of recipes as prepared by ancestors; 3) vegan (without products of animal origin), prompted by ethical reasons; and 4) gourmet, informed by aesthetic motivations and "social distinction through food" (Bourdieu, 2005). Thus, trying to answer the question previously formulated, it can be affirmed that the food movement for the valuing of culture in the locality of Juazeiro goes in the direction of promoting the population's access to quality food for all. We argue that different nuances indicated above concerned to food quality and diversified supply options tend to increase the chances of contact with this type of food and awareness of its value.

It is known that food choices are determined by socioeconomic issues involving income and education and by the supply of different types of food. This food supply is directly influenced by the role of large retail in a supply system increasingly concentrated and dominated by few companies (Guivant, 2003; Isakson, 2013; Reardon and Berdegué, 2002), which are currently located in medium-sized cities in the interior of Brazil. However, our argument is that, on one hand, the influence of culture and tradition, both of which are understood as being in a constant process of reconfiguration, in Juazeiro's food provisioning seems to be restricted to a small group of consumers for reasons of price and income. On the other hand, it has a diffuse expression in the maintenance and even the expansion of traditional festivities and popular restaurants, which are also affected by the movement for the valuing of local food culture.

In this context, the valuing of culture, a synergic element to the political spaces registered above, seems to affect all kinds of audiences. Although driven by actors with different interests and projects, the valuing of culture promotes political engagement of local actors and empowerment through a sense of belonging to their territory. The feeling of being part of a place and its culture, nature, and history is what has been mobilized by local actors in Juazeiro for promoting access to quality food.

## Concluding Remarks

What is at stake in the locality of study, as well as in other localities surrounding medium-sized cities in Brazil, is that food and social transformations give rise to processes of interaction between coexisting food systems. Conflicts, hybridism, and synergies are features of these processes that provide greater visibility to social actors who were once less visible through social participation in political spaces, which they created or occupied with the goal of valuing their own culture. Both aspects have become elements of synergy between food systems and empowering resources that, by shifting power in other directions, give legitimacy to other projects, knowledge, and interests, which now have more space to coexist in the variety of systems. Finally, we would like to highlight the requirement of new forms of thinking about food provisioning centered in the access to quality food, which means opportunities to have contact with certain types of food, debates on food issues, projections of an imagined future, and inspiring food movement leaders. All of these elements can be seen in the political spaces of Juazeiro presented in this paper.

Actor empowerment through local cultural resources implies considering structural transformations in the localities as well as the new needs of their residents. In this context, a current menu based on local food culture can be prepared with processed ingredients and assuming a new version which may be lighter in fat, vegan, or gourmet. The focus on these cultures in motion, presented here from the interactions between coexisting food systems perspective, would have a greater chance of making a change than previous food movements focusing only on health or environmental issues. This is due to actors' engagement in their historical process and a sense of belonging to a locality that came about through an empowerment mechanism created by social participation in political spaces for the valuing of culture.

Taking advantage of the current political moment in Brazil, where people have once again taken to the streets to protest, making politics more present in their daily lives, food issues in political spaces must be addressed, cultivated, and made visible with the view of developing new and alternative ideas to create more just and sustainable food systems. The discussion brought to this paper aimed to highlight possibilities that

emerge from interactions between coexisting food systems by focusing on a food movement that has developed in this intersection based on social participation and the valuing of culture in the locality of Juazeiro. These two are empowering resources for promoting access to quality food that could also give birth to local food provisioning strategies that consider synergies and possibilities of cooperation among food systems. The emergence of a food movement through the valuing of culture in Juazeiro is a component of local food politics which is in line with the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and the human right to adequate food while strengthening their applicability at the local level.

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